Listening to the Fur Trade: Sound, Music, and Dance in Northern North America 1760-1840

by

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Abstract

The fur trade in northern North America during the period of 1760-1840 introduced both Europeans and First Nations peoples to new sounds, musical forms, and dances. Permeating nearly every aspect of the fur trade’s operation, from travel and transportation, cross-cultural encounters, establishing and strengthening relationships, exchanging material goods, and celebrating holidays and special occasions, a distinct soundscape and musical culture developed. First alerted to the presence of Europeans by the sounds of gunpowder, customs of saluting and signaling by firing weaponry were soon adopted and adapted by First Nations peoples in their activities and interactions with fur traders. The colonial warfare that characterized the Great Lakes for much of this period introduced military instruments such as drums, bugles, and bagpipes to the trading posts, which gradually shed their disciplinary associations and were employed instead in fur trade rituals and recreational activities. While music and dance served as a pastime for the gentlemen and servants of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and North West
Company (NWC), it operated most crucially in engagements with First Nations peoples on whom they relied for their profits and livelihood. Fur traders had to navigate dances associated with the calumet pipe and war, which functioned to establish and strengthen trading relationships. Fur traders were agents of change as well as early ethnographers who described First Nations’ musical traditions. They observed similarities and differences between various nations’ musical traditions, while also recording instances of cultural and material adaptation. Significant locations along the trading routes elicited ritualized responses, layering meanings onto the landscape with sounds, stories, and songs. Singing regulated paddling, pushing its pace and duration while also providing a creative outlet for the expression of sensory desires. A vibrant instrumental dance music culture developed in and around the trading posts especially before the amalgamation of the HBC and NWC in 1821. After this date dances became increasingly restricted due to concerns over profitability and morality. Yet the fur trade gestated hybridized fiddle and dance styles that left a lasting legacy especially in First Nations and Métis communities.
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Introduction

In 1814 the naval officer Lieutenant Edward Chappell piloted the HMS *Rosamond* into Hudson Bay. Escorting two Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) ships, the convoy spent the summer months navigating between the various posts of the Bay. On July 31st, Chappell was in bed when he first heard the “shouts and cries” from the Inuit who had paddled up alongside the ship in kayaks. In his memoir, Chappell recalled how he raced to deck, marvelling at the light-frame construction of their crafts, with their oiled seal-skins expertly sewn “as tight as parchment upon the head of a drum.”¹ Chappell pronounced the difficulty of conveying an “adequate idea of the delight expressed” once the Inuit had reached the ships, as “they jumped, shouted, danced, and sang, to express their joy.” From his perspective, the arrival of HBC ships resembled “a sort of annual fair.”² Sound, music, and dance operated centrally in this intercultural encounter, and would continue playing a role as it transpired.³

The fur traders and Inuit proceeded to shore where gift giving ensued. Chappell recorded the Inuit term “Pillitay” which meant “gift” in his estimation and was issued as a request for material. Once the English had dispensed what they felt was the appropriate amount, Chappell indicates that song and dance were pursued not from a desire for recreation but rather “as a means of diverting their attention,” something he estimated to be “absolutely necessary.”⁴

Accordingly, one of our party, who was well acquainted with the manners of the Indians of Hudson’s Bay, began a song in the language of the Cree tribe. The Esquimaux [Inuit] gaped with great astonishment and evident pleasure, preserving the most profound silence, until he gave a loud shout, as a finale; when they sat up an universal shouting and jumping, and

² Ibid., 58.
³ Ibid., 68.
⁴ Ibid., 102-3.
it appeared as if they were half beside themselves with delight: yet we were certain that they understood nothing of the sense of the song.

This short passage describes a musical encounter with a number of important details. That the HBC employee chose to sing a Cree rather than English song reflects a pattern of fostering interactions between First Nations cultures. The HBC employee in this instance had such an acquaintance with Cree culture that he was confident enough to sing one of their songs, commanding the attention of everyone. Listening to the song in silence, the Inuit conformed to ascribed cultural roles as they waited for the song’s conclusion, responding with celebratory sound-making. Chappell’s declaration that the English and HBC men possessed a better understanding of Cree music than the Inuit is unsubstantiated, yet reveals his confidence in the knowledge of his informants. Songs were employed by the Inuit before trade, and later by the English as a diversion. It was presented as a gift with the expectation of reciprocity. “We thought this a good opportunity to petition them for a similar favour: our signs were instantly comprehended, and a ring immediately formed.” This account suggests that music was a potent intercultural activity that served a number of functions, as an exchange of materials was accompanied by an exchange of songs.

Historical scholarship investigating “cultural encounters” between Europeans and colonized peoples has over the past two decades increased its focus on sensory perceptions.5 This dissertation will use the sense of hearing to explore the theme of encounter and cross-cultural interactions in the fur trade. Although Joy Parr called for a “more sensuous history” over

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a decade ago, scholarship on early Canada has been slow to respond. In contrast, American historians have examined sound and music as central to sensory history in colonial North America, demonstrating how it can complement understandings of this era by providing new questions and a new filter through which to analyze experiences and interactions. Filter is a more suitable metaphor in this dissertation than “lens” because it can apply to the auditory realm. Existing research relevant to this topic is fragmented across the disciplines of anthropology, folklore, ethnomusicology, aboriginal studies, cultural studies, linguistics, and history. This dissertation engages with this broad scholarship while based in the research of primary documents from the fur trade. It fits into the recent historiography concerning First Nations peoples and trans-Atlantic history that challenges older assumptions about European cultural dominance and in turn investigates First Nations' influence on Euro-American culture.

This dissertation demonstrates that sound and music were integral to the operation of the fur trade, comprising rituals and a reciprocal realm of cultural interaction in which functions, meanings and identities were asserted, contested, and adapted. Music served as an accompaniment to trade as well as a portion of its material exchanges, influencing the musical practices of both European and First Nations peoples involved in the fur trade. Sound, music, and dance were not peripheral, but rather central to the operations and influences of the fur trade. The

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methodological underpinnings of this dissertation will be presented after an overview of the subject and discussion of its historiography.

1.1 Overview of the Fur Trade

Trading networks long preceded the arrival of Europeans in northern North America. Early encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples were shaped by systematized encounters historians have come to call the “fur trade.” This designator was by no means universal, with some such as Archibald Macdonald describing his vocation as “Indian trader,” emphasizing the people with whom rather than the material for which he traded. The chronicles of early European explorers describe both conquest and violence as well as peaceful encounters with peoples already living in North America, who will be referred to as “First Nations” peoples in this dissertation.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European monarchs sponsored voyages of arctic exploration and the discovery of the northwest passage. Martin Frobisher’s voyages in the 1570s and those of Henry Hudson at the outset of the seventeenth century established an English awareness of the Arctic. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the French extended their North American empire from the St. Lawrence into the Great Lakes and beyond through military alliances with First Nations peoples secured through exchanges of gifts and materials. New France depended more on First Nations allies than the English, Dutch, or Spanish American

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11 Western First Nations did not encounter Europeans until the later eighteenth century: thus in British Columbia the definition of First Nations is “a group of people who can trace their ancestry to the populations that occupied the land prior to the arrival of Europeans and Americans in the late eighteenth century.” See Robert James Muckle, *The First Nations of British Columbia: An Anthropological Survey*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 2.
empires, finding little more than fur as an exploitable resource in the vast Great Lakes region. By the 1650s and 1660s the French began exploring far to the west, with Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard des Groseilliers pushing into the lands to the north and west of Lake Superior. Imprisoned on their return for trading without a permit, the two travelled to England, where their stories of northern fur-bearing riches convinced Charles II to charter the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1670. This company used its position on the shores of Hudson Bay to lure First Nations to its forts. While the French captured these posts in the 1680s and 90s, they were soon reclaimed by England.12 The French competed for furs by extending a trading post network from Montreal through the Great Lakes and beyond with the technology of the canoe, eventually connecting with Louisiana in the south and the North Saskatchewan river in the northwest. The Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) tested and then ruptured the French alliance network, which the British sought to re-establish after the Peace of Paris. Pontiac’s Rebellion, the major uprising in the summer of 1763 that saw nearly every British post west of Niagara fall to First Nations warriors, demonstrated the rejection of British imperial impositions and the post-conquest re-alignment of military and trading alliances.13

As British merchant capital flowed into Montreal, English speaking bourgeois, or “pédlars,” as the Hudson’s Bay Company derisively called them, adopted the French techniques and networks and began transporting European manufactures through the northwest with the labour and expertise of French Canadians and First Nations surrounding Montreal. By the early 1770s rapid expansion had produced intense, and often destructive, competition. The largest

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Montreal merchants pooled their capital, amalgamating in 1774 into the joint-stock North West Company (NWC), pushing their trading post network across the plains and into the subarctic, northwest coast, and plateau – basin regions. The English speaking Montreal traders referred to the vast territory from the Great Lakes all the way to the Pacific and Arctic oceans primarily as the “north west,” or “northwest,” roughly analogous to the term pays d’en haut used by the French Canadian voyageurs at this time.\(^\text{14}\) The Hudson’s Bay Company sought to compete with the North West Company, but had difficulty acquiring the labour, technology, and expertise for extended operations in the interior. The North West Company hired its servants in the St. Lawrence valley, especially French Canadians and to a lesser extent Iroquois from the regions around Montreal. Canoe travel was predicated on large crews of coureurs de bois, engagés or voyageurs, as they became known, who entered the northwest in considerable numbers.\(^\text{15}\) The numbers of engages and voyageurs travelling westwards with the Montreal fur trade increased from 500 in 1784 to 1,150 by the 1790s, 1,500 by 1802, and over 2000 annually by the mid 1810s.\(^\text{16}\)

Reaching from the western Great Lakes across the plains to the Rocky Mountains, and from Oregon to the Arctic circle, a network of trading posts operated with seasonal rhythms over the immense landscape. In the summer months when the waterways were clear of ice, crews and cargoes were released from the winter freeze-up, with packs of furs transported outbound and

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\(^\text{14}\) “The North West, as it is called, includes (as I understand it) all that extensive Country which lies between Lake Superior and the Frozen Ocean, between Hudson’s Bay and the river of the West – Many parts of which are very little known except from Indian Reports.” Roderick Mackenzie, “An Account of the Athabasca Indians by a Partner of the North West Company,” Archives of Ontario (MU 2200), 1.

\(^\text{15}\) In 1776 Alexander Henry told Mathew Cocking there were 100 voyageurs overwintering along the North Saskatchewan River, while the following May he related that that twenty more canoes had come upriver, bringing what was likely well over double that number; Matthew Cocking, et al. “Journal of Occurrences and Transactions at Cumberland House by Mr. Matthew Cocking and Others, Commencing the 4th July 1776 and Ending the 4th July 1777 By William Walker,” in Cumberland and Hudson House Journals 1775-82: The Publications of the Hudson’s Bay Record Society, edited by E.E. Rich (London: The Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1951), 150.

\(^\text{16}\) Carolyn Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 5.
European manufactures inbound. The short summer season demanded expedited travel and long durations of relative stasis in the winter months, features that greatly shaped the fur trade’s social and cultural makeup. While by the late eighteenth century the fur trade extended from the Great Lakes to the plains, sub-arctic region, and Rocky Mountains; by the outset of the nineteenth century it reached all the way to the Pacific and Arctic oceans. These diverse regions possessed distinct natural soundscapes, changing with the topography and landscape of the major geographical zones. The seasons blew through distinctly, quieted by blankets of snow in the winter and unleashed into torrents of sound in the spring. The various regions of this vast landscape are the backdrop for this study, which focuses on the overlay of a distinct trade sound through the introduction of diverse materials and development of distinct auditory customs and musical cultures.

The fur trade was pursued by a wide variety of Euro-American peoples. It incorporated a vast swath of North America into trans-Atlantic trading networks. In many ways the cultural encounters of the fur trade took place more intensively between the employees of the trading companies than with First Nations peoples. The diverse workforces of the North West and Hudson’s Bay Company were divided into a distinct two-tier hierarchy. English speakers comprised the upper echelon of factors, masters, and clerks - the “bourgeois” who engaged in bookkeeping, accounting and managing the workforce of “servants.” While the North West Company employed mostly French Canadian servants, the Hudson’s Bay Company hired from various locations including Norway, Ireland, England, the Shetland and Orkney Islands, and after the amalgamation of 1821, French Canada. Employees were bound within a paternalist labour model as “servants of the Honourable Company” for the duration of their contracts, which lasted
from three to five years. The Hudson’s Bay Company’s board of governors met annually in London. Partners or elites of the North West Company, on the other hand, met with the other partners and ‘bourgeois’ annually in western Lake Superior, and were comprised primarily of Scottish Highlanders such as Simon McTavish and later William McGillivray. As competition accelerated in the 1770s, the employees of both companies came into close contact with First Nations peoples and attempted to secure their allegiances, with some traders acting unscrupulously to de-fraud or debauch in order to acquire furs. The Hudson’s Bay Company played catch-up with the North West Company’s robust trading post network, as NWC posts were often established near First Nations’ gathering sites and villages. Fur traders overwintered at remote forts with often only a few other employees, with even smaller numbers camping near First Nations in the winter known as trading en déroine. Competition climaxed in the decade from 1810 to 1820, culminating in a series of violent conflicts, including skirmishes and larger conflicts such as the “Battle of Seven Oaks” in 1816.

Despite the competitive and occasionally violent nature of the trade, there were often remarkable displays of cordiality across company, class, and racial lines. Sylvia Van Kirk was the first historian to outline the contours of “fur trade society.” By focusing on marriages and fur trade families, she suggested something of the permanence and distinctiveness of the culture that took root in the northwest between fur traders and First Nations peoples. Edith Burley has investigated class relations and mentalités in fur trade society. Rather than merely replicating

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18 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 201-246.
European patterns, she explores the social dynamics underlying “new customs and mores and, therefore, a new culture.”

The fur trade spanned an incredible diversity of First Nations peoples across North America. Major language families affected by the fur trade include Iroquoian, Algonquian, Siouan, Athapascan, and the numerous language families of the coastal First Nations. First Nations peoples in this vast region of North America included both agricultural and hunting and gathering societies, with somewhere approaching one thousand tribal and linguistic units. Some lived a predominantly sedentary lifestyle associated with agricultural production, such as the eastern Iroquoian-speaking Huron-Wendat and Iroquois Confederacy or Haudenosaunee. Others such as the Algic-Algonquian speaking Anishinaabek and Cree lived a more mobile existence, hunting and gathering in patterns of seasonal migrations.

1.2 Historiography

Historical scholarship about the fur trade began with a prevailing focus on economic analysis. An early monograph entitled The Adventurers of England on Hudson Bay traced the commercial expansion of the HBC, romantically depicting the mercantile activities of fur traders in an inhospitable landscape. Harold Innis’s The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History introduced a rigorous archival and statistical approach, analyzing the fur trade and the origins of the Canadian economy in tandem. Its sweeping scope and breadth of analysis describes Canadian economic development as predicated on the export of semi-

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22 Agnes C Laut, The Adventurers of England on Hudson Bay: A Chronicle of the Fur Trade in the North (Toronto: Glasgow, 1914),
processed raw materials. Examining the interplay of technology, geography, and international economic forces, Innis details how beaver pelts were obtained and processed by First Nations’ peoples and traded for European goods. Locating the Canadian fur trade within the realm of global mercantile commerce, he traces the forwards and backwards “linkages” of the fur “staple” on the economy. Interweaving economics, political economy, and nationalist impulses, Innis argues that the fur trade and the Montreal traders in particular formed the historic link justifying the modern geography of Canada.23 The favourable scholarly reception and sustained importance of Innis’ work ensured that economic analyses would remain closely associated with discussions of the fur trade, as would nationalist discourses.24 Historians such as Donald Creighton followed Innis’ approach, examining the fur trade through the framework of staples analysis, with fur presented as one of a series of key resources that developed in the economic sphere of the St. Lawrence.25

The shift towards political considerations appears in E.E. Rich’s studies of the fur trade. The three-volume *Hudson’s Bay Company* and broadly encompassing *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* explore the political implications of European commercial rivalries and trading relationships on the geography and First Nations peoples of North America.26 While the Hudson’s Bay Company’s charter emphasized furs, it simultaneously served as a crucial arm of the British empire in Northern North America. Rich ultimately perpetuates a nationalist narrative, whereby Governor George Simpson and the fur traders fought to keep at bay the

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“surge of American frontiersmen” through the prairies and Rocky Mountains, preserving the rich pristine landscape for eventual purchase by Canada.27

Starting around 1970, these overarching economic and political histories were critiqued from several perspectives. The emergence of ethnohistory began to shift the focus from European to First Nations’ activities. Arthur Ray’s *Indians in the Fur Trade* traces the seasonal migrations, hunting patterns, subsistence, and trading activities that were absolutely essential to the fur trade’s operation.28 While Ray helped pioneer the first focused ethnohistory of the fur trade, he continued along the established lines of market-based economic analysis. This largely maintained what is referred to as the “formalist” interpretation of motivation begun by Innis, with the assumption that First Nations peoples traded with Europeans due to a kind of universal economic rationale, with accompanying assumptions about the superiority of European goods.29

Alternate explanatory models began developing at this time. What became known as the “substantivist” position posited that First Nations motivations were better explained by examining indigenous values and institutions, and by focusing on relationships rather than material exchanges as the central facet of encounter. This approach was forwarded from a number of perspectives. Anthropologists such as Wilcomb Washburn emphasized the internal cultural logics that employed “noneconomic” incentives.30 Karl Polanyi elucidated the formalist / substantivist polarity and presented the treaty-trade model of analysis, which emphasized the centrality of diplomacy and treaty arrangements as a pre-cursor to trade. Originally developed in

the context of the ancient world, Polanyi was influential in subsequent analyses of mercantile and colonial commerce.\textsuperscript{31} This approach influenced the Canadian economist Abraham Rotstein, who challenged the applicability of market forces in explaining the incentives and bonds that fostered trade between Europeans and First Nations peoples. He pointed out that exchanges “bore striking similarity to [First Nations’] institutional procedures, suggesting that the fur trade was closely embedded in the intertribal political process,” and was ultimately an “institutional extension of the Indian alliance system.”\textsuperscript{32} This viewpoint challenged market-based assumptions of motivation and more sensitively considered First Nations’ participation in the trade. Cornelius Jaenen emphasized how Europeans were received and perceived by First Nations peoples, and whose material goods served not only served economic and utilitarian but also aesthetic and spiritual functions.\textsuperscript{33}

Gender history ushered in a much closer consideration of fur trade culture and society. Until this point, discussions had been limited almost entirely to a consideration of men’s activities. Two scholars, Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk transformed the field in the 1970s and 80s by interrogating the diverse and crucial roles of women and families in the fur trade. Women, they discovered, served as intermediaries, translators, partners, wives, and mothers, as well as essential labour for processing pelts, outfitting hunters, preparing and processing food, and providing shelter. Jennifer Brown’s \textit{Strangers in Blood} employs the toolkit of an


anthropologist to interpret company and kin allegiances. Intermarriages and the “mixed-blood” offspring generated complex discussions surrounding sexuality and race, as some fur traders attempted with great difficulty to raise their offspring separate from First Nations communities in the northwest.**34** Sylvia Van Kirk’s *Many Tender Ties* transformed the historiography by emphasizing the relationships, from transitory to long-lasting, that developed between fur traders and First Nations women. She emphasizes the emotional and familial bonds that emerged and were often conducted with great affection. There developed, according to Van Kirk, a “fur trade society” that was predicated on marriages *à la façon du pays* (according to the custom of the country).**35**

Though not entirely focused on the fur trade, Richard White’s *The Middle Ground* has proven influential to its historiography. Describing a broad framework of cultural interaction in the Great Lakes, White examines how diplomacy, alliances, and trade took place on a metaphoric cultural “middle ground” where specific patterns of behaviour, language and ceremonial protocol shaped encounters and relationships. Rituals and cultural adaptations were both mutually comprehensible and prone to misinterpretation. An uneasy balance of power prevailed between the actors: the French maintained alliances with the majority of the Algonquian speaking peoples until the fall of New France; although the transition to a British system was uneasy and produced the violent uprising known as Pontiac’s Rebellion, most of the First Nations allies of New France were allied to the British by the time of the American Revolution, resurrecting the diplomacy of the “middle ground.” British-allied First Nations warriors played crucial roles in the numerous conflicts that climaxed during the war of 1812.

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White describes how the British had reluctantly adopted the protocols that the French had employed with its First Nations allies, such as gift-giving, the use of wampum and the ceremonies of the pipe (calumet), reviving the alliance system that was characterized by trade, independence, accommodation, reciprocity, and mutual self-interest.\textsuperscript{36} Material exchanges were only one facet of these relationships. They also included kinship considerations, ceremonial obligations, and gift-giving to establish proper relationships. Richard White’s analysis of First Nations politics and society has been critiqued, yet he presents a useful framework of analysis that broadly encompasses social, cultural, political, and economic considerations.\textsuperscript{37}

Social history has recently transformed the field. The examination of the lives and working conditions of the 	extit{engagés}, voyageurs, servants, and labourers who constituted the vast majority of the companies’ personnel has only recently been fleshed out. While Grace Lee Nute’s \textit{The Voyageur} from 1931 provided the first rudimentary analysis of the labourers of the Montreal trade, including various aspects of their customs and diverse working environments, it was not until Edith Burley’s \textit{Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1770-1879} that the contours of the HBC’s workforce was analyzed in depth.\textsuperscript{38} Burley explores the contractual and paternalist form of employment, whereby protest and resistance was frequently a strategy employed in the master – servant relationships. The London Committee was constantly searching for supplies of cheaper and more obedient labour. Analyzing the labour dynamics, work, and material conditions in “fur trade society,” Burley provides some broad insights to the mentalités that constituted the “new

\textsuperscript{37} “The Middle Ground Revisited,” \textit{William and Mary Quarterly,} 63(January 2006); Philip J. Deloria, “What is the Middle Ground, Anyway?” Heidi Bohaker “”Nindoodemag”: The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600-1701.”
customs and mores” of the “new culture.” Yet she demonstrates that the HBC was a conduit through which older European pre-industrial paternal arrangements were transplanted into the North American context. More recently, Carolyn Podruchny’s *Making the Voyageur World* has shed light on the working lives of the French Canadian labourers of the Montreal trade. Those who paddled the canoes, transported the cargos, and worked various labour jobs around the trading posts were by the nineteenth century referred to as voyageurs. Exploring the encounters and relationships of these men with their superiors in the company as well as with the First Nations peoples with whom they closely lived and worked, Podruchny unveils a culturally rich interface, presenting the voyageurs’ vocation as a mixture of French Roman Catholicism and First Nations influences.

A closer consideration of First Nations peoples and the development of ethnohistory have influenced the fur trade historiography. Bruce White examined Anishinaabeg and Dakota responses to the arrival of French merchandise. Collapsing the analytical dichotomy between “utilitarian,” “nonutilitarian,” “economic,” and “noneconomic,” White argues that materials were employed and adapted both for practical and spiritual purposes in multiple and often complex ways, as they passed through various uses and cultural contexts. Symbolic and metaphorical language was crucial in trading negotiations, and White explores how particular cultural understandings shaped transactions from the Anishinaabeg perspective. In a similar vein, Paul Thistle has examined trading relations in the Lower Saskatchewan region before 1840. He details how Cree subsistence patterns and band structure influenced engagement and expectations of

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reciprocity. In his analysis, Cree material dependency on European goods is challenged and their relative autonomy asserted.\textsuperscript{42} Elizabeth Vibert has deconstructed fur traders’ writings, exploring how “traders’ tales” were informed both by empirical observation and preconceived notions. While fur traders produced some of the earliest “ethnographic” records of First Nations peoples, Vibert cautions how “the traders' cultural lenses shaped and refracted their view of Native societies.”\textsuperscript{43} Their observations often reveal cultural biases shaped by their cultural and religious backgrounds. White, Thistle, and Vibert all demonstrate the ethnohistorical influence, employing various methodological approaches to complement and challenge the written record.

Some of the post-1970 scholarship suggests how the investigation of sound and music might provide a new ethnohistorical perspective. Richard White points to the “calumet” pipe as particularly critical to establishing peaceful relationships and demonstrating commitment to alliance obligations, hinting that the Iroquois and Anishinaabek closely associated these ceremonies with a dance.\textsuperscript{44} The exchanging of songs across cultural and linguistic barriers went beyond the “cultural trappings” of the middle ground: it was central to the “many ceremonial changes tied to the fur trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”\textsuperscript{45} Van Kirk describes smoking ceremonies as a component of “country marriages,” or weddings \textit{à la façon du pays}.\textsuperscript{46} She writes that “Dancing was the favourite pastime of the fur traders,” as they found it “a welcome break from the monotony of the daily routine. . . any excuse for having a ball was seized upon, be it a wedding or the arrival of the annual brigade,’’\textsuperscript{47} suggesting that in this

\textsuperscript{42} Paul Thistle, \textit{Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840} (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1986).
\textsuperscript{43} Vibert, \textit{Traders’ Tales}, xii.
\textsuperscript{44} White, \textit{The Middle Ground}, 21.
\textsuperscript{46} Van Kirk, \textit{Many Tender Ties}, 37.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 128.
context social divisions and segregations eased, providing moments of cultural interface between Euro-Canadian fur traders, their voyageurs and servants, and First Nations men and women. Yet these customs were challenged by the period 1820s-1840s, as European styled wedding parties came to replace these traditions in the northwest, and formal “balls” were expected to formalize marital unions. This arrival of formal European style wedding parties coincided with changing power dynamics and norms about marriage with Aboriginal, Métis and finally white women by mid century.48

Musical culture, then, like the shifting marital patterns of the fur trade, serves as an indicator of broader cultural change. Grace Lee Nute and Carolyn Podruchny both profess the centrality of songs to the travel of the voyageurs. Coordinating the paddles, serving as a mechanism to manage labour as well as a platform for cultural expression, songs served many functions. Nute claims that they reveal a form of “class consciousness,” while Podruchny suggests they served the broader functions of fostering communal bonding and expressing individual selfhood.49 Dances, games and revelry formed part of the carnivalesque celebrations and holidays at the trading posts.50 Yet these song and dance traditions were challenged directly and indirectly by reforms made after the amalgamation of the NWC and HBC in 1821, indicating the influence of the broader social transformations on the soundscape.

Historians of the fur trade have recently demonstrated the insights that the study of material objects can contribute. Material objects can be interrogated and serve as a supplementary record that embodies human activities, beliefs, identities, cross-cultural

48 Ibid., 115-9.
49 Nute, The Voyageur, 143; Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 55.
50 Ibid., 174-181.
influences, and historical processes. While this field has broadly influenced historical writing over the past few decades, it has played a particularly important role in fur trade scholarship. Studies reliant on archaeology have proven influential, from Bruce Trigger’s work on the Huron-Wendat, to Neal Salisbury’s reappraisal of pre-contact North American trading networks. A recent collection of essays about the fur trade begins with a section entitled “Using Material Culture.” In an essay by Willmott and Brownlee, burial items and garments of clothing of Western Anishinaabeg leaders from the nineteenth century are analyzed for insights into social structure. Operating through the visual sense, the authors suggest that dress functioned “to articulate individual and social identities along lines of age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, rank, lineage, personal accomplishments, and other aspects of status.” Willmott has also studied the auditory effects of material culture. Examining how evidence of repurposed trade metal rolled and twisted into sound-making “tinkle-cones” reflected a distinctly indigenous use of European materials, Willmott explores how these items characterized Anishinaabeg dance traditions in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. European materials were strategically adopted and incorporated into indigenous sound-making and musical traditions.

Yet the material turn has been paralleled by a tendency to focus on relationships and cultural exchanges rather than economic transactions. Carolyn Podruchny, for instance, describes

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an “annual cycle of carnival” at the trading posts, examining how holidays and festivities were accompanied by dances that formed a part of revelry and play. The social activities of holidays served to generate feelings of home away from home, while also creating new experiences and memories. Ultimately, rituals and celebrations bridged lines of race, class, and gender. “Holidays helped to mark the passage of time and provided structure during the long, dreary, and often lonely months at the interior posts,” Podruchny writes, postulating that “coming together to celebrate at specific times helped to generate camaraderie and fellow feeling with one another, their masters, and Aboriginal peoples.” Dances were not only locations where social boundaries were temporarily dropped, as Van Kirk had suggested, but where more durable relationships and social bonds could form across lines of race, class, and gender. These suggestions will interrogated, expanded on, and challenged in the pages that follow. This dissertation will further these analyses with a focused appraisal of the topic based on primary accounts of the fur trade, while also informed by relevant scholarship in the fields of anthropology and ethnomusicology.

1.3 The Study of First Nations’ Music

The study of First Nations’ music developed alongside the field of anthropology. The "salvage" philosophy that guided ethnography in the late nineteenth century has been a prominent influence, with its attempt to study pre-contact "authentic" cultural traditions devoid of European influence. Some early comparative musicologists depicted a unified continental

56 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 174.
57 Paige Raibmon, Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 34-74, 116-135; Andrew Nurse, “‘Their Ancient Customs are Gone:’ Anthropology as Cultural Process,” Lynda Jessup, Andrew Nurse, and Gordon E. Smith, eds. Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008);
system with only minor variations, while others emphasized the differences and distinctiveness of individual nations, who were studied through a process of direct empirical observation known as fieldwork. The data was schematized and interpreted in various ways, for instance as representing culture circles that represented layers of history. This work resulted from many decades of intensive fieldwork amongst specific societies. The sketching of "musical zones" closely paralleled the development of culture areas, generating discussions concerning diffusions and distributions of musical materials and traits amongst First Nations in North America.

While “ethnomusicology” traces its origins to the final decades of the nineteenth century, it only crystallized as a term and discipline in the mid-twentieth century. Two separate streams, one American and one German, contributed to its development. Ethnographies in the mid-nineteenth century often had significant musical analysis, such as Johann G. Kohl’s *Kitchi Gami*. Theodore Baker produced the 1882 publication *On the Music of North American Indians*, which was the first focused study of the subject. Based on relatively limited fieldwork amongst the Seneca during the summer of 1880, this work contains some specific details but also many generalized characterizations. Baker did not have extensive exposure or experience with First Nations music, and his work falls somewhere between the disciplinary poles of fieldworker

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and armchair musicologist. Collecting specific tribal data on the one hand, and schematizing it into broader patterns on the other, represented two divergent concerns in the early research.

American researchers, perhaps due to their close proximity became associated with fieldwork-intensive studies of First Nations music. Alice Fletcher has been recognized as a pioneer for her work in the 1880s amongst the Omaha, whom she studied for over a decade before publishing her observations. What perhaps most characterizes her work, and can be seen as foreshadowing later studies, is her emphasis on "music in its setting." Fletcher stressed the centrality of music in the life of the community and how it accompanied diverse activities, from social gatherings and games to ceremonies honoring the sun, plants, and animals, as well as preparing for war.  

For the Omaha, music "envelopes like an atmosphere every religious, tribal and social ceremony as well as every personal experience," and she sketches an array of dances. In collaboration with a member of the community named Francis La Flesche, she divides Omaha music into three categories: religious songs sung by a particular class either through initiation or inheritance; social songs sung in a group and involving dances and games; and individual songs including dream, love, captive, prayer, death, sweat lodge, and songs of thanks. 

Her subsequent publication focused on one particularly significant ceremonial complex, the Pawnee pipe-ceremony the *hako*. Fletcher presents this elaborate Pawnee variation of the “calumet” or “peace pipe” ceremony, recognized as a historic intertribal ceremony that included music and dance. Conducting intensive fieldwork became the methodology for most subsequent researchers, some of whom were financially supported by the Smithsonian Institution. The most

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64 Ibid., 10.
prolific of these was Frances Densmore, who conducted fieldwork amongst dozens of North American First Nations over the first half of the twentieth century. A musician and educator from Minnesota, Densmore studied piano and organ at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music from 1884 to 1886, and apprenticed with the American musicians Carl Baermann, Leopold Godowsky, and John K. Paine of Harvard University.66 Densmore became interested in First Nations’ music in 1893 after the publication of Fletcher’s A Study of Omaha Indian Music, and “acknowledge[s] her indebtedness,” for the “gracious kindness of Miss Fletcher” in encouraging her study.67 After 1895 Densmore studied with the “Chippewa” (Anishinaabeg) of Lake Superior and began lecturing widely on First Nations music.68 In 1907 she officially started research for the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, publishing dozens of monographs and articles on the subject and making more than one thousand field recordings over the following decades.69

While Fletcher and Densmore employed the methodology of focused and intensive fieldwork, scholars working in parallel were fitting individual cultures into larger schemes that encompassed the whole continent. The "culture area" model was first used by anthropologists to map tribal units of North America in 1895.70 In the twentieth century, these were debated and

68 Ibid., 86.
revised by anthropologists Clark Wissler, Harold Driver, and Alfred Kroeber. The American anthropologist and student of Boas, Alfred Kroeber promoted the idea that a culture area had a "center" or "climax" from which cultural characteristics flowed outwards towards peripheries, where they met and mixed with traits diffused from neighbouring culture centers. The school of "German diffusionists" sought to unpack layers of historical contact through the culture area model. Known as the "kulturhistorische Schule" and comprised of scholars such as Leo Frobenius, Fritz Graebner, and Wilhelm Schmidt, the paradigm developed by this school came to be known as "Kulturkries," or culture circle. Similar to the culture area model, a culture circle model delineates how groups of people share cultural traits, regardless of whether they are geographically contiguous. The more traits societies share, the more likely they are assumed to have had a historical relationship. Because the diffusion of elements from culture to culture was assumed to have occurred at different times, the culture circles are taken to "represent strata in its history." This supposedly inevitable progression towards tonal definition was linked to the assumptions of unilinear evolutionary models promoted by the Kulturkreis school, who maintained that there was a universal societal progression from gathering, to hunting, to herding and finally to agriculture. While Franz Boas and his students were initially attracted to the Kulturkreis school, they became disillusioned by its dogmatism and speculative assertions.

The Kulturkreis school has had a prolonged impact on ethnomusicology. Marius Schneider, for instance, spoke of hunters as having much shouting and little tonal definition,

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72 Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America*.
75 Ibid.
while cultivators possessed a more tonally regulated and structured “arioso style.” Criticism was leveled at the assumptions of unilinear cultural evolution, with scholars such as Norma McLeod arguing that its practitioners selected specific aspects of music and removed them from their cultural context to prove “whatever theory is wished.” Scholars must separate the problematic assumptions and historical interpretations of the Kulturkreis school from analysis of First Nations music and musical areas. Their attempts at mapping culture areas based on musical criteria have proved to be of enduring significance, while their interpretations and theorizing have been discredited.

The classification of musical areas was influenced by both German and American scholarship. Scholars weighed certain phenomenon from the vast array of styles within each group to characterize their style more generally and compare and contrast it with others. Some of the scholarship contains historical interpretations based on analysis reminiscent of the Kulturkreis school. George Herzog is an important early ethnomusicologist who combined the German and American approaches, schematizing and analyzing North American musical zones. While “armchair” musicologists such as Erich von Hornbostel placed heavy emphasis on analysis of musical scales, Herzog was more concerned with music’s role in culture, something more associated with the American approach. Herzog avoided overt speculation based on models of unilinear cultural evolution, while still theorizing about musical styles and historical developments. He offers, for example, an explanation as to why First Nations’ story and game songs contrasted with other songs in their repertoires but shared an intertribal style, speculating

that they were part of an archaic layer that underlay later musical developments. He examines the Ghost Dance as a window into the later nineteenth century context in which it developed.

Herzog’s seminal study on musical areas in North America appeared in 1930.

Boundaries were further scrutinized and developed by American musicologists. Helen Roberts published a detailed and influential study in 1936 based on the distribution of instruments and vocal styles. Bruno Nettl further revised Herzog and Roberts’ map of musical areas, using what he called “a more statistically oriented approach.” He settled on dividing the area north of Mexico into six “not always contiguous” regions: Eskimo-Northwest Coast; California and the Yuman style; Plains and the Pueblos; the Athabascans; the Great Basin; and the East and Southeast. Nettl stresses that First Nations musics in North America can best be distinguished by tracing the “relative frequency of traits.” Measuring degrees of difference and similarity has plagued the establishment of these divisions, which have been critiqued for reductionism and simplification. Nettl argues for the ongoing merits of musical areas in describing styles and characteristics that display neither a “confused diversity” nor “complete homogeneity.” Ultimately musical areas are still recognized for their utility in “creating order out of the chaos of ethnographic data.” This dissertation will employ “culture areas” as a way to discuss the diverse musical cultures across northern North America. These should be

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84 Nettl, The Study of Ethnomusicology, 333.
86 Ibid., 334.
interpreted not as demonstrating absolute boundaries but rather as useful approximate divisions for organization and analysis. Yet the evidence presented in this dissertation will also challenge the culture area schematization, demonstrating the distinctiveness of particular traditions as well as fluidity and adaptation across supposedly distinct areas.

In Canada, anthropological fieldwork developed closely alongside the study of folklore. At a joint meeting of the American Anthropological Association and the American Folklore Society in 1914, Marius Barbeau met Franz Boas, who suggested that Barbeau might collect the traditions and culture of French Canada. This suggestion germinated in many decades of important research. Collecting songs primarily along the St. Lawrence, Barbeau published the supposedly traditional songs not only of the habitants but also the coureurs de bois and voyageurs. It is important to recognize how the folk paradigm has been critiqued. Ian McKay’s *Quest of the Folk* reviewed the approach of folklorists such as Helen Creighton, who portrayed their subjects as pure, simple, and virtually unaffected by modernity. Discovering songs, lore, and handicrafts that fit these pre-subscribed patterns and values, folklorists devised publications to serve contemporary political purposes. For French Canadian material, Ernest Gagnon and Marius Barbeau promoted nationalist imagery and ideals, motivating and shaping their analysis. More concerned with presenting a historically contiguous and pious depiction of French Canada, Gagnon and Barbeau suggested that Canada largely operated as a musical time-capsule of medieval and early modern France. The correspondence between these two important Canadian figures touches on themes of selection, presentation, and nationalism, indicating something of

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their close relationship and similar methodologies. They compared versions, eliminated what they assumed to be later additions, and traced European origins, publishing versions with standardized core narratives. These serve as a useful point of comparison for songs collected during the fur trade, suggesting how they changed, deviated, and were extended from their “original” versions. The filters through which Gagnon and Barbeau collected typically stripped folksongs of their lively variations, additions, and bawdy lyrics, essential features of the paddling-song repertoire that were finally granted recognition in a paper published in 1983 by Conrad Laforte entitled "Le Répertoire Authentique des Chansons D'aviron de nos Anciens Canotiers." While he provides few examples, Laforte opens the potential for a renewed study of this music in its historical context.

The best primary source of musical transcriptions from the fur trade is the collection of eleven voyageur songs with lyrics and musical notation by fur trader Edward Ermatinger. A trained musician, Ermatinger’s collection was transcribed sometime in the 1820s and remained privately with his family until Marius Barbeau published it in the Journal of American Folklore in 1954. Providing only a brief introduction and musical analysis, Barbeau notes these folksongs were adaptable and prone to variation. It is the recorded lyrics of this collection that are of most interest, with verses extending beyond those published by French Canadian folklorists, and including some of the colourful language that was fastidiously edited out of their collections. The Ermatinger collection was not analyzed by Laforte, while Podruchny mentioned

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91 Although Barbeau published the collection with the date 1830, Ermatinger had actually retired from the service by that year, while from 1827-1829 he accompanied the York Factory express canoe brigade from York Factory to the Pacific Ocean. Marius Barbeau, “The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830),” Journal of American Folklore 67(April – June 1954): 147-161.
but did not analyze it, categorizing the songs as “all old French ballads.” Yet the Ermatinger collection is the most significant extant collection of notated music taken during the fur trade. Other collections such as that of fur trader W.F. Wentzel was reportedly in the possession of the editor L.R. Masson in the late nineteenth century, but had disappeared by the twentieth. The Ermatinger collection is thus the crucial primary source for examining the songs used in the canoes of the fur trade.

The intellectual tradition of salvage anthropology has influenced the records of early ethnographers and comparative musicologists (the precursors of ethnomusicologists) in their representations of First Nations cultures. Until very recently, the origins of anthropology were enthusiastically espoused and focused around the work of Franz Boas and his students, who were cast as heroic preservers of culture. Their promotion of cultural relativism over hierarchy, and equality, diversity, and historical contingency as cultural determinants rather than unilinear models of cultural evolution transformed the study of First Nations peoples in the twentieth century. Yet this narrative has been challenged from a number of perspectives, with some arguing that the professionalization of the field was a gradual process pre-dating Boas. Others have written about the damaging effects of “salvage anthropology,” arguing that it did not adequately credit indigenous informants, assumed ownership over tribal property, and facilitated the transfer of traditional material culture away from communities to museums.

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93 Likely owing, according to a conversation with a reference archivist at the Library and Archives Canada in 2011, to the “rubric of moral terpitude.” See Chapter Seven.
96 Margaret M. Bruchac, Siobhan M. Hart and H. Martin Wobst eds. *Indigenous Archaeologies: A Reader in Decolonization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010).
anthropologists attempted to undo decades or centuries of contact with Europeans by presenting only the cultural traditions of “authentic Indians.” Yet within this work, there is occasionally evidence of the fur trade. Indeed Densmore discovered what she described as Scottish influence on melodic and rhythmic features of certain Chippewa (Anishinaabeg) songs, which she suggests “may be traceable to songs heard years or even generations ago from Scotch traders, many of whom were connected with the Hudson’s Bay Company.” While these comments are a rarity in early twentieth century ethnomusicology, as they are so thoroughly focused on reconstructing and presenting supposedly “traditional” and “authentic” culture, they are suggestive of the musical influence of the fur trade.

The consequence of these approaches is that scholarship on early Canadian music history has been conspicuously devoid of depictions of “syncretism,” or “hybridity.” The former term is defined as the “process through which elements of two or more cultures are blended together,” involving “both changes of value and of form.” Examples could include both “indigenized” European music and altered First Nations’ styles. On surveying the literature, Bruno Nettl dismissed the possibility of syncretism, concluding that “since North American Indian music and European music have little in common, a form of music having the features of both did not arise.” This viewpoint was largely supported by the ethnographic data generated by the salvage approach, as material with European influence was viewed as inherently less valuable.

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97 Raibmon, Authentic Indians, 5-13.
98 “The melodic as well as the rhythmic features of certain songs, which suggest what is commonly known as “Scotch music,” may be traceable to songs heard years or even generations ago from Scotch traders, many of whom were connected with the Hudson’s Bay Company. This is offered as a tentative explanation. If it be true, it is an interesting point that both these elements should have left rhythmic stamp on the music of a locality. The melodic resemblance is less important, as the tonality commonly known as the “Scotch scale” is found in the music of many primitive peoples.” Frances Densmore, Chippewa Music, Vol. 1, (1910; repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 179.
and generally omitted from the scholarly writing. The “salvage” prism faded in the later twentieth century when it became obvious that First Nations’ peoples were not “vanishing;” on the contrary, they were beginning projects of cultural reclamation and renewal that have significantly influenced scholarship over the past few decades.

It is an opportune moment to re-asses the standard music histories of Canada which have placed very little emphasis on musical syncretism. In Timothy McGee’s description of the songs of the coureurs de bois and voyageurs he emphasizes the un tarnished durability of the French Canadian tradition. In a statement reminiscent of Gagnon and Barbeau, he writes that this genre was “a continuation of the tradition of unaccompanied song that dates back to the troubadours of the Middle Ages.” Helmut Kallman’s influential text does not “attempt to deal with Indian and Eskimo music,” while his analysis of the French Canadian voyageur songs does not consider adaptations from the fur trade and only briefly insinuates the possibility of First Nations’ influence. Willy Amtmann contributed a more historically sensitive evaluation, arguing that French Canadian voyageur songs more reflected sixteenth and seventeenth century vocal repertoires than medieval, admitting the possibility within this genre for originality. While these texts afford only miniscule analysis of French Canadian folksongs influenced by the fur trade, they fail to recognize the genre of First Nations’ fiddling. This genre is finally receiving recognition alongside other Canadian traditional fiddling styles, distinguished by its incorporation of European and First Nations’ musical influences.

In the past two decades, issues of liminality, borderlands, hybridity, and métissage have become topics of interest to historians of the colonial era and the fur trade, as well as ethnomusicology.\textsuperscript{105} Scholars have become attuned to the particular ways in which missionaries conformed their messages, including their music, to First Nations peoples, and how First Nations peoples themselves in turn celebrated and expressed “indigenized” forms of Christianity.\textsuperscript{106} Yet detailed consideration of the non-missionary and in many places pre-missionary fur trade era have largely been overlooked.\textsuperscript{107} Historians of the Red River Métis have examined the themes of métissage, while only briefly touching on the role of music.\textsuperscript{108} Yet the origins of Métis fiddling, the musical tradition most associated, remains largely unstudied. This dissertation will examine the broader context of musical exchanges and cross-cultural influences generated by the fur trade, contributing an understanding of the material and cultural environment from which Métis music emerged. I will argue that the foundations of First Nations’ and Métis fiddling can be traced to the musical culture that flourished at the trading posts of the northwest prior to 1821.

\textsuperscript{105} While there are too many works in these fields than is necessary to list here; for works focusing specifically on métissage in the fur trade see Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown ed., The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985); for a forthcoming example, see Michel Hogue, Prairie Crucible: The Metis and the Borderland World of the Northern Plains (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming.)


\textsuperscript{107} Craig Mishler reviews this remarkable absence of treatment in traditional Canadian music history; See Craig Mishler, The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Ethnomusicologists studying First Nations’ and Métis fiddling traditions have ascribed in only very general terms its origins in the fur trade era. The lack of historical scholarship on the subject has proven a lacuna. Craig Mishler published perhaps the first scholarly monograph on the subject, conducting fieldwork amongst Athapaskan Dené peoples in the Yukon valley. He uncovered Native fiddling traditions that bore evidence of two successive stages of European influence from the fur trade and the gold rush eras. Presenting an outline of syncretic adaptation, Mishler traces the stages of diffusion, juxtaposition, and fusion. His work is centered directly on analysis of musical and dance styles, while his explanation of foundational historical causes is very general. Recently, Scottish, Orkney, and Cree influences have been described in the fiddle traditions of the James Bay Cree by the Scottish ethnomusicologist Frances Wilkins.

Anne Lederman conducted fieldwork in western Anishinaabeg and Métis communities in Manitoba, discovering layers of a diverse repertoire, the oldest of which she determines was transmitted during the fur trade. She argues ultimately that First Nations’ fiddling styles are indeed syncretic, evidencing many stylistic commonalities with First Nations’ music of the plains. In her recent chapter on the subject, the fur trade context is discussed before a summary of the ways in which Scottish and French Canadian fiddling styles were adopted by First Nations and Métis fiddlers of northern Manitoba. While these publications suggest the origins of

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110 Ibid., 9.
northern fiddling originated sometime in the fur trade era, they cite only a few historical sources. This dissertation will periodize the development of hybridized fiddling genres.

1.4 Sensory History and Soundscape Studies

The field of sensory history and historical soundscapes has recently blossomed. Mark M. Smith describes sensory history as operating somewhere “between a field and methodology.”

The discipline has been fed by many interdisciplinary currents, but began from a strong impulse to move away from the dominance of the visual sense. As anthropologist David Howes puts it, sensory studies promised “to liberate us from the hegemony which sight has for so long exercised over our own culture’s social, intellectual, and aesthetic life.” By emphasizing senses other than sight, it is possible to conceive of culture as representing patterns in the “interplay of the senses they present.” The idea that various cultures represent distinct “ratios of sense” dates back to the work of Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, and has been receiving renewed consideration by anthropologists. These authors stress the primacy of the oral - aural realm for non-literate peoples and argue that hearing held privileged importance in these societies. While some of these assertions have been challenged, the senses have been recognized as particularly important “shapers and bearers of culture.”

115 David Howes cites Foucault (1979), Tyler (1984), and Summers (1987); David Howes, The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses, ed. and intro by David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 4.
116 Ibid., 8.
118 Howes, The Varieties of Sensory Experience, 8-9.
119 Ibid., 3.
Historians have become attuned to considerations of the senses, yet the field has developed along very particular lines. Joy Parr called for a "more sensuous history"\textsuperscript{120} over a decade ago, yet Canadian historians have gravitated towards studies of sight and taste more than touch and hearing. Analyses of visual representations and the burgeoning field of food history have disproportionately constituted emerging scholarship,\textsuperscript{121} while Parr’s own diverse work on sensory history concerns the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{122} Early Canadian history is conspicuously devoid of sensory histories pertaining to sound and music. In the United States, historians such as Peter Hoffer and Richard Cullen Rath have published excellent monographs exploring sensory, sound, and music studies in the realm of American colonial history. Rath, for instance, examines sounds and auditory environments in early American encounters, arguing that "sound mattered in ways it no longer does," examining the perceptions of thunder, the acoustics of town halls and religious spaces, and the sonic exchanges along the frontier.\textsuperscript{123} Mark Smith traces how nineteenth century rhetoric employed as metaphors of “progress” the sounds of steamships, locomotives, spindles, and looms, thought to be properly displacing the "yell of the savage" and screeching owls of the forest.\textsuperscript{124} Not only was there an east-west dynamic on the frontier but a north-south division between the sounds of industry and urbanization and a rural agrarian slaveholding society. These histories demonstrate the viability of the sensory approach to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; they demonstrate that sound and music can be fruitfully

\textsuperscript{120} Joy Parr, "Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth Century Canada: the timely, the tacit and the material body," \textit{Canadian Historical Review} 82, 4(Dec 2001): 720-45.


\textsuperscript{124} Mark Smith, \textit{Listening to Nineteenth Century America} (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 108.
engaged with by historians studying the era before sound recordings, providing new insights into
the encounters and historical processes of this period.

The writings of Canadian composer and theorist R. Murray Schafer underpin many sound
studies. He helped break down the categorical divisions between “sound” and “music,” noting
that “to define music merely as sounds” was for a long time “unthinkable,” [while] today it is the
more exclusive definitions that are proving unacceptable.” 125 Developing new methodologies
and terminology, Schafer coined the term “soundscape” around 1970 to signify the immersive
“sonic environment.” 126 He developed its study on the premise that sounds “have a rich
symbolism for man,” and that human behaviour varies in different sonic environments. 127
Schafer provides three main concepts for the interpretation and analysis of soundscapes: keynote
sounds, signals and soundmarks. The first term encompasses background noises and sounds,
including those created by climate and geography such as the effects of wind and rain, and the
sounds of birds, animals, and insects on various landscapes. Signals are sounds foregrounded,
“listened to consciously,” and imbued with meaning. Soundmarks refer to those sounds
associated with the landscape at specific locations that often have particular meanings attached to
them. 128 These concepts have proven helpful in studying sensory and soundscape history, and
will be employed at times throughout this dissertation. Most importantly, Schafer proposes a
methodology for studying historical soundscapes, by first identifying “the significant features of
the soundscape, those sounds which are important either because of their individuality, their

127 Ibid.
numerousness or their domination."\textsuperscript{129} The chapters of this dissertation are organized around the most significant features and themes of the fur trade’s soundscape.

Music is one of the most remarked features of the soundscape. One useful definition of “music” is “humanly organized sound."\textsuperscript{130} Songs function to “move” people emotionally and physically, and are linked to dance in both European and First Nations culture. It must be acknowledged from the outset that categories of sound and music and their attendant activities varied widely between cultures, providing a structural challenge for cross-cultural analysis that has challenged ethnomusicologists for more than a century. It is helpful to recall that music “is a figment, an abstraction of the action,"\textsuperscript{131} as Christopher Small writes, stressing the importance of the social behaviours that helped produce the music rather than the precise nature of the music itself. He presented his own term, "musicking," which is a holistic concept for examining music’s social production and impact:\textsuperscript{132}

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world.

Performer and audience, dancer and spectator: all comprised the musical event, and helped shape its significance. The strength of this approach lies in its handling of diverse participants in any given encounter. No matter how varied their interpretations were, everyone present helped construct the event’s overall meaning. Performers, dancers, and audience were all

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{130} This classic definition comprises the first chapter title in John Blacking’s 1973 study; See John Blacking, \textit{How Musical is Man?} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 13.
crucial to the musical event. The most important point is that from passive observation to outright participation in the other’s music and dance, cross-cultural interaction based around music often unwittingly involved participants and observers. Ceremonies and dances thus cannot be extricated from the analysis of music’s social functions, intertwined as they are in the act of musicking.

Examining music as ritual behaviour has proven useful to scholars interested in its social and cultural significance. Rituals are shaped by sensual experiences, and in their most basic formulation are defined as a “formalized, collective, institutionalized kind of repetitive action.”133 Often accompanied by explicitly defined intent or ideology, rituals are re-enacted by groups of people "to explore and to celebrate their ideas of how the relationships of the cosmos (or of a part of it), operate, and thus of how they themselves should relate to it and to one another."134 As Antonio Gramsci argued, the forces of domination and resistance are seldom realized by direct physical force, but rather play off one another in more subtle cultural interactions such as ritual.135 In the study of the fur trade, rituals have been examined as evidencing power relations and delineating cultural roles in a kind of social theatre.136 Rather than getting bogged down in pedantic exercises about what is and what is not properly defined as ritual, I take the lead from historian Catherine Bell’s reworking of ritual studies and investigate why people ritualized various sound-making and musical activities in particular contexts,

exploring the implications of these rituals as they reflect back on society and culture.\textsuperscript{137} It is the ritualized sounds of the fur trade that are of most interest here.

Dances are ritualized forms of human behaviour. Frances Rust divides the subject into social and magico-religious categories.\textsuperscript{138} Dance is defined as “rhythmical movement of any part or all parts of the body in accordance with some scheme of individual or concerted action.”\textsuperscript{139} It is not timbre or melody but rather rhythm that operated most crucially in dance and work songs, the predominant contexts of musical activity in the fur trade. Linking movement with sounds, rhythms provided powerful motivators and frameworks for human engagements across lines of race, class, and gender. In his pioneering work on the history of rhythm, the German musicologist Karl Bücher claimed that both dance and poetry likely originated with labour-rhythms.\textsuperscript{140} He sketched the ancient repertoires of peoples who turned to vocal reproductions of natural sounds, and in whose songs rhythm was paramount. While his interpretation is dated, the important point is that rhythm serves as the foundation for both work and dance songs, and that the co-evolution of the two likely intertwined far into the distant past.

Music provides a unique window into the nature of historical change. In European history, music dominated conceptions of an ideal soundscape. It not only functioned centrally to sociability and partner selection, but it served as a weather vein for broader cultural change. In Ronald Byrnside’s appraisal of eighteenth century music, he asserts that “the changes in musical style and content. . . reflect and complement various changes in the larger cultural context.”\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{140} Karl Bücher, \textit{Arbeit und Rhythmus}, (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1896).
\textsuperscript{141} Ronald L. Byrnside, \textit{Music: Sound and Sense} (Dubuque: W.C. Brown, 1985), 126.
How did the musical culture of fur traders transform due to prolonged contact with First Nations peoples? In turn, how did First Nations’ musical culture change as a result of the arrival of trading posts and goods in their midst?

Recently Olivia Bloechl has examined the topic of European – Native American musical encounters from a literary and post-colonial perspective. According to her analysis, Europeans often sought to “neutralize the difference” between Native American and European music by comparing it to the noise of charivaris or the cries of demoniacs. These descriptions were often derogatory and proliferated precisely because they “were ideologically effective and efficient: in one stroke they strengthened existing power asymmetries in European societies and reinforced the increasingly important fantasy of European cultural superiority relative to native American cultures.”142 Bloechl’s approach is rooted in poststructural theory, and she deconstructs the discourses of both Protestant and Catholic travellers. Representations of First Nations’ songs served to delineate colonizer from colonized, while deviations from aesthetic and religious norms were often interpreted as diabolically inspired and antithetical to “civilized” culture. Michael V. Pisani’s work *Imagining Native America in Music* examines how Euro-Americans recreated First Nations’ music in the eighteenth century contexts of the French court, British-American theatre, and elsewhere. Ultimately, music was employed to highlight differences between Euro-American culture and the exotic and primitive *other*.143

In contrast, this dissertation explores how music and dance served to unite and as well as distinguish fur traders and First Nations peoples. Song and dance were a crucial area of cross-cultural interaction and at times served to bridge the divisions of race, class, and gender. Rather than relying on the offhand descriptions of travellers passing through, fur traders worked closely

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over long periods of time with First Nations peoples. Many developed a keen ear for the characteristics and distinctions between First Nations’ music, describing it at length. While it also served as a pastime, music formed one of the core social activities that strengthened trading relationships, characterizing the trade and the interaction of its diverse peoples.

1.5 Chapter Summaries

Chapter One examines the sounds that most dominated the arrival of the Europeans, cannons and muskets. Gunpowder and firearms took on not only military roles but were part of the symbolic fabric of the fur trade, ceremonially marking the soundscape. They were used as long distance signaling and saluting devices, shattering the northern landscape with loud booms that were often equated with the sound of thunder. Cosmological understandings were often initially employed to interpret these sounds, which came to be associated with human activities. Cannons and muskets transformed the soundscape, functioning as sound-makers, signaling mechanisms, and ceremonial devices, employed distinctly in the fur trade by First Nations peoples and servants of the companies.

Chapter Two introduces First Nations' music, both the historical parameters of its study and its general and regional characteristics. The musical areas sketched by ethnomusicologists and encountered by fur traders are surveyed, including eastern and plains groups to western subarctic, coastal, and plateau - basin peoples. Early descriptions of traders reveal the centrality of music in cultural encounters. These sources provide a valuable glimpse at First Nations musical culture before intensive colonial contact and missionary activity. Fur traders noticed both commonalities and differences between nations and culture areas.

Chapter Three examines the arrival of European military instruments. Drums were utilized by First Nations and European peoples, providing a fertile arena for cultural exchange.
European military drums were fairly widespread in the fur trade and could be repurposed into traditional First Nations uses. New applications for military instruments occurred, slowly shedding their disciplinary functions and associations and being employed instead for their novelty and recreational purposes. Bugles and bagpipes made their way into the trading post circuit in a more limited capacity than drums, with their roles similarly transformed from those they served in colonial warfare.

Chapter Four analyzes the First Nations’ dances of diplomacy associated with the calumet pipe and war. These were integrated into the diplomatic forms of the middle ground, integral to the alliance-building and trading operations of numerous First Nations. As a component of colonial relations, these forms played a prominent role in the experiences of many fur traders. To the Anishinaabeg of the western Great Lakes, and Algonquian and Siouan groups to the west, pipe ceremonies were often accompanied with dances. These were in turn imported into the northwest via the fur trade. Dances of diplomacy had prominent political and economic ramifications in the fur trade until the 1820s.

Chapter Five examines the sounded encounters with the landscape created by canoe brigades on the route between Montreal and western Lake Superior. Specific locations were associated with particular sounds, oral stories, and music. The route from Montreal along the Ottawa and French rivers, along the North Channel of Georgian Bay and Lake Superior was by far the most well-traversed in the period before the amalgamation of the trading companies. Its landscape evoked oral histories, songs, and ceremonies. English speaking fur traders were exposed to the history and significations of sites and portions of the voyage through ritualized “soundmoments,” which is a concept that will be introduced in this chapter.

Chapter Six explores the intimate acquaintances some fur traders gained with First Nations’ culture and music. While overwintering at trading posts and travelling to First Nations
camps to trade, they encountered and described the music associated with conjuring, hunting, and healing ceremonies. While not trained formally as “fieldworkers,” these prolonged experiences produced significant ethnographic descriptions of First Nations’ musical culture. Their contact with First Nations communities hastened cultural flux and transformation, with new musical styles and influences developing from the arrival of new peoples and materials through the fur trade.

Chapter Seven examines the songs associated with travel. The most frequently referenced are those of the French Canadian voyageurs. These have previously been analyzed through a romantic filter. With a close examination of the primary documents and particularly the transcriptions of fur traders it is possible to analyze this genre and how it operated on the water. While the guides of the canoe brigades initiated paddling by starting songs familiar in the St. Lawrence, these were extended in creative ways and often accompanied by new and varied choruses. Some of this additional material related specifically to the voyageurs' vocation, while many choruses employed non-lexical syllables known as "vocables." The Ermatinger collection suggests how folk songs were adapted on the water and contrasted with those recorded by musicologists. Songs of travel reflected the conditions of the fur trade, its human diversity, as well as the anxieties of the fur traders' vocation.

Chapter Eight is an examination of the music and dancing culture of the trading posts. Shaped by the contours of the seasons, dances were held regularly throughout the year at the smaller posts, while the annual summer meetings of the North West Company at the west end of Lake Superior yielded the largest. Divisions of race, class, and gender were often bridged, while First Nations women were more often invited to the dances than First Nations men. The Montreal trade exported a vibrant musical culture into the northwest, encouraging French Canadian traditions to merge with those of Scottish and First Nations. Before the amalgamation
of the trading companies in 1821, musical materials such as fiddle strings and jaw harps were exported in large quantities into the northwest. The music of the fiddle became most prized and cherished in the trading posts, while changes to the trade beginning in the 1820s began to curtail this “favourite pastime” of the fur traders.

Many aspects of the fur trade are characterized by the themes of exchanges and reciprocity, and this extended to the auditory realm. Musical interactions manifested from social and political necessity, ritualized into diplomatic protocol. Travelling and trading post life presented unique circumstances, influences, and materials that ultimately led to a distinct fur trade culture. Peaceful interactions and trade were encouraged through ritualized engagements with sound, music and dance. These served as a crucial platform of intercultural interaction between master and servant, European and First Nations, and men and women in northern North America from 1760 – 1840.
2 With a Bang: The Arrival of Merchants and Firearms in the Northwest

The Omushkego Cree of Hudson Bay recall first detecting Europeans through the sense of hearing. An oral history recounted by elder Louis Bird relates that his ancestors heard a “noise which resembled sound that comes when the ice pieces in the bay collide with each other – the sound was a booming sound like thunder at times.”¹ In the subarctic landscape and low rocky terrain, echoes travelled tremendous distances over the water and shoreline. The frequent “boom sound” resembled those produced when ice collides, and the Omushkego initially thought nothing of it. Yet when this sound recurred, their familiarity with the auditory environment made them recognize something was amiss:

these ancestors when they heard these things it never bothers them - until one day - it was in the evening - they hear this thing. It was not the right conditions to hear an echo and the wind was not strong enough to make the ice pieces collide with each other. And they heard this thing in the evening, and they became to hear it coming over and over so rapidly - and then they looked. They went to the high ground and look at where the sound come from - and it was late in the evening - and they actually saw the lightning on the Water. But by this time they couldn't see no sails or anything - just the light on the water, a lightning sort of thing. And that's what scares them. And they now begin to think there is a thing there - there is something.

Sounds had drawn the Omushkego to the water, but darkness had prevented them from seeing the sailing ships that produced the booms and “lightning.” The sounds resembled ice colliding, but their distinct rhythm, “coming over and over so rapidly,” distinguished them from the natural world. According to the oral history, it was years before the Omushkego learned that “when they would hear that booming sound, it was the cannon,” finally connecting the sounds

with voices of people overheard aboard ships at Cape Henrietta Maria, known to the Omushkego as *Ki-ni-ki-moo-sha-wow*, meaning “barren or treeless headland.” The origin of the loud booms that occurred at unusual times and in inexplicable rhythms had been determined.

Hudson Bay’s low rocky landscape gave the sounds of cannon-fire a special auditory quality that amazed European visitors. When Lieutenant Edward Chappell of the Royal Navy accompanied Hudson’s Bay Company ships that became enveloped in thick fog, they fired three shots as a signal for the rest of the convoy. The crew was “astonished at the effect produced by the cannon. The explosion issued like thunder over the ice; then appeared to roll rumbling back towards the ship; bellowing forth again in tremendous peals. The echo died way in distant reverberation.” The sound of the cannon was augmented by the environment, amplified into a shocking boom that echoed with tremendous magnitude over the ice and low rocky terrain.

This chapter examines how cannons and muskets punctuated the soundscape of the fur trade, playing a role in the interactions between Europeans and First Nations peoples. Firearms were an important part of fur traders’ cargo, imported throughout the trading post network and traded with First Nations peoples. Fur traders used them as sound making devices for signalling and ceremonial purposes, broadcasting presence and power in the acoustic spaces surrounding the trading posts. These sounds signalled at the most basic level the presence of guns and powder. In the period from the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the First Nations of the northwest encountered these technologies, and their sounds were institutionalized in the operations of the fur trade.

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2.1 The Seven Years’ War and its Aftermath

The pervasive militarism from the period 1744 to 1814 conditioned the fur trade and its soundscape. The heightened tensions and skirmishes that spilled into North America during the war of the Austrian Succession (1744-8) intensified into the Seven Years War (1756-1763) ultimately transferring influence to the English after the defeat of Montcalm's army and the fall of New France. In capturing the St. Lawrence the British attained the fur-trading hub of Montreal and access to travel and trading networks through the Great Lakes. Yet their authority was challenged in Pontiac's Rebellion (1763-4) in which all of British posts west of Niagara fell to a broad alliance of Great Lakes First Nations. Yet by the American Revolutionary War (1775 - 1783), most First Nations of the Great Lakes allied with the British, a pattern that persisted for the remainder of what some historians have dubbed a "Sixty Years War." Trading posts and fortifications in the Great Lakes served both military and commercial functions, and the expansion of fur trade networks from Montreal into the northwest proceeded as a commercial and imperial rivalry.

Soldiers and fur traders operating in the western Great Lakes were exposed to the sound traditions of First Nations peoples. On the arrival at a town of the Ottawas on the island of Grand Traverse near Michilimackinac in 1766, Jonathan Carver was received in a manner bewildering and shocking to his senses.5

But what appears extremely singular to me at the time, and must do so to every person unacquainted with the customs of the Indians, was the reception I met with on landing. As our canoes approached the shore, and had reached within about three score rods of it, the Indians began a feu-de-joy; in which they fired their pieces loaded with balls; but at the same time they took care to discharge them

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in such a manner as to fly a few yards above our heads; during this they ran from one tree or stump
to another, shouting and behaving as if they were in the heat of battle.

At this reception Carver was “greatly surprised,” and “was on the point of ordering my
attendants to return their fire, concluding that their intentions were hostile,” but the intervention
of some fur traders prevented bloodshed. They relayed that “this was their usual method of
receiving the chiefs of other nations.” Reinterpreting the gunshots as signals of honour, Carver
was eventually “pleased with the respect thus paid.” The notion that gunshots could be used in
unfamiliar ways and with alternate customs of saluting and signaling was introduced early in his
travels. Nothing in his military experience had trained him for his landing at the Ottawa village
on Grand Traverse Island, and Carver spent the following years learning more about the customs
of First Nations peoples.

By the 1780s, the large trading posts of the western Great Lakes rivaled the largest on
Hudson Bay. Michilimackinac, Grand Portage, and Fort William were all palisaded with heavy
gates. They possessed cannon for their defense, yet were used, according to the primary
accounts, mainly as a method of saluting arrivals and departures. Peter Pond describes a
particularly memorable reception at Mackinac in the 1760s. When spotted over a mile and a half
away (2.41 kilometers) in a fleet of the “Largest” canoes in the country, Pond describes how “ye
Cannon of the Garreson Began to Play Smartley” and continued until “we Reacht ye Shore.”
This loud reception broadcast the ceremony of arrival into the acoustic space surrounding the
forts, persisting, as this example suggests, for long durations. In the early 1820s, the new
Deputy-Governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company Nicholas Garry described his arrival at Fort
William: “We were received with the firing of Guns, and the Shouts of the Indians, Canadians,

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6 Peter Pond, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John MacDonell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faires, and Thomas Connor*, edited by Charles M. Gates with an
introduction by Grace Lee Nute (St. Paul: The University of Minnesota Press, 1933), 50.
The fur traders entering the northwest after the fall of New France describe a rich ceremonial soundscape marking arrivals and departures. The most prevalent sound-making technologies employed for these purposes were cannons and muskets.

2.2 Cannons

Cannons represented the arrival of European commerce to the shores of Hudson Bay and the Western Great Lakes. Their reports reinforced the military underpinning of the fur trade that began with the imperial rivalries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, superimposing the rhythms of trade onto the soundscape. The commercial rivalries that ensued after the Seven Years War expanded the use of cannons and artillery, employed in signaling and saluting with friendly parties or firing shots of warning at those who were hostile. The western fur trade hubs of Michilimackinac and Grand Portage expanded rapidly in the mid 1760s and 1770s, serving as bases from which the westward trade was conducted. As the Montreal traders extended their trading networks into the Athabasca region, the Hudson’s Bay Company moved inland and set up major forts at Cumberland House in 1774 and Île-à-la-Crosse, introducing cannons and artillery to the major posts of the northwest.

Archibald McDonald describes how cannons at York Factory sounded signals that had symbolic meaning. The fort’s mounted artillery consisted of “four handsome eighteen or twenty-four pounders,” positioned on a high bank near the store houses. “Gun firing is, (or was during

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my time there),” McDonald writes, the customary “mode of salute throughout the whole North.”8 The effects on the soundscape can hardly be exaggerated. The Omushkego passed on traditions about the altered soundscape of Hudson Bay more than three centuries after they first encountered cannons. Europeans also recorded their experiences with the sounds of cannons, which dominated the northern soundscape through institutionalized saluting and signaling.

A resident of Red River described her experiences onboard a ship arriving at York Factory in the early nineteenth century. The sounds of the cannon remained fresh in her memory many decades later. When her ship was fifty miles off Churchill, “a couple of cannon were shot off on the chance that the reports might be heard by the Churchill schooner,” to let them know “that we were passing on our way to York Factory.” Anchoring offshore at a point between the Nelson and Hayes rivers, “a cannon was fired at intervals to let them know on shore that we had come.” The next morning a schooner arrived to take the mail and official documents from the ship, as well as the “dangerous part of the cargo” – the gunpowder. Mrs. Cowan recalled that they anchored about seven miles (11.27 kilometers) from York Factory, and when they would fire their guns, they “could hear the guns reply at the factory.”9 This provided the fort with forewarning of the ship’s arrival the following day, serving as a long distance signaling and saluting mechanism.

Using cannon for saluting on arrival had a long precedent, dating back in Europe to the armies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As cannons took minutes to reload, firing salutes at a distance demonstrated that guns were empty on entering firing range. This served to ease tensions as the possibility of accidental or premeditated firing was reduced. This custom became

an institutionalized symbol of goodwill and non-hostility in European military protocol. Armies developed systems of military honours that expanded these traditions, whereby high military and civil officials were saluted with a prescribed number of gun blasts, increasing with their importance in odd numbers up to twenty-one.\(^{10}\) Outside the official channels of the British Navy, the merchant fleets of the HBC employed cannons to commemorate arrivals and departures.

James Isham’s observations from Hudson Bay in the 1740s details how cannon salutes were expected on arrival. Failure to follow protocol could lead to trouble. In 1746 two ships entered the harbour of York Factory, but did not proceed to port, rather staying at a distance. As these ships were unexpected and unidentified, their behaviour was interpreted as potentially malevolent. With “their boats a Sounding, at 11,” Isham reports that the fort fired two “12 pounders, between the ships & boats, wch. Brought. them too, the Distance 4 1/2 mile the shott Drop’t 1/2 way.”\(^{11}\) The post-master then sent a few men in boats to inquire what “their Design’s was, they acting so much Like Enemy's by Sounding all abt. the mouth of the River & not Sending their boats to the fort.” Uncertainty about their allegiance persisted even after the customary salute; Isham describes in his journal that “the Ships fir'd 15 Guns Each, wch. we suppose to be a Salute to the fort. I return'd None.”\(^{12}\) The apparent salute was ambiguous because the actions of the ship breached protocol, and salutes could be mistaken for threats. Cannon salutes were the expected custom, yet could function as potentially ambiguous signals in long distance communications between ship and fort.

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\(^{10}\) The British Army employed odd numbers of blasts up to twenty-one, while even numbered salutes were reserved for funerary functions. See Mark M. Boatner III, *Military Customs and Traditions* (1956; repr. Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 48.


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
There was less potential for ambiguity when the cannons were used to commemorate departures. Archibald McDonald explains his understanding of the meaning of the “parting cannon shots.” He reports that these were “for good luck.”\textsuperscript{13} Around the trading posts, thundering booms echoed great distances in saluting the departure of supply ships and canoe brigades. The annual cycle of trade in Hudson Bay meant that the ships leaving for England would blast their departing cannons in the late summer or fall. At the forts of the western Great Lakes, departing salutes would have been heard after the mid-summer rendezvous.

As the fur trade was extended to the Pacific coast, cannons were employed by merchants as an auditory signal of their arrival. It was specifically used to attract the attention of First Nations peoples. Writing in 1799, William Sturgis reports using cannon to signal the presence of his ship: “we shall inform them of our arrival by our great Guns.”\textsuperscript{14} This method was still used over forty years later when James Douglas working with the Hudson’s Bay Company described sounding "guns of invitation" along the Pacific Coast, offering "friendly salute[s]" in an effort to alert First Nations and invite trade.\textsuperscript{15} This tradition was widely employed by European merchants in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as a way to invite trade, as well as to warn off other European traders.\textsuperscript{16} Yet the interpretation of these sounds by First Nations peoples was likely quite varied.

How were they interpreted? From the account of Louis Bird, the Omushkego Cree first interpreted the sounds of the cannon as being produced from natural causes from the ice colliding, which produced a “booming sound like thunder.” Once the Cree had perceived that it

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{McDonald, \textit{Peace River}, 41.}
\footnote{James Douglas, “Diary of a Trip to the Northwest Coast. April 22- October 2, 1840,” Transcript, Archives of British Columbia, (A-B-40-D75.2.), 41-3, 50.}
\end{footnotes}
was something on the water creating the sounds, Bird emphasizes his peoples’ fear of the “lightning sort of thing” they did not recognize. Its mysterious appearance and unknown origin “scare[d] them” for some time, until ships were seen up close and their cannon shots became familiar to the Omushkego.\textsuperscript{17} The sounds themselves were perceived by the Cree as “like thunder,” which was a similar interpretation to Lieutenant Chappell’s observations from shipdeck of cannon sounding “like thunder over the ice.”\textsuperscript{18} Yet European and Cree conceptions and associations with thunder were quite different.

On a basic level, both European and First Nations peoples attributed thunder to the activity of supernatural beings. In the European tradition thunder represented the tremendous gulf between gods and men. In the ancient world thunder was personified as broadcasting the activities and emotions of the gods Donner, Thor and Zeus. Only gods were thought capable of producing such sounds, with a frequency range “well outside the human scale of soundmaking.”\textsuperscript{19} Richard Cullen Rath has written about the varied perceptions of thunder and lightning in seventeenth century New England. It was the sound rather than the flash that was seen as having a destructive force, and thought to be commanded by God or demons.\textsuperscript{20} Only in the eighteenth century with the increased emphasis on sight were the damaging effects understood to come from the flash and not the sound itself.\textsuperscript{21}

To many First Nations peoples in northern North America, thunder resulted from the activities of powerful beings. Louis Bird speaks about the centrality of thunder and lightning in Cree cosmology, and the importance of “thunderbirds” in creating thunder. Omushkego oral

\textsuperscript{17} Bird, \textit{The Spirit Lives in the Mind}, 47-9.
\textsuperscript{18} Chappell, \textit{Narrative of a Voyage}, 120-1.
\textsuperscript{19} R. Murray Schafer, \textit{The Tuning of the World} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1977), 25.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
traditions describe shamans who have through their dreams attained powers beyond those of ordinary people, and can connect with these beings. Attained through dreams and mastery over a significant body of knowledge and techniques, the “highest level of shaman. . can control the thunderbird.”

The oral traditions speak of powerful shamans controlling lightning to defeat enemies, yet this was reserved for the most powerful who had “acquired the knowledge of the thunderbird.” Louis Bird describes thunderbirds as “very highly regarded as being part of the power of all First Nations people in Canada,” to some degree unifying First Nations’ cosmologies. “No matter where I have gone,” Louis Bird states, “the thunderbird is always highly regarded and respected.”

Theresa Smith has examined conceptions of the thunderers or thunderbirds amongst the Anishinaabeg as well as Menominee and Cree peoples. According to her analysis, the traditional “life-world” of these peoples was replete with symbols, beliefs, and practices “alive with the presence of these other-than-human people – the manitouk.” These beings inhabited the narrations of Anishinaabeg mythology, and were said to be encountered in dreams or visions. Two kinds, Smith argues, the underwater serpent-lynx manitouk Mishebeshu, and the sky thunderers and thunderbirds, were particularly important in this cosmology. Referred to as animikeek, the Anishinaabeg thunderbirds are similar to conceptions held by other First Nations peoples such as the Sioux and Cree, though they also diverged in their details. Shared is the notion that thunderbirds caused thunderstorms, and were conceived of as “gigantic, frequently eagle-like birds,” that “enjoy positions of power and prestige within their respective worlds.”

They influence Anishinaabeg culture, especially through individuals who claimed to “marry

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23 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 67.
and/or metamorphose into Thunderbirds themselves.”

They are crucially important to the *midéwiwin* or *mide* society, a central component of Anishinaabeg religious life with levels of initiation in which initiates paid a fee and learned “healing techniques and methods for acquiring personal power.”

Thunderbirds influence how the Anishinaabeg conceptualized their acoustic environment. The sounds of thunder signal “the arrival of powerful people, Thunderers or Thunderbirds, who have a relationship with human beings,” and with whom people engaged by burning tobacco as an offering, encouraging them to move on.

That these views were held by Anishinaabeg peoples during the fur trade is revealed by the account of John Tanner. Having lived for decades with the Anishinaabeg and having worked for numerous trading companies over the course of his career, Tanner provides the revealing insights of a liminal figure who moved in between Euro-American and First Nations’ cultures in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. He describes traveling early one spring when, a severe thunderstorm roused those he was traveling with from their sleep:

> Pich-e-to becoming much alarmed at the violence of the storm, got up and offered some tobacco to the thunder, intreating it to stop. The Ojibbeways and Ottawwaws believe that thunder is the voice of living beings, which they call An-nim-me-keeg. Some considering them to be like men, while other say they have more resemblance to birds.

Offering tobacco to the beings that controlled thunder was witnessed and described by Tanner. It represented an effort to stop or divert the thunder, fitting the pattern that Smith has documented of using tobacco to encourage the *animikeek* to move on. While these traditional methods continued to be employed, the fur trade’s introduction of gunpowder may have augmented their methods of communication with these non-human beings.

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26 Ibid., 2.
27 Ibid., 41.
28 Ibid., 2, 30-7, 66.
For fur traders, cannons served as signaling and saluting devices as well as weapons of war. Some fur traders reported firing “warning shots” to deter and threaten hostile First Nations peoples. When the American Captain Robert Gray was trading for Otter Skins near the mouth of the Columbia River in 1790, twenty large war canoes with thirty men each approached quickly while “singing a War Song.” Gray reports that he “fir'd a Cannon and some Musketts over their heads. At this they mov'd off about 100 yds. and . . . halted.” On this occasion the warning shot succeeded as a deterrent for conflict. Yet in other instances on this voyage Captain Gray resorted to using his guns directly on Northwest canoes.

The trading posts’ cannons could also be used in conflicts. Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) recalls an incident from inside a fort, when after midnight “a discharge of fire arms were suddenly heard, on the south side of the Panbian [Pembina?] River accompanied by a most tremendous hooping and yelling.” Henry relates how he could “distinctly hear the Scieux [Sioux] harangueing” in the distance, and he loaded the “Cohorn” [mortar] on the battery with a pound of powder and thirty balls. Aiming in the direction of the sounds, he fired:

The Balls made a clattering noise among the large Trees on the South side of the little River, and the night being still and calm, the noise of the piece was very great indeed, and must have appeared awful to the people who never saw or heard any thing of the kind before. My Saulteaux were in great hopes of finding a good round number of the enemy dead the next morning as they instantly said, they heard the Scieux, crying and lamenting their relations, that had just fell. However every thing was now quiet for some time when we again heard the enemy harangueing, but they had shifted their position, and had withdrawn to a greater distance. I once more loaded my Cohorn, and pointing it as near as possible to the spot where we heard them, when we fired a second shot. This caused them apparently to have withdrawn at some distance, as we heard no more of them during the night.

Shooting the artillery in the direction of what was assumed to be a hostile group of Sioux warriors, Henry emphasizes how his artillery successfully warded off a hostile group potentially

much larger than his own. Francis Ermatinger in his 1828 expedition to the West Coast Clallem tribe records how when there was possibility of conflict and a few shots had been fired, Ermatinger “to mend the matter sent off [Congreve] Rockets !!!” This was not intended as a friendly signal, rather it “was purposely done to warn the Natives.”

Cannons and by the early 1800s other kinds of artillery represented powerful technologies of war at the employ of fur traders. Yet the accounts indicate that their sound-making capacities were utilized as both friendly and menacing signals, with sounds often operating with more efficacy than the projectiles themselves.

The advance of the trading post network introduced the sounds of cannons throughout the northwest. The major forts on Hudson Bay and the Western Great Lakes echoed most frequently in the summer months with the arrival and departure of cargoes and people. The descriptions of the Omushkego and Lt. Chappell suggest that the sounds of cannons were interpreted as closely resembling thunder, effectively re-arranging the meaning of this sound symbol. Instead of being controlled exclusively by supernatural forces such as animikeek, they were now commanded by fur traders. The evidence is too thin to know precisely how the booming cannons of the large posts on Hudson Bay and the western Great Lakes were perceived differently than the smaller artillery of the inland posts. Yet it is clear that firings left an auditory receipt of the comings and goings of cargoes and furs throughout the northwest, introducing a prominent new element to the soundscape.

2.3 Muskets

32 Francis Ermatinger, Notes and Correspondence on the Expedition to the Clallem Tribe 1828, Archives of British Columbia, (A/B/20/V5), 13.
While cannons contributed the loudest auditory punctuations to the soundscape, small arms perhaps more significantly transformed the soundscape through their sheer numbers. The arrival of muskets preceded the arrival of fur traders in many if not most First Nations communities. When fur traders did arrive, this became one of their signature sounds. This arrival of firearms placed enormous sound-making capacity in the hands of fur traders, voyageurs, and servants, and First Nations peoples. The musket represented a personal means of producing a loud report that could carry kilometres through forests, over plains, and along river valleys, serving some of the same signaling and saluting functions as cannons yet also developing other distinct usages.

European military tactics from the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries were based on the combination of musketry into coordinated volleys on the battlefield. Military historians have written about the “stunning noise of the discharges,” that struck fear even into European soldiers who had years of experience. The sounds of volleys could influence the tide of battle, for instance at Zorndorf during the Seven Years War when Russian morale was sapped by the torrential sounds of Prussia’s artillery.33 Muskets, unsurprisingly, seem to have had an even greater impact on peoples in North America. This factor was exploited early by Europeans along the Atlantic seaboard, and the auditory effect of muskets was documented in colonial warfare. Samuel de Champlain may have exaggerated the physical effects of his primitive firearms, known as arquebuses, in military engagements with the Iroquois. Yet his accounts clearly indicate their auditory influence: on encountering fierce resistance, “neantmoins nous leur montrasmes ce qu’ils n’auoeient jamais veu, ny oïy.”34 The sounds were intended to cause terror,

“car aussi-tost qu’ils nous veirent, & entendirent les coups d’harquebuse, & les balles siffler à leurs oreilles, ils se retirèrent promptement en leur fort, emportant leurs morts.” Champlain attributes the Iroquois retreat largely to the auditory effects of the firearms, asserting that his Huron allies could attack far ahead and rely on the arquebusiers for cover, “whom the enemy greatly feared and dreaded.”

In the seventeenth century the French restricted the trade of guns to First Nations allies who were baptized as Christians. By the eighteenth century, New France’s allies around the Great Lakes were supplied with guns and ammunition through military alliance and the fur trade. Arthur Ray has written that guns were adopted by the Assiniboine and Cree bands of the woodlands, as well as by the “Home Guard” Cree around Hudson Bay prior to 1774, when Cumberland House was built and the NWC coalesced. Although firearms transformed hunting practices of First Nations peoples, they were mostly reserved for warfare. Ray hints at their auditory impact by stating that the initial demand was “quite high, since they had great shock value.” Especially against unarmed people, firearms exerted on “their less-fortunate enemies pressures that were out of proportion to the actual effectiveness of the guns.” While the large quantity of guns and gunpowder traded by the companies after the conquest is undeniable, the nature and degree of First Nations’ dependency remains a debated and contentious matter.

Recent discussions around the efficacy and employment of firearms have under-emphasized their utility and employment as noise-makers and signaling devices. Brian Givens has questioned the degree to which muskets represented an improvement and replacement for

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 7.
38 For the question of firearms and dependency see Ray 19-21, 73-8.
bows and arrows. Arrows could be employed with stealth and accuracy, useful for hunters and warriors alike. Yet muskets emitted a tremendous noise whose psychological effects were palpable. While the bow and arrow took hundreds of hours of practice, even “the dullest recruit could learn in a few weeks to shoot a musket,” evidence that seems to go against Brian Given’s basic thesis of the superiority of bows and arrows over muskets.\textsuperscript{39} The flintlock muskets that were traded in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were considerably improved over matchlock muskets in terms of reliability, accuracy, and rapidity of fire.\textsuperscript{40} The sound making abilities of all types of muskets, rather than merely cumbersome, were harnessed for their auditory capabilities.

Oral histories of First Nations peoples in the western plains have maintained traditions about their initial encounters with firearms. The Blackfoot are said to have acquired guns before horses, and both of these were encountered long before they met Europeans themselves. An oral tradition relates the first encounter with guns to an exchange with the Cree:

One time a party of Blackfeet were in the woods north of the Saskatchewan. They heard a frightening noise and began to run away. Some Crees, who had made the noise by shooting a gun, motioned to the Blackfeet and told them to come to them. The Crees then showed the Blackfeet how to load a gun from the muzzle and to fire it by pulling the trigger.\textsuperscript{41}

After obtaining guns themselves, a Blackfoot war party moving against the Crows and Shoshonis used the sound of guns to intimidate their enemies. "When the enemy heard the noise of these guns they were so frightened that they fled southward from their location near present Calgary, leaving their tipis, their horses, and all of their camp equipment behind." According to this history, the Blackfoot subsequently drove the Crows, Snakes, Flatheads, and Nez Percés

\textsuperscript{39} Brian Given, \textit{A Most Pernicious Thing: Gun Trading and Native Warfare in the Early Contact Period} (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 107.

from the Bow River southward beyond the Sweetgrass Hills, through the “noise of these guns alone.”

On a macro-level the effects of gun blasts can be interpreted in terms of geo-political significances, while on an individual level they could be associated with an array of direct experiences. Few fur traders lived to tell the kind of tale that John Tanner did of getting shot while paddling a canoe. He recounted the “discharge of a gun at my side . . . I heard a bullet whistle past my head, and felt my side touched, at the same instant that the paddle fell from my right hand, and the hand itself dropped powerless to my side.” This recollection focuses on the sound of the shot in the most extreme example of the sensory effects of firearms. Tanner heard the shot pass by his head, recounting a harrowing narrative where he barely escapes with his life. On a different occasion he describes the terrifying effect of firearms on his Anishinaabeg family when he had been away for some time. “My family had been so long unaccustomed to hear guns,” he writes, “that at the sound of mine they left the lodge and fled to the woods, believing the Sioux had fired upon me.” Indeed Tanner was on contested territory, and relates how his gun was constantly on his mind: “If I had occasion to do any thing, I held my gun in one hand and labored with the other.” After hunting moose, however, while butchering an animal he put down his gun and heard a shot “not more than two hundred yards from me.” Shocked and thinking it the Sioux, Tanner “immediately called out.” He supposed his own firing had been heard, “but no answer was returned.” Finally returning home as quietly as he could, Tanner avoided conflict in this tense situation. His account reveals the impact of firearms and the ability

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42 Ibid.
43 Tanner, *A Narrative*, 270.
of gunshots to transmit location through a wooded environment, with the potential for varied and ambiguous interpretations.

2.4 Transporting Guns, Gunpowder, and Shot into the Northwest

The geographic expansion and fierce competition of the fur trade after the Seven Years War increased the supply of guns, gunpowder and shot. The French had previously supplied these items to the northwest, especially when they were in control of York Factory from 1694-1714. Yet the evidence suggests that this supply was often irregular.\textsuperscript{45} Estimates of French cargoes departing for the Great Lakes in the 1670s indicate that between 320 and 440 guns shipped annually, increasing to between 680 and 1040 by the 1690s.\textsuperscript{46} While the development of the \textit{canots du maître} by the 1720s and extension of the fur trade increased the size of cargoes, estimates of firearms, powder, and shot must only be approximated due to the incomplete nature of the sources. The records that do exist indicate the number varied tremendously depending on the year, and that arms and ammunition rarely formed more of the cargo than textiles and clothing. In 1732, leading up to war against the Fox, 509 livres worth or 36\% of the cargo sent to Detroit was comprised of arms and ammunition, which fell to 68 livres or only 8\% of the cargo in 1736. Textiles and clothing represented most of the cargo sent to Green Bay in 1740 and 1747, when arms and ammunition made up 2, 549 livres worth or 30\%, and 3, 049 livres or 15\% respectively.\textsuperscript{47}

After the Seven Years’ War, large quantities of supplies made their way into the northwest. Muskets were provided by the North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company to

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 138.
First Nations hunters, in exchange for furs or on credit. Fur traders departing from Michilimackinac and Grand Portage left detailed records of their cargoes, indicating not only values and percentages of cargoes, but also weight of powder and shot transported. The records indicate that trade increased the amount of firearms and particularly gunpowder traded west, particularly in the period of rapid competition and expansion. In 1769 Maurice Blondeau got a license for three canoes to “Michilimackinac and La Mer de l’Ouest” including cargo for 800 lb. gunpowder and 14 1/2 cwt. ball and shot, as well as 24 rifles, while Lawrence Ermatinger sent two canoes with 500 lb. gunpowder, 1,000 lb. ball and shot, and 16 rifles. In 1770 Blondeau sent 1,100 lb. of gunpowder and 17 cwt. ball and shot, while Benjamin Frobisher sent 1,100 lb. of gunpowder and 24 cwt. ball and shot to Michilimackinac and Grand Portage. In 1772, Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher sent 1,400 lb. of gunpowder, 22 12 cwt. of ball and shot. By 1774, these numbers increased further, including cargoes of 1,500 lb. gunpowder for Maurice Blondeau and 1,700 lb. of gunpowder and 2,100 lb. ball and shot from Benjamin Frobisher. In 1775, Lawrence Ermatinger sent 2,000 lb. of gunpowder and 3,600 lb. of ball and shot. The need to replace broken guns and provide a continual supply of powder and shot meant that a large portion of the fur traders' cargo was devoted to these items. The quantity of gunpowder transported into the northwest annually provides perhaps a better indication of the degree to which the soundscape was affected.

Most First Nations in the Eastern, Great Lakes, and Great Plains regions had been exposed to firearms by the mid-eighteenth century. While tracing the precise arrival date for

50 Ibid., 192-193.
51 Ibid., 193.
each is impossible due to the paucity of sources, the “voyages of discovery” recorded by fur traders provide an indication of when and how certain groups received their own supply. It was with the North West Company that Alexander Mackenzie made his historic voyages to the Pacific and Arctic oceans in the final decades of the eighteenth century. While staying near the Nuxalk people along the Bella Coola river in 1793, Mackenzie engaged in difficult diplomacy. Communication “was awkward and inconvenient, for it was carried entirely by signs, as there was not a person with me who was qualified for the office as an interpreter.” Yet he relates that on his first arrival at their village, “they requested us not to discharge our fire-arms, lest the report should frighten away the salmon.” This remarkable request demonstrates that the Nuxalk were already aware yet wary of firearms, concerned that they interfered with the salmon so vital to their physical and spiritual well-being. Spending considerable time with a Nuxalk man curious about their equipment, Mackenzie reports perhaps another reason for their wariness: “he frequently repeated the unpleasant intelligence that he had been shot at by people of my colour.”

Leaving this village and continuing down the Bella Coola River to the Pacific, on his return Mackenzie and his men passed through the same village. Canoes customarily stopped shortly before arrival at trading posts or villages in order to arrange their appearance and prepare for arrival, but on this occasion they stopped primarily to load their weapons. “As it was uncertain what our reception might be at the village, I examined every man's arms and ammunition, and gave Mr. Mackay, who had unfortunately lost his gun, one of my pistols.” Encountering the village “in a state of perfect tranquility,” Mackenzie commanded his men not

54 Ibid., 390-1.
55 Ibid., 376.
56 Ibid., 387.
to fire a salute. This demonstrates that he heeded the Nuxalk’s request, in order to not frighten the salmon with the sound of the firearms. During this visit however, the Nuxalk “expressed a wish that I should explain the use and management of them.” Mackenzie obliged, firing one of his pistols at a target, landing four out of five buck-shot, which, according to his account, caused the Nuxalk to react with “extreme astonishment and admiration.” It appears that the ambivalence and fear about the auditory effects of the gunfire was overridden or mitigated by observing their management, power, and utility in the hands of Alexander Mackenzie. While initially wary of firearms, the arrival of the Montreal trade to the Nuxalk and perhaps other west coast groups introduced their familiarity, operation, and supply.

### 2.5 Signaling and Saluting

Gunshots were important auditory signals because they travelled over long distances and signaled at the most basic level human presence. The precise distance over which musket reports could carry varied tremendously depending on topography as well as climatic conditions. When the source of a gunshot was unknown, it was often interpreted ominously. In Henry Timberlake’s account of his river travel, more than once he thought he was surrounded by “northward Indians” due to the “report of a gun.” After hearing another from the opposite shore, Timberlake felt certain he was “in the midst of our enemies.” The following day his party heard “several more guns on both sides of the river,” again making him believe they were being pursued, although the source of these gunshots was never determined. While traveling near the

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57 Ibid., 390.
Rocky Mountains, Archibald McDonald reported that he “heard a shot in the afternoon,” which was ominous, noteworthy, and yet unexplained.\(^5^9\)

Gunshots were the signals used by friendly parties to get the attention of passing canoes. Nicholas Garry identifies the war whoop and gunshot as being “the customary Sign” to halt a canoe brigade on the Ottawa River.\(^6^0\) Thomas Connor of the NWC reported from the intersection of the Yellow and St Croix rivers in 1804 that “several Volleys of Small Arms” from a First Nations’ village were fired to entice his brigade to stop and trade.\(^6^1\) This quote is noteworthy because it suggests adopting a “volley” style of firing as a signal perhaps to increase its volume, or in a conscious effort to imitate the European military-style firing.

The audible distance of gunshots provided an important demarcation of distance and was employed in various signaling systems between canoes. Alexander Mackenzie describes establishing a safety mechanism when he and his men were working separately. If there was a need for reconnaissance “they should fire two guns,” wrote Mackenzie, to be used “if they met with any accident, or found my return necessary.” They were also made to understand that if they heard the “same signal” from Mackenzie that “they were to answer, and wait for me, if I were behind them.”\(^6^2\) Two gunshots in succession made the signal less ambiguous. The enormous noise-making capabilities of muskets allowed for fur traders to establish signaling systems, providing a degree of safety and coordination when working at a distance.

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\(^6^0\) Garry, *The Diary of Nicholas Garry*, 32.
Fur traders sought collective security even when commercial rivalries separated them. Without line of sight, being within earshot was the distance in which two parties could signal danger. In the 1790s, the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company established competing forts along the North Saskatchewan River, often close together. For instance Buckingham House and Fort George were within firing distance or “a gunshot away.”

John McDonald of Garth describes the physical proximity of rival forts: "We had here, (beside the Hudson’s Bay Company whose fort was within a musket shot of ours) the opposition on the other side of us, of the new concern [X.Y.]. . The Hudson’s Bay Fort - at the head was my old friend Mr. Thompson - the Forts were within musket shot of one-another.” These arrangements were not due to lack of alternate locations. In deciding where to establish forts near Île-à-la-Crosse on Lac des Serpents, the competitors Alexander Mackenzie and McGillivray consulted each other on where to build. Mackenzie’s first location was rejected by McGillivray who “did not approve of the situation,” expressing awareness of “a much better one not far distant.” While the two would be competing for the allegiances of First Nations’ hunters and their furs in that region, McGillivray “suggested it would be for our mutual good” that they travel together, and they pitched their tents “within a gun shot of one another.” While these close quarters were justified for security reasons, they allowed each side to spy and eavesdrop on one another, listening to gunshots from one fort to the other. When François Victor Malhiot worked for the NWC, he described the sounds of the opposing X Y fort. Of significance was the inferred arrival of a

64 "Autobiographical Notes of John McDonald of Garth a Partner in the North West Company 1791-1816," Library and Archives Canada, (MG19 A17 to A20), 10.
significant person (Alexander Mackenzie?) due to the sound of guns: “We have just heard several gun-shots in the direction of Chorette's fort which leads us to presume that His Lordship had just landed.” Tracking movements at competitors’ forts was facilitated by the customs of collective security and of saluting arrivals and departures with gunshots.

The ceremonies of saluting with small arms were important in marking the comings and goings of brigades. It served, like ships firing cannons on approaching forts, to signal the immanent arrival of men and cargo. Between Euro-American peoples the salute was a widely recognized signal of peace and goodwill. Military historians have recognized that “the idea of holding your weapon in a harmless position appears to be a universal and a very old way of showing respect,” citing precedents from near eastern Arab and Saharan peoples. The ceremonialism of saluting seems to have been inherited along with guns and gunpowder, and there is evidence of European armies firing off weaponry when approaching forts and town dating back to the fourteenth century. Asserting definitive meanings of rituals is impossible; even specific rituals often have ambiguous meanings and are interpreted variously by people involved. The most crucial feature is that rituals were repeated, consisting of a cultural script and sensory experience. Under this broad definition, saluting represents one of the most important rituals spread by the fur trade.

Saluting was both a mechanism for alerting the fort of impending arrival and a way to commemorate the completion of a successful journey. Carolyn Podruchny has indicated that “firing of muskets” was the “symbolic welcome” commonly employed when canoes arrived at a

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67 Boatner, Military Customs and Traditions, 47.  
68 Ibid.  
trading post.\textsuperscript{70} Not only involving gunshots, saluting was typically also described alongside hoisting flags. James Porter, an early overwintering fur trader around Slave Lake, wrote in his journal for the year 1800-1801 that when sixteen Red Knives arrived at the fort, he “Gave them the usual honours. Hoisted our flag and fired a few shots.”\textsuperscript{71} Alexander Mackenzie describes his reception after he re-traversed the Rocky Mountains after his voyage to the Pacific Ocean in 1793.

At length, as we rounded a point, and came in view of the Fort, we threw out our flag, and accompanied it with a general discharge of our fire-arms; while the men were in such spirits, and made such an active use of their paddles, that we arrived before the two men whom we left here in the spring, could recover their senses to answer us.

Mackenzie’s unexpected arrival and rapid advance outpaced the return salute. He does not specify whether it was the Union Jack or the North West Company’s colours, although he diligently reports that he unfurled his flag when sounding his salute.

Salutes were also institutionalized on departure. Alexander Mackenzie reported departing from Mr. Finlay “under several vollies of musketry, on the morning of the 23rd.”\textsuperscript{72} Salutes were so much the norm, that their failure to proceed according to the established pattern was subject to commentary and explanation. For example, Francis Ermatinger described the departure of a brigade from Fort Vancouver:\textsuperscript{73}

in passing the Fort the Men discharged their pieces and a salute of Canon was returned upon our embarking, but the Captain of the Eagle being either taken upon short notice, or what is more probable being out of powder, instead of one round of Guns gave us three of cheers.

\textsuperscript{70} Carolyn Podruchny, \textit{Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 176.
\textsuperscript{72} Mackenzie, \textit{The Journals and Letters}, 240.
\textsuperscript{73} Francis Ermatinger, "Notes and Correspondence on the Expedition to the Clallem Tribe 1828," Archives of British Columbia, (A/B/20/V5), 2-3.
Either short notice, or a lack of powder, were typically given as explanations for the substitution of the cheers for the customary departing salute. George Simpson referred to salutes with military terminology as “honours.” He describes interactions with First Nations peoples, such as “Poucecoupee & Lezett’s bands” who left the fort to go to their winter hunting grounds: “when putting off from the shore, they honoured us by hoisting their colours and discharging some vollies of fire arms, which we returned.” Here the gunshots were interpreted cross-culturally as gestures of honour, and the combination with the flag incited Simpson to return the salute. He was eager to impress and maintain allegiance with these nine or ten “excellent hunters,” who he thought “will do great things this Winter.”

Yet when attempting to salute with First Nations peoples, meanings could easily be misinterpreted. Robert Longmoor of the Hudson’s Bay Company instructed his men to “Salute them in the usual form.” Yet for First Nations unacquainted with firearms, this custom could prove a deterrent to trade rather than an enticement. Alexander Mackenzie describes some company employees firing guns as his canoe was pushing off on his voyage up the Mackenzie River, terrifying his newly acquired guide:

As we were pushing off some of My Men fired a Couple of Guns load[ed] with Powder at the Report of which the Indians were startled, having never heard or seen any thing of the kind before. This had like to have prevented our Indian to fulfil his promise, but our Indians made him understand that what we had done was as a Sign of Friendship & prevail’d on him to embark.

Salutes of gunfire were not obviously friendly signals to those unacquainted with their ceremonial applications: rather they seem more often to have been regarded with terror. Yet the

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arrival of the fur trade brought their frequent use into the northwest as saluting with gunshots became a familiar custom.

A distinct technique of firearm salute came to be associated with First Nations peoples. Jonathan Carver had early recorded his astonishment on arrival at Grand Traverse Island when the salutes were fired uncomfortably close over the heads of his crew. George Nelson recalls a similar reception at Fort Dauphin on Lake Winnipeg in 1808 that thoroughly shocked his senses. The local Cree had carefully prepared their appearances for his arrival. Nelson describes how the painted faces and ornamented bodies made a strong impression, describing their appearances as “hideous” and “barbarous indeed,” while also admitting that it “became them well” and provided a “wild yet pleasing effect.” The visual imagery of the warriors is accompanied in Nelson’s account with a description of a seemingly aggressive auditory salute:

> When we entered the river they greeted us with cries de joie,” + when we reached the beach they came running down with their guns in their hands, load + firing over our heads, between us + under our Canoes sending the water flying in sprays over our heads. It was certainly a “wild delight,” but not without a little danger, lest the guns might burst.

While a musket-salute may have been expected on arrival, the manner in which it was executed appears to have surprised George Nelson.

There is evidence that this kind of salute was part of a more widespread First Nations custom of warfare employed when friendly war parties gathered to fight a common foe. While on an expedition from Red River, John Tanner observed a cross-cultural encounter between Cree, Assiniboine, and Anishinaabeg war parties that he estimated to number around one thousand people. There was a consultation among the different chiefs as to the appropriate “ceremony of

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78 Ibid.
salutation to be used,” a difficult subject due to the very large numbers of warriors involved.  

Tanner reports that “It is customary for war parties engaged in the same cause, or friendly to each other, when they meet, to exchange a few shots by way of a sham battle, in which they use all the jumping, the whooping, and yelling of a real fight.” The chiefs decided to override this customary welcome, because the group was too big and there was a potential for violence. Although Tanner does not specify how, the assembled chiefs proposed “to use a different method of exchanging compliments in meeting” on this occasion.

The custom of saluting became an integral part of the fur traders’ ceremonial relations with First Nations peoples. Hunting and war parties arriving at forts sometimes sent advance messengers to inform of their approach, and to request gunpowder for a proper salute on arrival. This has been described as a "practice introduced by the Canadian traders," whereby a "few small gifts" such as tobacco, paint, and powder were obtained from the Fort by advance runners. When the party arrived, when they were "within a few yards of the gate, the Indians salute the traders with several discharges of their guns. This is answered by hoisting a flag and firing a few guns." Duncan M’Gillivray describes First Nations approaching and announcing their presence with gunshots. “At a few yards distance from the gate they salute us with several discharges of their guns, which is answered by hoisting a flag and firing a few guns. On entering the house they are disarmed, treated with a few drams and a bit of tobacco.” Yet these ceremonial requests could be denied. The journal of an anonymous North West Company fur trader in the

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80 Ibid, 196-7.
81 Ibid.
Pine River district includes the following entry: “This morning 2 Young men arrived from L’Homme Seul's band; they informed me that the Gauché's band have joined the others; and L'H. Seul sent them for some powder to fire on his arrival here, but I did not think it proper to send him any.” Explaining this rationale, the fur trader writes that he harangued the group when they arrived because they should be “ashamed of the scandalous hunt they have made since they were here last.” While their request for gunpowder was denied in this instance, these passages indicate that First Nations peoples adopted the ceremonialism of saluting with muskets on arrival at the trading posts.

First Nations peoples did not only adopt firearms for saluting purposes with fur traders, but seem to have incorporated them more broadly into their cosmology based on their sound-making capacity. Based on the oral interviews of Anishinaabeg informants, Theresa Smith documented that “when a thunder a thunderstorm appears especially violent, some people say that it is because the Thunderbirds are flying too low. James Redsky says that when this happened, his father would shoot at the sky.” The report of the firearm was thought to influence the thunderbirds. James Redsky elaborated:

I saw my dad do this one time. He got the muzzle loader and fired into the air to scare them up. Boy! It was lightning and raining. Coming down! Coming down! They were so low you could almost hear their wings flapping; they were too low. No! Nothing. It did not work. So he said, "I'll try shooting up again a little later." Then he loaded up his gun the second time and shot it into the air again. You know the storm died right away; it went off into the east.

This oral history describes how firearms could become incorporated into indigenous cosmologies. Interacting with the realm of the thunderbirds with his gun, James Redsky’s father

84 The underlining appears in the original source. Unknown, “Northwest Company Papers: Indian Ledgers, Etc. [Typescript.],” Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, Manuscript Collection (77 box 2), 104.
86 Ibid.
was using a piece of European technology in an attempt to influence the weather and the supernatural beings who were thought to control it.

In analyzing the rituals of voyageurs along the canoe routes from Montreal through the northwest, Carolyn Podruchny has described various ceremonial uses of muskets. Using Edward Muir’s broad definition of ritual as a manifestation of ideals, and Victor Turnor’s suggestion that rituals create communities, Podruchny traces the ritual progression from Montreal through the pays d’en haut. Ritual “baptisms” at specific locations figured prominently along the journey, marking the progression into new landscapes and advancements through the voyageurs’ vocational ranking, from novice mangeurs de lard (porkeaters) to homes du nord (men of the north). To the west of Lake Superior at the height of land dividing the two watersheds, the fur trader John McDonell reported that a sprinkling of water and pledges were made and accompanied “by a dozen of Gun shots fired one after another in an Indian manner,” in succession rather than in a volley. This custom was used to commemorate the baptism of mangeurs de lard into lifestyles that were increasingly similar to those of First Nations peoples, an appropriate sound-symbol of baptism into “Indian country.”

Why was firing shots in succession associated with the “Indian manner?” Was this truly representative of First Nations’ customs, or just a stereotyped notion? While difficult to ascertain, an indication comes from the captivity narrative of James Smith, a Pennsylvanian man captured during the Seven Years War by a party of Algonquian and Iroquoian warriors. He describes a war party departing with the "commander" singing the travelling song “hoo caughtainte heegana.” As they made it to the edge of town, “they began to fire in their slow manner, from

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87 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 61-2.
the front of the rear, which was accompanied with shouts and yells from all quarters." This account describes not a volley, but a dispersed succession of gunshots on leaving the village, which Smith designated as their characteristic style.

Carolyn Podruchny posits that the inclusion of this “Indian custom” signaled the importance of First Nations peoples and culture to the lives of the French Canadian voyageurs. The appropriation of these sound symbols may have been an attempt to fit into “Indian Country,” familiarizing themselves with the customs of a strange new people. Perhaps they were trying to indigenize themselves and bring their ceremonies into alignment with First Nations’, helping them assume a new sense of belonging in the foreign land." Although the documentary record for these “baptisms” is too thin to make any definitive assertions, muskets seem to have served as an auditory reinforcement of the rite of passage into a world where different rules and expectations applied. They certainly commemorated the entrance into the northwest with sound symbols associated with First Nations peoples. Voyageurs and bourgeois ritually replicated the First Nations’ method of firing even though they themselves provided the supply of arms and ammunition.

Muskets were used in auditory ceremonialism at particular points of the year. Before dawn on New Years' morning, the servants of the companies customarily woke up their master by firing muskets outside of their window. In exchange for this “honour,” the bourgeois were expected to provide the men with alcohol and food, beginning the New Year with a ceremonial regale. This widely practiced and fiercely imposed custom is one of several that reminded

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88 James Smith, “Of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Colonel James Smith, (Late a Citizen of Bourbon County, Kentucky,) During His Captivity with the Indians,” in Indian Captivities: Or, Life in the Wigwam; Being True Narratives of Captives Who Have Been Carried Away by the Indians, from the Frontier Settlements of the United States, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time, edited by Samuel G. Drake (Buffalo: Derby, Orton & Mulligan, 1853), 187.
89 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 62-3.
superiors about fulfilling obligations to their servants. They were expected to provide their men not only with a respite from work but also with drink and food, sometimes known as a “levée.”\textsuperscript{90} This was similar to the temporary inversions of authority that occurred at points of ritual baptism along the river. Alexander Mackenzie reported this custom was prevalent in the distant reaches of the northwest in 1793, when “on the first day of January, my people, in conformity to the usual custom, awoke me at the break of day with a discharge of fire-arms, with which they congratulated the appearance of the new year. In return they were treated with plenty of spirits, and when there is any flour, cakes are always added to their regales.”\textsuperscript{91} This description suggests that being woken at daybreak with a discharge of firearms was a ceremony for congratulating the appearance of the New Year, perhaps echoing the language employed by the men. Podruchny has written about how the “early morning firing of muskets or cannons usually woke the masters,” representing a “formal honoring of the holiday.” Yet this custom also seems to play into the pattern of passive resistance and thinly veiled threats that she has identified in the rigid paternalism of the trading companies. The servants and voyageurs pushed for better living conditions and material gains from their superiors through scenes of misrule and carnival, with gunshots figuring prominently in their assertions of symbolic power, forcing holiday customs and reprieves from work.

Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) describes how near Red River on January 1\textsuperscript{st} 1802, “the usual ceremony of firing &c, was performed,” whereafter Henry describes presenting food and drink to the employees, with unspecified “neighbours” arriving to partake of the feast, with all the servants intoxicated “before sunrise:” “I treated my people with 2 Gallons of High Wines, Five fms of Tobacco, and some Flour and Sugar. My neighbours’ men came visiting and before

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 61-3.
sunrise both sexes of all parties were completely intoxicated and more troublesome than double their number of Saulteaux.”  

Willard-Ferdinand Wentzel of the NWC describes how on January 1st, 1805, “After having received the Customary Honors from the Men I invited them to Glass of Liquor – which was graciously received per them.” The following year he describes the ceremonies in more sarcastic terms as the “Drunken Day of the North,” of which he was made aware by “the report of several Guns” which were fired while he was sleeping “at the Window of my room.” After this “Salute,” Wetzel writes that he had the “honour of receiving the good wishes of the bonne Ann[ée],” giving his men spirits and high wines. He writes with apparent sarcasm: “No one got out of order everything was lead [led] with great delicacy through the numerous ceremonies necessary [on] such a solemn occasion.” His resentment at conceding to the customs of the servants is palpable, yet their demands, ritually performed, were accommodated.

George Simpson describes his first New Years in the interior similarly. In diplomatic terms, he states that “The Festivities of the New Year commenced at four O’Clock this morning when the people honoured me with a salute of Fire arms.” This was the beginning of a long day of celebration, music, and revelry. “In half an hour afterwards the whole Inmates of our Garrison assembled in the hall dressed out in their best clothes, and were regaled in a suitable manner with a few flaggon's Rum and some Cakes; a full allowance of Buffaloe meat was served out to them


94 Ibid., 292-3.
and pint of Spirits for each man; the Women were also entertained to the utmost of our ability.”

These were part of the obligations placed on the bourgeois by the servants of the company, something that was accommodated with more or less graciousness. Simpson was accommodating during this first season in the northwest, but implemented changes when he became Governor of an amalgamated Hudson’s Bay and North West Company in 1821, ultimately reducing the distribution of goods and regales to servants and their families. Although Simpson would eventually restrict and curtail holiday celebrations and dances throughout the year, Christmas and New Years remained important, conforming to this pattern of revelry until at least the later nineteenth century. The New Years levée tradition has been intermittently continued by Canadian Governor Generals and Lieutenant Governors until the present day, although the ceremonial gunfire before daybreak has been abandoned.

The sound-making potential of gunpowder transformed the soundscape of the northwest through the conduits of the fur trade. It shaped the encounters and receptions of Europeans and First Nations peoples. While both associated in the seventeenth century the sounds of loud booms and thunder with deities rather than human beings, the arrival of large amounts of gunpowder augmented these auditory associations. As potent sound making devices, cannons and muskets were institutionalized during arrivals and departures of ships and canoes, serving as salutes as well as signals by fur traders. While the conduits of the fur trade served as the mechanism by which arms and ammunition were introduced and supplied to First Nations

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97 For the history in Saskatchewan, see for example Michael D. Jackson, “Political Paradox: The Lieutenant Governor in Saskatchewan,” in Saskatchewan Politics: Into the Twenty-first Century (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2001).
throughout the northwest, the culture of using the guns would come to be shaped by both European and First Nations’ influences in the fur trade. The reports that travelled long distances were useful tools in travel and trade, employed by the servants of the companies as expressions of agency and vehicles for resistance within the hegemonic order. Their effect in transforming the soundscape was described by merchants and First Nations peoples in the fur trade.
3 Encountering First Nations’ Music

This chapter will introduce First Nations music of northern North America. The development of ethnomusicology as a discipline has been closely connected to its study. The long history of scholarship about its general characteristics and its schematization into musical areas will serve as a necessary introduction to the topic, while its categorizations and characterizations should be considered only as suggestive. The tendency of early ethnomusicologists to essentialize “Indian music” and divide and categorize it into musical areas on various criteria has been critiqued on a number of levels. The tremendous activity of the fur trade in First Nations’ communities before the late nineteenth century belies the assumptions of a static, unchanging, and essentially homogenous “primitive” culture presented by salvage anthropologists and early ethnomusicologists. In the late eighteenth century fur traders arrived in First Nations communities and described musical encounters as they travelled through the plains, western subarctic, northwest coast, and plateau – basin regions, noting the novelty of music and dance as well as similarities and patterns. Scholarship summarizing First Nations' music typically employs the culture area model. By introducing the subject as it is commonly summarized, the subsequent historical evidence can serve to test, add nuance, and critique this model.

3.1 First Nations’ Music

The study of First Nations’ music has transformed over the past few decades. The basic methods and descriptions of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have come under criticism, as has the very concept of conducting fieldwork. Wary of their long-term status as passive objects of study by the 1970s, First Nations peoples were increasingly assertive about self-
defining and maintaining possession of their own cultural narratives, songs, and materials. The legacy of colonialism and misrepresentation led some to resist sharing cultural traditions and music with outsiders.¹ The “etic” approach to musical description has generally been eschewed in favour of the “emic.” Ethnomusicologist Tara Browner has recently described in the *Music of the First Nations* how most contemporary research is “community based and oriented,” aiming to serve First Nations peoples directly by emphasizing their own voices and priorities.² In her collection, musical traditions are presented in essays that link performances with specific aspects of culture, history, and mythology. Generalized characterizations of attributes of First Nations’ music are now commonly absent from volumes on the subject, such as Tara Browner’s and Elaine Keillor’s *Music in Canada.*³

On the other hand, defining general characteristics and attributes once constituted much scholarship. In the mid-twentieth century, Bruno Nettl performed a comprehensive statistical analysis of research that had been gathered over the previous half century. According to his analysis, First Nations’ repertoires shared basic characteristics in a “majority or a large plurality of their songs,” including pentatonic scales (consisting of five notes), monophonic texture, and percussive accompaniment. He concluded “that North American Indian music is fundamentally a unit, and that the areas within it are only slightly different.” This quotation and indeed this entire section has been removed from the revised edition of *The Study of Ethnomusicology.*⁴ This kind of general characterization has been rejected by the current generation of scholars who work

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intensively with specific communities and emphasize distinctiveness rather than similarity between First Nations’ musics.

For much of the twentieth century ethnomusicologists distinguished First Nations’ music from European by highlighting a supposed fundamental difference in functionality. The argument stressed that First Nations’ music was almost never merely a leisure or “pastime” activity, and not typically appreciated passively as a mere aesthetic experience. Frances Densmore, writing in 1926, put it thus: “The radical difference between the musical custom of the Indian and our own race is that, originally, the Indians used song as a means of accomplishing definite results.”5 Three decades later, Bruno Nettl wrote that music held a prominent place in First Nations societies “because of its prevailing functionality.” In his analysis, music in all “primitive” societies was more likely to serve “a particular purpose other than providing pure entertainment or aesthetic enjoyment.”6 This essentialization of First Nations’ musical practices reinforces notions of racial difference and downplays the potential of “functionality” in other societies. While “primitivist” terminology has been updated and some of the more problematic generalizations abandoned, many of the basic characterizations of early ethnomusicologists are still republished. Ethnomusicology as a discipline has for better or worse been shaped by legacy of fieldwork tradition and scholarship concerning the characterization of First Nations’ music and its categorization into general and regional attributes. The current entry on “Amerindian Music,” for instance, in Grove Music, a leading scholarly musical encyclopedia,

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as well as Elaine Keillor's *Music in Canada*, provide revised general attributes as well as schematization into musical areas.⁷

By comparing descriptions of First Nations’ music in summaries such as Elaine Keillor’s and Bruno Nettl’s as well as compilations made in conjunction with First Nations peoples such as Tara Browner’s and Beverley Diamond’s, we can sketch some basic patterns with some confidence. In First Nations communities across the continent, music is employed to assist the hunt and harvest, influence weather and wildlife, interact with unseen spirits, and promote healing. Music assists both physically and conceptually the rituals and dances of which it forms a part. Circle dances unite members of the community while symbolically re-enacting myths, creation stories, and seasonal cycles. Music can form a kind of communion with the spirits of departed ancestors and supernatural beings. The steps, hand gestures, and spatial patterns of the dances often had symbolic meanings linked to the intent of the ceremony. Music is closely intertwined with spiritual practices, forming a crucial component of individual and collective prayers and thanksgivings.⁸ Many traditional songs were “owned” in the sense that their rendition was restricted, and could be given as a gift or purchased from the owner. Songs could also be attained through hereditary transmission in warrior and healing societies, or personally through dreams or vision quests. As a rite of passage, young men and women often undertook fasts in isolated or sacred places until they received a message or song from a spirit guide in the form of an animal or insect, to be invoked and used by the recipient in times of danger or need. These songs were believed to have particular power, and were not to be used by other individuals unless given as a gift. Music symbolized and manifested supernatural power, which the spirits

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gave to humans by teaching them songs. Peoples known for supernatural connections were strongly associated with music. Yet it is clear that music also accompanied activities outside of the realm of religious or spiritual functions such as social dances, gambling, and games.

In First Nations’ musical practices, vocal expressions only sometimes possess lyrics. Some employ only a few words, while many consist partially or exclusively of “vocables,” or syllables that did not possess a specific lexical connotation. Yet their inclusion was usually deemed crucially important to the proper rendition of songs. Beverley Diamond describes how the lyrics of contemporary powwow songs consist primarily of vocables, highly “practical in a tradition with participants who speak dozens of different Native American languages.” Some syllables employed widely across northern North America are “hey,” “uh,” and “ha.”

Percussive instruments are those most commonly employed in First Nations’ music. Rattles are categorized in the Hornbostel-Sachs scheme of classification as “idiophones,” defined as instruments where sound is produced by the instrument itself vibrating, rather than a string or membrane. This includes essentially percussion instruments with the exception of drums. Rattles are sounded when struck, shook, rubbed, or agitated. Perhaps all First Nations cultures possessed at least one form of closed container rattle, which usually contains pebbles, seeds, or pits. Gourds, leather spheres sewn with rawhide, bark containers, turtle shells, and horns constituted some of the more common containers, although there is a tremendous variety.

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Drums are categorized by musicologists as “membranophones,” instruments sounded by a membrane usually stretched over a hollow acoustic space. Several basic types of drums have been identified as “traditional” to First Nations peoples in North America, including one-sided frame drums, double-headed drums, water drums, kettle drums, and horizontal drums placed on four pegs. Drums were usually beaten with sticks carved and painted with symbols of supernatural signification. The drumbeat is seen as representing the heartbeat of the nation.\(^{14}\) Drums were often covered when not in use to signify their “closed” status, which afforded them proper respect while also protecting them.\(^{15}\)

Dreams and visions were (and for many often still are) important forms of knowledge and a means of connecting with the spirit world and acquiring personal power among eastern First Nations peoples. Among Innu hunters, dreams are the only source of songs, known as nakamuna (singular nikamun).\(^{16}\) When the hunter sings these, often to the accompaniment of the teueikan (drum), he reconnects with the dream and spiritual power. “Most hunters insist that nikamuna are a private spiritual genre," which Beverley Diamond asserts, and "not for the public domain."\(^{17}\) Lynn Whidden has traced the use of songs that continued to connect northern Cree hunters to the land and animals during the late twentieth century. Traditional songs were still subject to innovation, serving as “vehicles for communicating with the spirit of animals. They were prayers and predictions that helped to influence the outcome of the hunt.”\(^{18}\) Containing vocables and descriptions about the appearance and behaviour of animals, these songs also sometimes contained facts about local ecology. Many of these qualities and features are suggested and/or


\(^{16}\) Beverley Diamond, *Native American Music in Eastern North America*, 64.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 66.

challenged by the writings of fur traders, evidence I will introduce after summarizing the regional musical attributes as sketched by musicologists and ethnomusicologists.

### 3.2 Musical Areas

#### 3.3 Eastern

The Eastern region describes a large area of eastern North America that features the boreal and mixed hardwood forests, stretching from grasslands in the south to the tundra in the north. It is an imperfect category, with the Cree and Anishinaabek spanning the eastern and plains areas. It is divided in Nettl’s and Keillor’s schematization into “Eastern nomadic” and “Eastern sedentary” regions, represented by the Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee respectively. The Iroquois Confederacy or Haudenosaunee were agriculturalists and the largest and strongest political organization of northern North America, while the Anishinaabek were Algic-Algonquian speakers who relied primarily on hunting and gathering. Musical culture was closely interwoven with subsistence methods, especially before the reserve era. The Iroquois have many songs and dances associated with the harvest while the Anishinaabek have many associated with the hunt. Yet for both, songs were central to the preparation beforehand and expression gratitude afterwards in the tasks of hunting, fishing, gathering, and harvesting.

The Anishinaabek often directed their songs towards the “Kitchi Manitou” (Great Spirit). Stages of life were marked with stories, songs, chants and dances, and these were mediums through which elders passed on traditions to the younger generation. Personal ceremonies for naming, the first hunt, marriage, war, as well as group ceremonies such as the

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Feast of the Dead and thanksgiving in spring and autumn all prominently possess songs and dances accompanied by rattles and/or drums.\textsuperscript{21} Teenage boys aged twelve to fourteen were expected to undergo a vision quest ceremony before being accepted as adults, while women underwent rituals associated with first menstruation. Beyond public social songs and dances, personal and spiritual songs were possessed by individuals. Certain members of society were recognized as having special powers and abilities with music that were in turn inculcated from an early age. Some who collected medicinal plants and healing songs were referred to as “medicine men” for their specialization, while the term “medicine” is used more generally to refer to powers attained through visions and dreams, and often accessed or channelled through dances and songs. The efficacy of healing ceremonies was attributed not only to the use of medicines but to ritual actions that prominently included singing.

Much discussion of Anishinaabek music revolves around the \textit{midéwiwin}, a specialized hierarchical society that organizes medicine practices. These ceremonies lasted often a week, taking place in the spring and fall, when new candidates were initiated into the society.\textsuperscript{22} Two basic interpretations of its origins have emerged amongst scholars. Anishinaabeg scholars Basil Johnston, Edward Benton-Banai, and Nicholas Deleary have argued it represents their traditional religion extending back into the pre-contact era. Another interpretation favoured by Harold Hickerson, Karl Schlesier, and others is that it represents a post-contact “crisis cult” that originated in response to the intrusion of Euro-Americans and new diseases.\textsuperscript{23} Walter J. Hoffman's important early study indicates that its primary functions were teaching members the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{21} Elaine Keillor, \textit{Music in Canada}, 32.
\bibitem{23} Ibid., 5.
\end{thebibliography}
appropriate and effective use of herbal remedies for healing and prolonging life. Thomas Vennum describes it as “priesthood” with limited membership, attained through purchase and lengthy instruction. Over time, the mide “priests” became the bearers of tribal history, herbal and ceremonial knowledge. Most authors agree that its central ritual was a healing ceremony meant to protect the Anishinaabeg from disease and promote long life. Michael D. McNally has described it as a ceremonial complex focused on “healing and the restoration of cosmic balance.” Recently, Michael Angel has suggested its development and expansion represents a transition in Anishinaabeg society from dreams and visions to inherited knowledge as a means of acquiring power. Although the origins and meaning of the term midéwiwin is contested, Basil Johnston has suggested that it means either “the good-hearted ones” (from mino, “good,” and deewewin, “hearted”) or “the resonance” (from the term midewe, “the sound”).

Birch-bark scrolls containing pictographic symbols were used to transmit songs especially between initiates of the midéwiwin and perhaps more broadly in Anishinaabeg society. While Henry Schoolcraft, Walter Hoffman, and Johann G. Kohl investigated these scrolls in the nineteenth century, it was not until the work of Frances Densmore, Selwyn Dewdney and Fred Blessing that these were understood as representing a complex mnemonic system for memorizing, categorizing and transmitting songs. Densmore is credited with the breakthrough partly because mide practitioners at the time of her research were willing to pass on detailed

26 Michael Angel, Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin, 12.
27 Michael D. McNally, Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native American Culture in Motion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.
28 Michael Angel, Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin, 10-11.
descriptions, songs, and pictographs that had previously been considered secret.\textsuperscript{31} That a system of writing served as a kind of musical notation demonstrates the potential mobility of songs among First Nations peoples of the Great Lakes region. Thought to serve as protection against malevolent forces, the system of writing also demonstrates these songs were highly valued. Ceremonies required not only the specific song, but the specific instruments, from special rattles, to the “grandfather” water drum. Distinct texts distinguished \textit{mide} songs from other songs. Sacred songs included healing (dream), ritual solicitation (Begging Dance), and gift exchange (Woman’s Dance) songs, accompanied by both single and double headed drums.\textsuperscript{32}

In the seventeenth century the region from the St. Lawrence valley to what is now southwestern Ontario was largely inhabited by Iroquoian speaking peoples, including the Huron-Wendat, Neutrals, and Iroquois Confederacy or Haudenosaunee. These groups based their agriculture around the cultivation of the “three sisters:” corn, beans, and squash. Living in pallisaded villages and surrounded by agricultural fields, the essential social unit in Iroquoian society was the longhouse organized by matrilineal clans. Songs accompanied the kettle, pipe, canoe, and cradle, as well as myths, ceremonies of welcome, invitations, and a large variety of dances. The major social dances and feasts were based on annual cycles and had to do with the planting and harvesting of crops, as their means of subsistence shaped their musical culture.

The Iroquoian calendrical cycle began with midwinter ceremonies to the accompaniment of songs, as well as various curing and sacred rites relating to the growing season. While the Anishinaabek danced around the circle clockwise to celebrate the order of birth of the Four Winds, the Iroquois often danced around the circle counter-clockwise.\textsuperscript{33} Iroquoian men had

\textsuperscript{31} Michael Angel, \textit{Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin}, 179.
\textsuperscript{33} Thomas Vennum, \textit{The Ojibwa Dance Drum}, 71.
personal songs called *adònwe’* which were used for empowerment in hunting, fishing, council meetings, and feasts. This was also the song to be sung before death, highlighting its importance in expression of personal identity and indeed all aspects of the life-cycle.\textsuperscript{34} Singing feasts were important communal ceremonies. Invitations were sent out by the master of the feast who wished to exhibit his goodwill and generosity. Held in a longhouse, they were usually accompanied by two chiefs carrying tortoiseshell rattles. Besides rattles and drums, Eastern societies employed a variety of flutes that were associated with practices of ritualized courtship. Songs were used in significant religious and life-cycle events as well as everyday activities.

### 3.4 Plains

The First Nations groups of the plains were historically characterized by their mobility and reliance on hunting prairie and wood bison. Those who traversed the northern plains include the Nadene cultures of Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee, Dunne-za/Beaver), Algic-speaking Nehiyaw (Cree), Anishnaabek (Saulteaux; Plains Ojibwa), Atsina (Gros Ventre), Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainah (Blood), Siouan-Catawba groups of Hidatsa, and Nakoda (Sioux Assiniboine, Stoney, Dakota, Nakota, Lakota). These groups lived in transportable tipis and pursued seasonal migrations that corresponded with hunting patterns, generally congregating into larger groups in the summer and dispersing during the winter. Plains musical style is characterized by a tense and nasal vocal production, with heavy vibrato on sustained tones and phrase endings. Plains melodies usually have descending contours with stepwise progressions identified in the scholarship as ‘terraced descent’ or ‘descending plateau.’ Similarly with the eastern area, pentatonic scales are common

\textsuperscript{34} Elaine Keillor, *Music in Canada*, 35-37.
and song texts are comprised largely or entirely by vocables, non-lexical syllables that are nonetheless fixed and deemed integral.

Plains societies possessed little social stratification or inherited hierarchy. Leaders were chosen for hunting and war parties just as they were to lead important ceremonies such as the annual thirst or Sun dance. Plains cultures possessed various “graded” or “age – graded” societies that managed and maintained ceremonial traditions, such as the Prairie Chicken Society, the Buffalo Dance Society, and the women’s Elk or Wapiti Society. The Horse, Bear, and Chicken dances included movements and sounds that imitated the animals. Sun, Ghost, Grass, Give-Away, and Calumet dances are commonly listed alongside medicine dances (mitewok) as representative of “traditional” plains culture, yet it should be noted that the Ghost and Grass dances developed from mourning and war dances in the later nineteenth century. The Sun dance seems to have spread in the early nineteenth century, while the Calumet dance has earlier origins, with one theory positing that it originated amongst the Pawnee and spread to the Mississippi and Great Lakes in the mid to late seventeenth century. In common with other First Nations areas, plains people had both public and private songs. Those accompanying each dance and ceremony were passed in group settings to the younger generation, while personal songs for various life rituals were attained through puberty rites, dreams, or vision quests.

35 Ibid.
Plains’ drumming is distinguished by its off-the-beat style, with drumbeats sounding just before or after the melodic pulse. Drums included hand drums, some with snares, water drums constructed from hollowed out logs, and large double-headed drums suspended horizontally by four stakes in the ground. As in eastern cultures, only rattles came in more diverse forms.\textsuperscript{39} The end-blown flute with block was also widespread. Bone whistles prominently accompanied a variety of dances, while rasps, buzzers, and bullroarers also served as prominent noise-makers.

### 3.5 Western Subarctic

The First Nations of this region have been studied perhaps least of all in North America. It is a region characterized by a harsh climate, with short summers and long winters. In addition to the many Cree groups who inhabited the northern fringes of the plains, the Athapascan speaking Dene (meaning ‘people of the barrens’) nation (Chipewyan, Dogrib, Gwich’in, Slavey or Dene-thah, Hare, Mountain, Yellowknives), accompanied the other groups of the Han, Kaska, Nat’oot’en (Babine), Sekani, Tahlton, Tanana, Tutchone and Wet’suwet’en (Dakelh, Carrier). People tended to live in smaller social units than those of the east or plains, and they followed seasonal hunting and migratory patterns. Ethnomusicologists describe people of the Western Subarctic as having a limited number of dances and less instrumental variety than other areas.\textsuperscript{40} Clockwise formations and side-shuffling characterized many of their drum dances, including the “all night dance,” “tea dance,” and those deriving from totemic animals. Common to the Mackenzie Valley Dene, tea dances were another name for drum dances, and in there was great


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
pressure for everyone to participate.\textsuperscript{41} Their tunes tended to consist of short, repeating phrases, and descending contours.

According to the later-twentieth century research of Michael Asch, the only instrument used in traditional Dene music is the frame drum (\textit{egheli}). The skin of the drum, typically made of caribou skin, is sewn across the frame with sinew strands (\textit{babiche}). On the outside face, three strands of \textit{babiche} are often attached to make a buzzing sound, when the instrument is struck by the foot-long birch drum stick (\textit{egheli dechi}). From his fieldwork observations, Asch reports that the drums were used in conjunction with drum dancing, hand and stick games, and curing ceremonies.\textsuperscript{42} Healing songs were given to the medicine men by their animal guardian, to be performed in ceremony by singing and drumming on a Drum Dance drum.\textsuperscript{43} Among the Dogrib, two kinds of love songs were prominent: \textit{ets’elà} and \textit{ndè gho shi ts’et’}, referring to love of other people, and love of the land.\textsuperscript{44} The former was an unaccompanied vocal genre, often expressing sorrow or longing, and which may be used when doing rhythmic work. These were personal, private songs. Love-of-the-land songs were more often performed in front of an audience, with some including basic resource information and the location of animals for the hunt.\textsuperscript{45} While these two types of song do not constitute the entire repertoire of western subarctic music, they represent both private and public genres, with the latter associated with the main form of subsistence, hunting.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Michael Asch, \textit{Kinship and the Drum Dance in a Northern Dene Community} (Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1988), 63, 71.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 59-60.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 61.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Lucy Lafferty and Elaine Keillor, \textit{Music of the First Nations: Tradition and Innovation in Native North America} Tara Browner ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} For instance one song was recorded that identified the location of caribou at the end of Lac La Martre. Ibid., 27-8.
\end{itemize}
3.6 Plateau & Basin

Often considered together, the plateau - basin region possesses sharply demarcated landscapes, with grasslands, river terraces, mountain slopes, and alpine meadows, as well as prominent rivers and relative proximity to the ocean. This area was relatively populous and supported complex and stratified hunter and gathering societies, with forms of private ownership, trade, slavery, polygny, a hereditary elite, and a seasonal sedentary lifestyle. Nations included the Ktunaxa (Kootenay) speaking the Kootenayan, The Nadene-speaking Tsilhqot’in (Chilcotin), Salishan-speaking tribes, the Okanagan, the Nlaka’pamux (Ntlakyapamuk, Knife or Thompson), the Secwepemc (Shuswap), and the Stl’atl’imx (Lillooet). People travelled the valleys and mountains by foot and later horse, gathering, fishing, and hunting. In the winter, the typical dwellings were pithouses, and communities frequently came together for dancing, feasting, and social gatherings. In the mid-summer, the solstice was celebrated with dancing. Power was believed to exist in everything in nature. Lakes, rocks, caves, and mountains were often identified with spirits that manifested themselves in dreams or visions. Because plateau - basin peoples believed that not only animals but also plants had power, women gathering carried out ceremonies of respect similar to those who hunted and fished. Prayers, which usually included song, were offered on these occasions. Music was perceived as the medium by which the powers from the natural world interacted with humans.46

Plateau - basin music shared some attributes with coastal and plains cultures, while also displaying distinct characteristics. Vision quests produced guardian spirit songs. Through a combination of fasting, dancing, and sweating, a trance or dream-like state was attained in which a guardian spirit would visit and provide a song for use in hunting, fishing, gambling, illness, or another time of need. Healing powers were attained by longer fasts and training. Counterclockwise dances marked the mourning song and those used at birth among the Nlaka’pamux, as well as war songs in which prayers were dedicated to the sun. Dressed with paint, feathers, and armaments, the participants used the songs of their guardian spirits to accompany the drums, dancing with the actions of warfare and preparing psychologically for battle. The women, once the men had departed on the raid, similarly painted themselves, wore armaments, and danced a counter-clockwise war dance. Some songs were recognized to have human composition, called “lyrical songs,” expressing sadness, nostalgia, grief, sorrow, loneliness, pity, happiness, or love. The melodies of plateau & basin songs mostly use only three or four pitches. Words and vocables were used and imbued with significance concerning relationships with spirit beings, with some syllables descriptive of their powers. Some vocables imitated the sounds of animals or birds.

Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling. Instruments were fashioned from local materials. Rasps made from serrated sticks were scraped with bones in accompanying war dances, while flutes made of elderwood or bone were used for courting, protection, and signaling.

Drums were made from birch and hide, as well as basket bottoms and kettles. Single-headed handheld drums became common in the nineteenth


century, while by the end of that century the large double-headed war drum played by four to eight players arrived with an infusion of plains-style war and circle dances. The plateau - basin region also shared characteristics with coastal communities, as the eastern plateau Salish (Flathead) shared much in common musically with the coastal Salish. This evidence suggests that in the west, musical areas were spanned by nations and musical styles. While musical areas provide suggestive generalizations about sounds and music produced over vast swaths of time and territory, the historical record will allow us to focus on specific events in the late eighteenth century to see if these characteristics manifested in specific intercultural encounters.

3.7 Musical Encounters with Fur Traders

While long distance trading networks and migrations had long connected the culture areas of North America,48 the latter eighteenth century saw the expansion of European trading networks and trading post infrastructure from the St. Lawrence, Great Lakes and Hudson Bay regions to the Pacific and Arctic oceans, encountering the plains, western subarctic, northwest coast, and plateau - basin regions. The following section will examine the musical encounters of prominent fur traders who pushed trade into these regions, such as Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) on the plains, Alexander Mackenzie in the western subarctic, Simon Fraser on the northwest coast, and David Thompson in the plateau - basin. Descriptions of these encounters are surprisingly detailed considering the laconic style of fur traders’ writings. They nonetheless

appear frequently, indicating music’s important role from the outset of colonial encounters and the fur trade. Western First Nations peoples had already been influenced by European trade goods before fur traders arrived to build posts in the late eighteenth century. Song and dance figured prominently in episodes of encounter, serving intercultural functions as well as providing early musical descriptions.

Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) was an important fur trader who travelled to the northwest of the Great Lakes after the fall of New France. From 1760 until the mid 1770s he overwintered and traded with numerous First Nations groups, spending long periods on the northern plains. This area was explored in the 1730s and 40s by Sieur de la Vérendrye and his family, who had extended the French trading post network northwest from Grand Portage at the west end of Lake Superior to the Red and North Saskatchewan rivers. Alexander Henry travelled through areas that were subject to the sovereignty of various western First Nations and had until recently been allied to the French.

In 1776 Alexander Henry described an encounter with First Nations of the northern plains. The fort he and his men had established on the “Pasquayah,” or North Saskatchewan River had drawn the attention of local Cree and Assiniboine. On a visit to an Assiniboine village, he was welcomed, and after trading and feasting for a few days he pursued the opportunity to witness a buffalo hunt. Henry relates how on receiving information by a hunter of the proximity of the herd, all of the dogs were immediately muzzled, presumably so as to not alert attention with their barking. Then, “decoyers” disguised as buffalo approached within ear-shot, “bellowing like themselves.” On hearing the noise, Henry reports that the buffalo, whether from “curiosity or sympathy” advanced to meet those from whom the call issued. The call was re-iterated frequently, drawing the herd forwards. The leaders of the pack followed the “decoyers” into the
pound which was constructed wide at one end, and ending in a funnel or gateway to the pound itself. Once the herd had been lured in, the slaughter began, creating a tremendous “uproar.”

The subsequent feasting, music and dancing that ensued in “all quarters” of the village was inescapable. Although Henry and his men retired to their tent, the music was perceptible in their private quarters.

On the evening of the day after the hunt, the chief came to our tent, bringing with him about twenty men, and as many women, who separately seated themselves as before; but, they now brought musical instruments, and, soon after their arrival, began to play. The instruments consisted principally in a sort of tambourine, and a gourd filled with stones, which several persons accompanied by shaking two bones together; and others with bunches of deer-hoofs, fastened to the end of a stick. Another instrument was one that was no more than a piece of wood, of three feet, with notches cut on its edge. The performer drew a stick backward and forward, along the notches, keeping time. The women sung; and the sweetness of their voices exceeded whatever I had heard before.

The women’s singing accompanied by drums, rattles, and rasps continued for over an hour before the dance commenced. Henry describes it as divided by gender, with the men and women lined up on either side of the room. Each moved sideways, first in one direction, and then the other. For the dance Henry does not mention musicians, but rather how the clothing of the women enabled them to keep rhythm. It was not deer-hoof clackers (often called “dew-claws”) that produced the rhythms, but rather “the sound of bells and other jingling materials, attached to the women’s dresses.” Henry reports that songs and dances were continued alternately until midnight. It is noteworthy that the Assiniboine at this time used bells and jingling materials, possibly copper or re-fashioned trade metal in the fringes of their garments. This suggests the material influence of the fur trade preceding the arrival of English merchants on the northern plains. Henry reports that the Assiniboine chief presented the dances to his men, but did not

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50 Ibid., 302.
51 Ibid.
himself take part in the “performances,” rather sitting aside as a spectator. He presented not only food for the feast, but also the dances themselves, considered by Henry as “performances,” and meant as gifts. The location of this dance literally inside Henry’s tent after the successful buffalo hunt represents the degree to which First Nations’ music was transplanted into his experiences and journal.

It was in the following decade when Alexander Mackenzie used the North West Company’s northwest hub of Fort Chipewyan to push into the enormous watershed that now bears his name and flows into the Arctic Ocean. In 1789 Mackenzie travelled in a voyageur canoe northwards into an area that had been uncharted by Europeans. He used not only the expertise of his French Canadian and First Nations canoemen, but also a Dene guide who knew the route. Mackenzie’s journal documents aspects of the Yellowknife people, whom he describes speaking Chipewyan but being politically distinct. At the confluence of the Great Bear and Mackenzie rivers he encountered two families of Athapascan Dene, Slave (Slavey), and Dogrib (Tlicho). These groups were terrified and shocked by his appearance, and did not appear familiar with the use of liquor or tobacco. They warned Mackenzie against attempting to follow the river to the Arctic, claiming that it would be several winters before they made it, and that they would be plagued by monsters along the way. With miniscule food resources and few animals for the hunt reported further north, Mackenzie had difficulty convincing his men to continue. He also had difficulty procuring a guide from this more knowledgeable group.52

During almost the entire encounter, according to Mackenzie, the Dene were singing and dancing.

During our short stay with those People they amused us with Dancing to their own Vocal Music, in either of which there is no great variety, at least as far as we could perceive. They form a Ring Men and Women promiscuously, the former have a Bone Dagger or piece of Stick between the fingers of the Right Hand which they keep extended above the head & in continual Motion, the left they seldom raise so high but keep working backward & forward in a horizontal direction keeping time to their Music. They jump & put themselves into different Antic Shapes, keeping their Heels, close together. At every pause they make the Men give a howl of Imitation of the Wolf, or some other Animal & those that hold out the longest at this strong exercise seem to pass for the best Performers; the Women hang their Arms as if without the Power of Motion.\(^{53}\)

Although Mackenzie’s account here begins with the seemingly dismissive “no great variety” statement, his description of the circle dance with the Bone Dagger and its movements is detailed, even describing leg positions, with heels close together while the dancers assumed a variety of “Antic Shapes.” Was the purpose of this display merely, as Mackenzie assumed, to amuse himself and his men? It is interesting that Mackenzie, who uses words sparingly, devotes so much space in his journal to these dances. By emphasizing the wolf sounds Mackenzie may have been particularly struck by them, or was attempting to portray these people and their dance as particularly “savage.” Yet he also mentions that the sounds of other animals were imitated. The mixture of men and women is described as “promiscuous,” contrasting these mixed dances with those of clearly delineated gender divisions.

Once his guide had taken him a short distance, Mackenzie met with another group of Dene and acquired a new guide. This man and his brothers were eager to show their abilities as guides and knowledge of the Inuit upriver. They resorted to song and dance, while in their boats, with Mackenzie providing the following incredible description:

They amused us with Songs of their own & some in Imitation of the Eskmeaux, which seemed to enliven our new Guide, so much that he began to dance upon his Breech in his small Canoe & we expected every Moment to see him upset but he was not satisfied with his confined Situation. He paddled up along Side of our Canoe & asked us to embark him (which a little before he had refused) we allow’d him & immediately he began to perform an Eskmeaux Dance upon our Canoe when every Person in the Canoe called out to him to be quiet which he complied with & before he sat down pull'd his Penis out of his Breeches laying it on his hand & telling us the Eskmeaux name of it. In short he took much Pains to shew us that he knew the Eskmeaux & their Customs.\(^{54}\)

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 183.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 194.
Performing their own songs as well as those of the Inuit, these Dene guides were eager to demonstrate their abilities and knowledge for Mackenzie and his men. The degree to which this was made a priority is remarkable. Yet how better to demonstrate familiarity with another culture than to sing their songs and speak their language? The overt reference to the male sexual organ is perhaps unique in the journals of fur traders, which tend to be free of such details. This was obviously a significant and remarkable event for Mackenzie, adding not only a musical but also a sexual dimension to the account. Familiarity with the Inuit was communicated by the Dene through the paradigms of body-knowledge and musical knowledge, appealing to the senses of touch and hearing.\footnote{This seems to conform with the theorizing of anthropologists about the primacy of hearing and touch to First Nations’ cultures. See David Howes, ed. The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 4, 8-10, 168-173.} What Mackenzie describes in detail, along with singing and dancing in the canoes, was not just a distraction on his voyage north: it was a kind of cross-cultural certification of the knowledge and experience of his new guides. The Dene danced in the canoes almost to the point of tipping, a danger with high stakes in the frigid northern waters. Yet executed successfully, this remarkable demonstration of agility and musicianship proved a noteworthy beginning to Mackenzie’s journey to the Arctic.

In 1793 Alexander Mackenzie helped push the Montreal trade into the northwest coast area, journeying down the Bella Coola River to the Pacific Ocean. On this voyage he reported hearing First Nations’ singing “in a manner very different from what I had been accustomed to hear among savages.” Not only was the sound different, but it was produced in an unfamiliar context. “It was not accompanied either with dancing, drum, or rattle,” he wrote, “but consisted of soft, plaintive tones, and a modulation that was rather agreeable: it had somewhat the air of
church music.’”\textsuperscript{56} This signaled to Mackenzie that he was encountering a significantly different musical culture, one that he found more similar to his own. Although he would not have conceived of changing “culture areas,” Mackenzie’s account acknowledges a significant transition in musical style on reaching peoples of the northwest coast.

When Simon Fraser made his first voyage down the river that now bears his name, he encountered a variety of singing. He describes how on June 27\textsuperscript{th} the “Thompson” Natives (Nlaka’pamuk) “entertained” them with “a specimen of their singing and dancing.”\textsuperscript{57} He would later describe encountering various coastal Salish groups, some of whom presented him with feasts and dances. He makes quick evaluation of their sexual dynamics, concluding that women were slaves to men. “Both sexes are stoutly made, and some of the men are handsome; but I cannot say so much for the women, who seem to be slaves, for in course of their dances, I remarked that the men were pillaging them from one another.”\textsuperscript{58} This statement insinuates that Salish women were slavish due to their dance-floor dynamics. It was Fraser’s reading of the dance that informed him of the supposed gender relations, and Fraser’s own cultural biases are displayed by linking promiscuity with unattractiveness. He describes how at a dance his guide “was presented with another man’s wife for a bed fellow.”\textsuperscript{59} This event confirmed Fraser’s suspicions of promiscuity and dominated his evaluation of the dance.

While moral judgments underlay many of his observations, Fraser tacitly acknowledged the role of song and dance in the formalities of diplomacy. He describes how on arriving at a large village, the Salish “entertained us with songs and dances of various descriptions. The chief stood in the centre of the dance or ring giving direction, while others were beating the drum

\textsuperscript{56} Mackenzie, \textit{Voyages}, 340-1.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 99-100.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
against the walls of the house.” What resulted was such a “terrible racket" that it alarmed Fraser’s men who were at a distance, who in turn rushed over to see what was happening. If this musical encounter was shocking, the next one was even more so. On reaching where the river divides at New Westminster, Fraser was greeted by hostile songs from war canoes that had launched from a Salish village. Armed with bows, arrows, clubs and spears, those aboard the canoes were “singing a war song, beating time with their paddles upon the sides of the canoes, and making signs and gestures highly inimicable.” The guide that Fraser had welcomed aboard responded in kind by becoming “very unruly singing and dancing, and kicking up the dust.” Remarkably, on encountering the war songs of the hostile canoe, the Salish guide sung and danced, which Fraser tried to stop. He describes how a Chief with a “number” of canoes “well armed” overtook them and “kept in company, singing with unfriendly gestures all the while.”

After making an attempt to seize Fraser’s canoe, the Chief resorted to threats and exhortations, and bloodshed was narrowly avoided. The war songs encountered on the Pacific coast from the canoes of First Nations peoples were not songs of welcome but of hostility, interpreted clearly across the linguistic and cultural divide. What Simon Fraser did not understand, however, is how he was interpreted in the Salish epistemological framework as a returning Xexá:ls, or Transformer.

David Thompson was the first European explorer to descend into the Columbia plateau. By that point in his career, he already had two decades of experience as a fur trader. His early employment with the Hudson’s Bay Company had taught him many useful skills, from the Cree language, to techniques of travelling, trading, and cartography, for which he apprenticed under

60 Ibid., 102-3.
61 Ibid., 104-5.
Philip Turnor. He joined the North West Company in 1797 and subsequently mapped large swaths of the western plains and western subarctic before crossing the “Great Divide” in 1807, descending down the Columbia river. He records receiving a friendly reception with the Simpoils (San Poils). Thompson refers to some of his own men – Thomas, La Fontaine, Bercier – mostly French Canadian voyageurs, who figured prominently in the musical exchange that followed.

After meeting on July 03, 1811, and smoking a “few pipes,” their meeting was coming to a close. “As the Chief was going,” Thompson recounts, “my Men wished to see them dance – I told the Chief, who was highly pleased with the request.” Thompson acted as the intermediary between the chief and his own men, relaying their sentiments and wishes. Thompson’s following descriptions are rich in detail, describing three dances, which the group performed on the spot without instruments. He describes “a mild simple Music,” with “cadence measured.” Yet the movements of the dancers were “wild and irregular:”

On the one side stood all the old People of both sexes - these formed groups of 4 to 10 who danced in time, hardly stirring out of the same spot; all the young & active formed a large group on the other Side, men women & children mixed, dancing first up as far as the line of old People extended, then turning round & dancing down the same extent, each of this large group touching each other with closeness - this continued abt 8 Minutes, when the Song being finished, each Person sat directly down on the Ground, where on the Spot he happened to be when the Song was done.

The moral condemnation evident in Mackenzie and Fraser’s account is largely absent here, although gender relations are indeed one of Thompson’s primary observations. After a speech that lasted a minute or two, the song began as it had before, with no fixed positions for the dancers. Instead it seemed to Thompson that they “mingled as chance brought them together.” He focused on a “young active woman, who always danced out of the Crowd & kept a

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line close along us, & always left the others far behind – this [was] noticed by the Chief, who at length called her to order, & either to dance with the others or to take a Partner.” It is interesting that Thompson mentions this particular woman, who in this seemingly unrestricted dance was singled out for her dancing and was called “to order.” This reveals insights into the Simpoil’s gender dynamics and hierarchy, which is perhaps more pronounced than among eastern, plains or western subarctic First Nations.

The final dance served as a prayer for the safe travels of Thompson and his men. This was again ordered by the chief, who

told them to dance a third time, that we might be preserved and in the strong Rapids we had to run down on our way to the Sea. This they seemingly performed with a great good will. Having danced abt an Hour, they finished - we retired much sooner as the dust of their feet often fairly obscured the Dancers, tho’ we stood only abt 4 feet from them, as they danced on a piece of dusty ground, in the Open Air.66

During the summer season, time was of premium value to fur traders. Thus it is remarkable that Thompson devoted over an hour to these spectacles, and describes them in such detail. During the following days after leaving the Simpoils, an unnamed group who Thompson identifies as speaking a Salish dialect met and traded with them, approaching “singing us a Song of a mild Air.” After discussing the river and the First Nations groups below, they “offered to dance for our good voyage & preservation to the Sea & back again.” Men, women, and children danced together in an ellipsis, with their movements resembling to the fur traders running on the spot, keeping time with their arms which were closely by their sides. Some older women were noted as dancing apart from the rest of the group, and their steps were judged “much better than the others.” This group danced three dances for Thompson and his men, each of which began with a speech from the chief, and which ended “with a kind of prayer for our safety, all turning their

66 Ibid.
faces up the River & quickly lifting their hands high & striking the Palms together then letting them fall quickly,” repeating this action “till the kind of Prayer was done,” lasting between one and a half and two minutes.⁶⁷

Thompson follows these descriptions with a note about their music and dance more generally. “I may here remark that all their Dances are a kind of religious Prayer for some end – they in their Dances never assume the gay joyous countenance, but always a serious turn with often a trait of enthusiasm.”⁶⁸ This cross-cultural comparison occurs frequently in Thompson’s journal, presented as he was with different examples at nearly every stop he made along the way. Each day from July 5th, to 9th 1811, Thompson’s party met a new group and received feasts and dances, participating in ceremonies of peace-making as they descended the Columbia river. On July 6th after gift-giving, women danced “in a body to the tune of a mild Song which they sang,” while on July 7th Thompson’s group encountered a village whose inhabitants “received us all dancing in their Huts.”⁶⁹ Thompson recounts dutifully the following encounter with a group he identified as the “Shawpatin” nation (Sahaptin - interior Salish) whose women “advanced singing & dancing in their best dress, with all of their Shells in their Noses – two of them naked, but no way abashed.” Here, as in previous encounters, the women danced while the men smoked, and were “like the rest something of a religious nature.”⁷⁰ Thompson demonstrates his increasing familiarity with the plateau - basin style, in his next encounter describes how after smoking “they gave us a Dance after the fashion of the others.” At the following village the chief “ordered all the women to dance, which they did as usual.”⁷¹

They danced in a regular manner & by much the best I have seen: all the young of both Sexes in two curve[d] Lines, backwards & forwards - the old formed the rank behind; they made much use

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⁶⁷ Ibid., 147.
⁶⁸ Ibid.
⁶⁹ Ibid., 148-9.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 150-151.
⁷¹ Ibid., 151-2.
of their Arms & Hands. The Dance, Song & Step were measured by an old Chief. Sometimes they sat down at the end of 3’ sometimes at the end of 10’, but never reposed more than \( \frac{1}{2} \)\textsuperscript{72}

Thompson describes and passes judgment, displaying his cultural inclination for regularity and order. These aesthetic values guided Thompson’s judgment of the merits of the dancing. As they encountered larger and larger groups, Thompson and his men recognized their good fortune in being received with dances that signified and solidified peaceful relationships. On August 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1811, they encamped amongst at least two hundred men who gave them a dance, after which Thompson writes “thank Heaven for the favour we find among these numerous people.”\textsuperscript{73}

Music and dance figured prominently in fur traders’ encounters with First Nations peoples. Dances were visual and auditory displays that sparked the curiosity and remarks of fur traders. First Nations peoples danced to welcome, entertain, communicate and pray with outsiders. Yet they also made music in an attempt to scare them off. On encountering the four western culture areas, musical traditions were exchanged with fur traders as part of the intercultural dynamic of peaceful relations, alliance and trade. Fur traders devoted considerable amounts of journal space to describing the dances they encountered, perhaps fuelled by curiosity, but also seemingly fuelled by pragmatism. They recognized that these cultural forms were significant to the First Nations groups with whom they were establishing trading relationships, and politely observed as audiences the gifts of their hosts.

Fur traders analyzed the dances as revealing not only aspects of musical culture but also social structure and gender dynamics. At the same time these accounts revealed the fur traders’ own attitudes and prejudices. Ritualized spectacles allowed European eyes and ears privy access to First Nations’ musical traditions before the fur trade was firmly established in these regions. As Henry’s account demonstrates, in the plains region by the mid-eighteenth century European

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 165.
trade goods had been adopted and adapted into material soundways and dance culture, while the three other western musical areas appear to have been largely uninfluenced by European material or musical culture. The war songs encountered among certain Salish groups on the northwest coast communicated overt resistance to the incursion of the fur traders. Yet in the plateau–basin region, songs were used to welcome David Thompson and his men.

Music and dance served as an important platform of cultural discourse, serving simultaneously diplomatic and supernatural functions. They were employed as gifts and offerings to humans as well as to beings of the spirit world. While fur traders were not trained as fieldworkers, and did not seem to comprehend much of the deeper spiritual significances, their vocation took them through the heart of First Nations’ communities. Some of their most noteworthy perceptions and descriptions were formed by observing music and dance culture. Fur traders described the aspects they found most remarkable, or often, out of place or unusual. They were in many instances more eager to interpret gender dynamics than describe body movements or musical attributes, yet they too included these kinds of observations. These accounts suggest how prominently cultural encounter was shaped by music and dance, manifesting into a multiplicity of forms and experiences.
Map 1. First Nations Culture Areas and Trading Posts before 1821. Made with ArcGIS software by the author.
4 Military Instruments in the Northwest

The height of colonial warfare in the mid-late eighteenth century coincided with the aggressive pursuit of the fur trade by English speaking merchants of Montreal. The recurring conflicts in eastern North America and the Great Lakes region from the Seven Years War until 1814 were so continuous that they have been dubbed by some historians a "Sixty Years’ War."¹ The fur trade was directly affected by these conflicts, with trading routes intersecting contested territory and trade at times interrupted or halted.² While the fur trade in the northwest was geographically removed from the epicenter of conflict, it was nonetheless affected by the recurring warfare and influenced the soundscape of the fur trade. Military musical instruments made their way through the trading post circuit, including drums, fifes, bugles, and bagpipes. These instruments lost the disciplinary associations that they possessed at the beginning of this era, instead being employed for novelty, recreation, and displays of power.

The heightened tensions and skirmishes that spilled over into North America during the war of the Austrian Succession intensified into the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), ultimately transferring French influence and trade in the interior to the English after the defeat of Montcalm's army. With control of the St. Lawrence valley came control of the fur-trading hub of Montreal, with its favourable position and experienced labour supply. English speaking merchants pursued this position, attempting to co-opt its trading networks with First Nations peoples. This was an uneasy process that witnessed enormous upheavals, the most notable of

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which is Pontiac's Rebellion (1763-4), which comprised of a broad confederacy of First Nations peoples who fought against British encroachment. Yet most First Nations allies of New France eventually allied with the British when faced with an expansionist America during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. The trading posts and fortifications of the Great Lakes and to the west served both military and commercial functions, extending economic, cultural and political influence while by no means asserting sovereignty over western First Nations peoples.  

English traders who pushed westwards after the Seven Years’ War were Alexander Henry (“the Elder”), Peter Pond, and Jonathan Carver, all of whom mentioned military instruments in their journals and memoirs. First Nations peoples would have been notified of the fur traders’ presence not only from the sounds of arms and ammunition but from the novel timbres military instruments emitted from the fur traders’ canoes and forts.

### 4.1 Music and Discipline

Eighteenth and early nineteenth century military music served separate functions for civilian populations and soldiers. For the public, sound was combined with pompous displays of colour, movement, melody, and rhythm, presenting the power and coordination of the army. It turned the soldiers into a visual spectacle accompanied by loud, attention-grabbing music.

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3 Harold Innis first demonstrated how France and England extended their spheres of influence over First Nations peoples from the Great Lakes westwards through the fur trade, followed suit later by fledgling Canada; Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*, introduction by Arthur Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); more recent scholarship has emphasized that First Nations’ peoples dictated the terms of their own participation to a large degree, and assumptions of dependency of European material goods have been re-evaluated. See for example Paul C. Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1986).
Armies paraded through population centers as displays of force and in an explicit effort to impress and inspire support. In battle, the bright attire of musicians enabled them to be seen in the smoke and confusion. The military band was by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seen as fundamentally important to the European model of warfare. Military historian Carl Benn has described music’s ability to "add spirit to military events, boost morale, inspire people to enlist, maintain good relations with civilian society, and affirm traditions and values." These multiple functions were often fulfilled simultaneously such as when parading near civilian populations.

In the eighteenth century, military bands attracted and inspired enrollment for service. This is how Peter Pond began his career. He would go on to help locate Methye Portage which served as the entryway for the Montreal traders into the vast Athabasca region with the help of French Canadian voyageurs and Cree guides in the 1770s. His remarkable career began at the outset of the Seven Years’ War, when one of General Braddock’s surviving contingents arrived in Milford, Connecticut. In his memoirs he relates that he enlisted for the army after being lured in by its music: "One Eaveing in April the drums an instraments of Musick were all imployed to that degrea that they charmed me," he wrote, joining others inspired enough to sign up with the recruiting officer Captain Baldwin. This marked Peter Pond’s introduction to the soldier’s life, travelling throughout the Great Lakes and leading him eventually to the fur trade. The military drums and music that charmed him are the sole reference to music in Pond’s memoirs, a testament to their lasting impression.

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What Peter Pond witnessed was likely the military ceremonialism of parading or "trooping of the colours." This meticulous display involved presenting the colours, flags and symbols of the regiment with "full ritual and solemnity" to the marches played by the military band. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there was an enormous expansion of military colours, with regiments having one each for each of the colonels, majors, and captains, in addition to the King's standard. Most were painted or embroidered with heraldic designs such as dolphins, cannons, flags, rising suns. These “colours” were treated with respect, honour, and ceremonialism. A military manual from 1794 indicates that drummers were to keep six paces behind their respective companies while on the march. Marches were “functional pieces composed by bandmasters when required,” borrowing not only popular tunes but also opera and oratorios from composers such as Thomas Busby, John Callcott, William Crotch, James Hook, John Mahon and Alexander Reinagle, in addition to more popular pieces by Handel and Haydn. Music was provided to the troops in the eighteenth century from the personal funds of British regimental commanders, whose tastes largely determined the regimental march. Popular tunes were often adapted for military use. Certain marches became potent symbols of patriotism, for instance the English "grenadiers march" or “British grenadiers,” the French “Malbrook” and “Marseillaise,” and the American “Yanky Doodle.”

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7 Ibid., 100-101.
10 These tunes may have served pragmatic functions on the battlefield, but they also provided the citizens of nation-states with symbols of imperialism around which citizens could rally; See Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
Military music functioned as an overt method of social control. It provided a mechanism for coordination and reinforcing the hierarchy of command by allowing the officers to set the men’s movements and marching speed. On the final page of the 1757 *Exercise of the Foot* appears an excerpt from Windham's *Plan of Discipline*, where it is explained that marching to the sound of drums presents “the greatest order and regularity,” allowing the soldiers to keep “the most exact time and cadence.” Even militia could be trained relatively quickly, it is touted, with the music helping them "move all together," while "regulating the step” of each soldier. Music was written about by military strategists as "the best and indeed the only method of teaching troops to march well.” This mid-eighteenth century military treatise describes how “the effect of the music in regulating the step and making the men keep their order, is really very extraordinary."11

To understand the functions of military music, it is helpful to first recognize the auditory restrictions placed on colonial regular and militia soldiers. Eighteenth century military strategy was influenced by attempts to rationalize social systems, with authoritarian and utilitarian impulses combining to demand silent and obedient subjects. The 1757 publication from the Duke of Cumberland emphasizes that "Every Soldier will give the greatest attention to the words of command, remaining perfectly silent and steady..." Silence ensured "attention and obedience,” and ultimately “ensure[d] success to his Majesties arms.”12 Integral to the strict disciplinary order of the military, enforced silence ensured nothing compromised or interrupted the command structure of the unit.

11 *Exercise for the Foot, With the differences to be observed in the Dragoon Exercise 1757: By Order of H.R.H. Prince William Augustus Duke of Cumberland, etc., etc. ad illustrations from A Plan of Discipline Compiled for the use of The Militia of The County of Norfolk 1759. Historical Arms Series No. 42 (1759; repr. Bloomfield & Alexandria Bay, Museum Restoration Service, 2004), 44.
12 Ibid., 15.
In this idealized, silent, and ordered world, the drum roll was the essential communication tool. As Michel Foucault has discussed in the context of prisons, the drum commanded authority over silent subjects in various models of eighteenth and early nineteenth century penal justice. Drum-rolls signaled to prisoners the activities of the daily regimen. In one French model from 1838, intervals of five minutes separated three drum-rolls every morning, directing getting dressed and making the bed, while after the end-of-the-day drum-rolls supervisors patrolled the corridors to “ensure order and silence.”  

The relationship between the disciplinary techniques of modern armies and society as a whole is part of Foucault’s broader argument. Some scholars have recently extended this analysis. Kate van Orden’s study of early modern music explores Foucault’s ideas in conjunction with military music and dance in the seventeenth century, exploring the influence of military themes on the music and culture of the upper classes. She describes how soldiers were managed through rhythmic commands, and drummers were the crucial conduit between the officers and soldiers. “The social point that follows,” van Orden writes, “is that drummers formed a crucial link in the chain of command.”

The progression of the soldiers' day began and ended in camp, as in prison, with the sound of drums. In the morning the "reveille" roused the soldiers and in the evening the final inspection of watch-posts was announced with the "last post" or "tattoo." On campaign, after the "last post" or "tattoo" was beat, the camp was expected to remain quiet, although commanders often struggled to enforce perfect compliance. On the Ticonderoga campaign of 1759-1760, Major John Hawks, serving under General Jeffrey Amherst, condemned the "very rietous noise in the

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15 "Last Post" would later be adopted for the funerals of fallen soldiers and commemorations.
camp till one o'clock" which took place "contrary to the orders of this camp & the rules in the army." Issuing a forceful statement to insist that officers of the guards ensure that after the "tattoo is beat," there would be no noises in the camp. Patrols were arranged, and on these anyone found making a noise or disturbance were ordered to be "still and silent." If after that point any auditory transgressions were detected, the guilty party would be confined and punished according to "Marshel law." Silence was enforced with the threat of violence.

While on the battlefield, silent soldiers provided the essential backdrop for the chain of command to operate, from the officers’ shouted orders signaling with military instruments. Seventeenth century military theorists promoted the use of drums and fifes, and devoted chapters to the subject. Montgommery recommended two drummers for each company, one ordinary player who works with the fife player, and the second a tambour colonel as their captain. By the mid-eighteenth century, each company of infantry had at least one large field drum to beat out the “calls of warre,” with a corps of drums that was led by a drum major who held the rank of sergeant. During the Seven Years’ War drummers made four pence more per day than private soldiers and were classified as non-commissioned officers, underscoring their importance and standing.

The primary role of the musicians was on the field (re)broadcasting the commanding officers' orders to the regiments. The military literature of the era emphasizes that from a tactical

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17 Johann J. Walhausen, L’Art militaire pour l’infanterie, (Frankfurt: 1615); Louis de Montgommery, La Milice française, (Paris: 1636).
perspective, it was most essential to amplify the spoken orders of the commanding officer. In the Duke of Cumberland's 1757 *Exercise of the Foot*, each procedure is categorized by its "word of command" and corresponding drumbeat.\(^{21}\) T.H. Cooper's 1806 *A Practical Guide for the Light Infantry Officer* asserts that "words of command are on all occasions to be used." Cooper insisted that "signals are only to be resorted to in aid of the voice."\(^{22}\) In warfare the auditory realm reigned supreme over the visual, which could quickly be overtaken with smoke and confusion. Each command had a corresponding and distinctive rhythm. These could be adapted, as were the orders of the American army and militia during September of 1813, when the signals for only two basic maneuvers were stressed: forming for battle was signaled by the drum-beat "*to arms,*" while the signal to halt was the "*retreat.*"\(^{23}\)

Alexander Henry ("the Elder") was an English merchant who transported a canoe of goods from Montreal into the Great Lakes in 1760 before the Seven Years' War was over. In his first hand account of the massacre at Fort Michilimackinac during Pontiac’s Rebellion, Henry *heard* a series of sounds and silences that signaled British authority had evaporated. Writing letters in his private quarters, Henry “heard an Indian war-cry, and a noise of general confusion,” and then perceived from his window that a massacre was unfolding. Grabbing his gun, he “held

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\(^{22}\) T.H. Cooper, *A Practical Guide for the Light Infantry Officer: Comprising Valuable Extracts from all the most Popular Works on the Subject; with Further Original Information; and illustrated by A set of Plates, on an Entire New and Intelligible Plan; which simplify Every Movement and Manoeuvre of Light Infantry* (1806; repr. London: Redwood Press, 1970), 97-8. Cooper's manual demarcates the basic commands, such as "to advance," "to retreat," "to halt," to "cease-firing," and "to assemble." that had become standardized with the British army by the turn of the nineteenth century.

\(^{23}\) The basic purpose of the instruments was read aloud on the U.S. Schooner Ariel on September 26th, 1813, "All signals will be immediately repeated by all the drums of the line."; John Brannan ed, *Official Letters of the Military and Naval Officers of the United States, During the War with Great Britain in the Years 1812, 13, 14, & 15: with some additional letters and documents elucidating the history of that period* (Washington City: Way & Gideon, 1823), 219.
it for a few minutes, waiting to hear the drum beat to arms.” This drumbeat would have been the
signal to rally the British troops to mount a defense during the surprise attack. No such drumbeat
came. Henry describes this “dreadful interval,” when he waited for the sound-symbol of British
authority to return, yet it had been overturned, and the fort’s drummers silenced.  

Because of the strict code of silence inside military camps and forts, orders and the
progression of the daily regimen were broadcast for those inside and outside to follow. First
Nations warriors became familiar with these signals. In the Sauk chief Black Hawk’s memoirs,
he recounts digging a hole to hide in ambush outside of Fort Madison. He was so close to the fort
that he "could hear the sentinel walking," and prepared his gun when he heard "the drum beat"
from within the fort, signaling the subsequent emergence of soldiers. These examples describe
how this perceptibility had evident military implications. Yet only certain trading posts at certain
times contained within their palisades proper military regiments, mostly around the Great Lakes
before 1814.  

Drummers directly enforced regiment discipline. It was part of their duties to beat their
comrades’ backs by administering floggings. The disciplinary spectacles Michel Foucault
describes as falling into disuse during the eighteenth century persisted much longer in the
military. The roles of signaling orders and enforcing discipline constitute a continuum within

25 Carl Benn, writes that "The beating probably consisted of the playing of reveille and morning duty calls." Benn ed., Native Memoirs, 131.
27 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 10-11.
the disciplinary order from regulation to punishment. To the marching soldiers, the signals that drummers conveyed through pounding the drum skins disseminated the orders of the officers, but perhaps also reminded them of their fate if they transgressed the rules. One chapter of a recent social history about the British military entitled "Following the Drum" details discipline in the British army. Older forms of military punishment such as "running the gauntlet" were replaced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries almost exclusively by flogging, also known as the “lash,” shifting the burden of corporal punishment from the entire group to the specialized role of drummers. The lash earned British soldiers the nicknames "lobsters" and "bloody backs," referencing the effects of their disciplinary techniques.

These roles for drummers were extended to the Great Lakes trading posts. In John Long’s account from experiences as a fur trader in the 1770s and 80s, European disciplinary practices clashed with Anishinaabeg principals of justice. A warrior identified as Silver Heels “from his superior agility, as well as his admirable finesse in the art of war,” was greatly respected, having killed, according to Long, “more of the enemy than any one of the tribes in alliance with Great Britain.” He arrived at the fort as a soldier was about to receive punishment, but expressed displeasure that the man be publicly shamed and disgraced. Learning the crime was intoxication, Silver Heels protested the apparent double-standard and vowed to return and disrupt the proceedings. Long describes the ensuing encounter:

Soon after the delinquent was tied up, and the drummers in waiting to obey orders, Silver Heels returned; and going up to the officer, with a tomahawk and scalping knife, said to him, Father, are you a warrior, or do you only think yourself so? If you are brave, you will not suffer your men to strike this soldier whilst I am in this fort. Let me advise you not to spill the good English blood which to-morrow may be wanted to oppose an enemy. -- The officer, turning upon his heel, answered with an indignant look, that the soldier had transgressed, and must be flogged.

30 Ibid.
That Silver Heels’ interference was tolerated is perhaps a testament to his importance as an ally. Yet he not only voiced displeasure with the method of punishment, but returned to directly challenge the authority of the officer in command with a tacit threat of violence. Taken another way, the above passage could be interpreted as Silver Heels retrieving the tomahawk and knife as gifts to “cover” the crime and appease the offended party, breaking the cycle of violence, commonly practiced in the diplomacy of Great Lakes peoples. The drummers “waiting to obey orders” were not reproached or reprimanded by Silver Heels, but rather the officer who commanded the punishment, demonstrating his understanding of the hierarchical command structure. With British soldiers stationed at the larger trading posts, their disciplinary roles influenced how drummers were perceived by First Nations peoples around the Great Lakes region in the decades following the Seven Years’ War.

In serious cases, a severe form of corporal punishment was administered with the lash during a "drum head court martial." This was the most elaborate disciplinary spectacle, whereby offenders were "drummed out" of the regiment. A young drummer in General Jeffrey Amherst's army moving through New York in 1758-9 was accused of stealing a glass of milk from a local farmer, and Colonel Fraser took the drastic measure of subjecting him to a drumhead court-martial on the side of the road. A military metaphor, its name arose from the court martial literally being written up on the skin of a drum. Yet this account merely describes the drummer being "tied-up and punished with two hundred lashes on his bare back, and then drum'd out of the Regiment." "Drumming out" was an important display of punishment performed by the

musicians, both by administering direct force, and by setting the atmosphere of shame by playing music as the disgraced soldier departed.

Military executions were the most severe disciplinary actions, and the band set the tone of the spectacle. A composition known as the “Rogue’s March” became the common tune in British and American armies for this procedure. When the fifteen-year old Pequot William Apess joined the army in New York City during the early years of the War of 1812, he recorded a significant experience with this ceremony on his way north. He first "enlisted for a musician," and was instructed on Governors Island "in beating a drum." He reminisces glowingly on his initial experiences as a drummer. Yet witnessing an execution altered his view of the military.

It is impossible for me to describe the feelings of my heart when I saw the soldiers parade, and the condemned, clothed in white with Bibles in their hands, come forward. The band then struck up the dead march, and the procession moved with a mournful and measured tread to the place of execution, where the poor creatures were compelled to kneel on the coffins, which were alongside two newly dug graves.

As these were spectacles designed to produce an emotional effect, Apess described how his “heart seemed to leap” into his throat. The death march established the mood, conveying the feelings that Apess described as “impossible. . . to describe.” “Death never appeared so awful. . . This spectacle made me serious, but it wore off in a few days.” The evocative potential of music, then, was used in conjunction with the execution ceremony to emphasize its somber implications, potentially increasing dread and maximizing its deterring effect, which in this case seems to have been at least temporarily effective. The role of music in contributing to spectacles of discipline has been largely overlooked in the literature since Foucault’s writing. For instance, Peter Moogk's “The Liturgy of Humiliation, Pain, and Death: The Execution of Criminals in

35 Ibid.
New France” examines public displays of punishment without focusing on their auditory accompaniment.  

4.2 Drums

Drummers thus served a number of essential functions, from playing marches, transmitting the commanding officers’ orders, and enforcing discipline. Considering they were only a small percentage of the regiments, what was their impact on the Great Lakes region? The primary sources indicate that although musicians formed only a small portion of colonial armies, maintained at just over two percent of total army numbers, they were a top priority to recruit and resupply. On the New York frontier in 1755, drummers were in demand as replacements for those lost in battle. Colonel Jonathan Bagley wrote on November 27th, 1755 about his request for William Johnson to “Send Up [a] Good Drum[m]er” to fill the position of Drum Major, and two more drummers, “if to be had.” Johnson’s correspondence indicates numbers of British casualties in battle, including “missing” drummers who had to be replaced along with their equipment. Some drums are known to have been captured by First Nations peoples. Nathan Whiting reported to Johnson on October 28th 1755 that his regiment lost seven guns, four swords,

37 In 1757 the British Secretary of War Lord Barrington ordered the raising of a Highland Battalion "which is to Consist of Ten Companies of Four Serjeants, Four Corporals, Two Drummers, and One Hundred Effective Private Men in each Company, besides Commission Officers." Drummers are here less than two percent of the total force; Thompson, A Bard of Wolfe’s Army, 111; A later eighteenth century infantry manual from 1794 suggests that there should be one drummer for each company of thirty privates, three officers, two sergeants, and three corporals: approximately 2.5% of each company. Langley, The Eighteen Manoeuvres for His Majesty’s Infantry, 21; When the 78th Foot disbanded in Quebec in August 1763, their names were taken on subsistence rolls, revealing that of the 887 men, twenty were drummers. This sample tally comes at the end of six years campaigning in North America, with drummers representing 2.25% of the total force. Thompson, A Bard of Wolfe’s Army, 222.
39 Ibid., 235, 236.
four horns, and one drum in the Lake Champlain engagements with the French and their Aboriginal allies.\textsuperscript{40} These material exchanges resulted from colonial warfare, and may have exerted an influence on musical practices of First Nations peoples around the Great Lakes.

First Nations closely involved with the fur trade were recorded to have captured drums of Euro-American regiments. A group of Anishinaabeg passing through Upper Canada in 1815 is depicted in Rudolf Steiger's watercolour showing a dance around what is clearly an American military drum.\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Deputation_of_Indians_from_the_Chippewa_Tribes.jpg}
\caption{Rudolf Steiger, "Deputation of Indians from the Chippewa Tribes to the President of Upper Canada, Sir Frederic Ph. Robinson, K.C.B., Major General, etc. in 1815," National Gallery of Canada (no. #30237). Used with Permission.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 287.
\textsuperscript{41} Special thanks to Dr. Carl Benn for pointing me towards this evidence.
Some European military drums were repurposed and incorporated into First Nations’ cultures. One particularly interesting example is a *dehe’igan* drum, likely collected on Manitoulin Island in the 1850s. It is a particularly fascinating material object due to its layered history, serving originally a military snare drum but at some point repurposed and redecorated by an Anishinaabeg owner.  

Alan Corbiere and Ruth B. Philips suggest that the drum was probably viewed as a trophy of war, akin to captured flags, weapons, and uniforms. It was incorporated into the Anishinaabeg’s cosmology wherein drums served as vehicles of communication with the *manidook*. The images on the drum represent dream-symbols in addition to some recognizable imagery of war, and symbols such as thunderbirds.

Military instruments during this period seem to have left their biggest imprint at trading posts in the immediate vicinity of the Great Lakes. These remained with their regiments or were lost in action. Yet these were not the only source of European drums to the region. There is evidence of drums on the trading company’s inventory lists and shelves for purchase. In the North West Company’s inventory lists of 1820-1, only two “tambourines” are listed at the Lake of the Two Mountains Fort for two shillings apiece. Yet their paucity in the inventory lists indicates that they did not represent a major trading item.

The encounter with European military drums applied not only with First Nations peoples in the war-torn Great Lakes, but also with those on the shores of Hudson Bay. On board HMS Rosamond in 1817, Lieutenant Edward Chappell remarked on numerous musical activities and cross-cultural interactions between his English crew, Cree, and Inuit peoples. On one occasion, a

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43 "Lake of 2 Mountains Inv. Cont," 1820-1, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Microfilm (SM12, Columbia B), 133.
Cree man was invited on board and closely examined the musical instruments, including two sets of bagpipes and perhaps a bugle or horn. Chappell reports that the man was “not particularly pleased with any of our musical instruments, except the drum.” It could be that the military drums most resembled the Cree’s own taawahekan frame drums, and the cultural proximity inspired the sentiment. Ethnomusicologists have posited that influences and exchanges are more likely to occur between musical cultures that share numerous characteristics.

Drums influenced not only First Nations around the Great Lakes, but also those around Hudson Bay. According to the oral traditions of Cree living in Moose Factory, the annual ships arriving in Hudson Bay were accompanied by dramatic parading as a marching or pipe band proceeded up and down the gang-plank before the cargoes were unloaded. This ceremony made an impression on the First Nations peoples living near the forts, and Moose Factory residents told stories into the later twentieth century about the arrival of the HBC’s ships, known in Cree as Shay Chee Man or “great canoes.” Ethnomusicologist Frances Wilkins has recently researched the musical traditions of this community, and was told by local elders such as James Cheechoo that the HBC’s military drums had inspired the invention of a new kind of Cree drum used to accompany the fiddle and secular dance music. The resulting double-headed taawahekan drum resembled a combination of European snare and bass drums. According to Cheechoo, these are only used on “secular occasions within the context of fiddle dance music,” and are

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46 James Cheechoo described an oral history from his father, Noah Cheechoo who worked on Charlton Island in the early twentieth century unloading cargoes, describing how the ships were “disembarked in the form of a pipe band wearing kilts, and paraded along the quayside for some time before unloading the supplies with the help of the local Cree. See Frances Wilkins, “The Fiddlers of James Bay: Transatlantic Flows and Musical Indigenization among the James Bay Cree,” MUSICultures, 40/1(2013): 65; Louis Bird, The Spirit Lives in the Mind: Omushkego Stories, Lives, and Dreams, edited by Susan Elaine Gray (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007).
fundamentally different from the traditional Cree hunters’ drums. The traditional taawahekan drums have been described by Lynn Whidden as made from birch or larch and covered by caribou skins, crafted with one or two heads. These drums were constructed for a definite purpose, and were used by hunters, trappers, and fishermen to aid in their hunt and communicate with non-human beings. A new instrument was sought for the context of social dances introduced by fur traders.

Military instruments moved into the plains through the conduits of the trading companies. On a voyage from Portage la Prairie to the forks (Red River & Assiniboine), Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) mentions that he was “plagued with J. McKenzy, HBCo Drum fife &c,” suggesting a drum and fife band played at the forks in 1805. R. Miles wrote to Edward Ermatinger from York Factory in 1833 about the band he had formed with John Tod, which continued on after Ermatinger’s departure from the trade: “we have had a Complete band of fiddle fife & drum not forgetting your old triangle which our worthy friend Ballenden beats upon most admirably, we however regret your absence in the Pandean Reeds.” Here the fiddle was added to the combination of military instruments, fifes and drums and triangles. In these examples, fur traders formed their own pipe bands, and military instruments were used for recreational purposes. These scenarios suggest alternate functions and contexts of use for military instruments in the fur trade.

4.3 Bugles and Bagpipes

Bugles and bagpipes were first carried through the conduits of the fur trade into the northwestern parts of North America. These instruments were radically different from those found in First Nations' cultures. While bagpipers were attached only to certain units of the British army, buglers were widely assigned to cavalry and infantry units. A distant relative of the medieval herald, buglers were expected in the late eighteenth century to carry themselves with a courtly comportment and transmit messages. They acted "as special orderlies to the Generals, who usually had several on their Staff."\(^51\) Their calls could pierce the din of battle, signaling various maneuvers to the cavalry such as advance, retreat, halt, commence and cease firing, and assemble.\(^52\) The bugles' special capacity to travel long distances gave them power to communicate across the camp or field to a large number of soldiers, as well as across enemy lines. Cooper's *Light Infantry Officer* from 1806 suggests that a "good bugle" could be heard at the distance of three miles or almost five kilometers (4.83 kilometers).\(^53\) During the engagements of the Seven Years’ War, large forces amassed for sieges and bombardments. Raising the white flag was the visual symbol for capitulation (though the French raised a red flag to contrast with their standard), while a bugle call was the audible signal of capitulation, that traversed walls, gates, trenches and earthworks. Vice-versa, a sieging party could sound the bugle for a parley, as happened after nineteen days of siege and bombardment of the French held Fort Niagara in July of 1759, when "after a furious cannonade on both sides, a trumpet sounded from the trenches,

\(^{52}\) Cooper, *Light Infantry Officer*, 98.
\(^{53}\) Ibid.
and an officer approached the fort with a summons to surrender."54 The bugle could thus serve as an auditory punctuation mark for battle, signaling a cessation of hostilities.

In the fur trade, the use of bugles is hardly documented. What evidence exists seems to suggest that they were relegated to recreational purposes. Fur trader Jon Tod wrote in a letter to retired trader Edward Ermatinger how he had found an old bugle he had used decades before.

“During my late abode at Kamloops amongst the musty records of the Fort I fell in with Your old Bugle, the sight did not fail most forcibly to recall the days of our Youth at Island Lake.”55 This passage suggests that musical instruments sometimes remained for decades in inventories. Encountering it triggered Jon Tod’s memories of his younger years with Edward Ermatinger. It was a material object of special significance, recalling meaningful social bonds, regardless of whether or not it played any practical functions.

The Scottish regiments and their attendant bagpipers made a considerable impact on colonial warfare during this period. Shortly after the defeat at Culloden in 1745, Scottish Highland and Black Watch regiments were integrated into the British army under William Pitt’s directives. Highland regiments with pipers were sent to North America, seeing action with Wolfe at Louisbourg in 1757 and again with Abercromby in 1758 during the ill-fated attack on Fort Carillon. The highest rank of pipe-major was comparable to drum-major, the equivalent of sergeant.56 Pipers, like fifers, were often concealed in the rolls simply as "drummers" to circumvent the scrutiny of headquarters, making quantification of those sent to the St. Lawrence

impossible.\textsuperscript{57} Personal accounts, such as James Thompson’s anecdotal description of three pipers crossing with Simon Fraser’s Highland Regiment in 1757, provide some evidence.\textsuperscript{58} In Highland units, bagpipers assisted the drummers in regulating the soldier's day, with specific songs used to signal various duties and events. Though these varied from regiment to regiment, “Hey Johnnie Cope” was known to sometimes replace the "reveille" in the morning, while “Bannocks o' Barley” or “Brose and Butter” called to lunch or dinner, “Bundle and Go” was used for tea, while “Sleep, Dearie, Sleep” was played for Last Post, concluding the soldier's day.\textsuperscript{59}

The accounts from the Seven Years’ War suggest that it was on the battlefield where the bagpipes played their biggest role. As military historian R.M. Barnes writes, warfare in this era resembled a highly controlled military exercise, and the difficulty from the soldier's perspective was sticking to the formation and drill no matter the intensity of enemy fire. Soldiers were not allowed to take cover, but rather had to “stand still in close order,” performing the maneuvers as correctly as possible under fire.\textsuperscript{60} The bagpipes were believed to assist in this role by boosting morale, providing reassurance, and rallying soldiers when their nerves broke. At the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, at the moment when the Highlander line “advanced to the charge,” General Murray sought the services of his bagpiper, "knowing well the value of one on such occasions." Murray reportedly shouted: "Where's the highland Piper!" "Five pounds for a piper!" Yet he was unable to be found, and the charge went on without the encouragement of the bagpiper. For his

\textsuperscript{57} "The piper has had many ups and downs in the matter of official approval," writes military historian R.M. Barnes, and “drummer” was used instead of “piper” to escape censure. See Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} James Thompson indicated that the piper could serve numerous roles, reporting that while staying in Donaghadee before crossing they were "awaken'd by one of our Regimental Pipers sounding the "Alarm"!" A house was on fire on other side of town, and men were roused from their slumber by the emergency call on the pipes, rushing over to assist. Thompson lists three pipers: Privates McIntyre, Macdonald and MacCrimmon; see James Thompson, \textit{A Bard of Wolfe's Army}, 119.
\textsuperscript{59} Barnes, \textit{The Uniforms & History}, 261.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
failure to materialize, he was shamed: “disgraced by the whole of the Regiment, and the men
would not speak to him, neither would they suffer his rations to be drawn with theirs.”

This informal punishment was effective, as in the subsequent battle of Sillery on the 28th
of April 1760, he succeeded in rallying the troops once their line broke. Thompson's 78th foot
regiment bore the brunt of cannon and musket fire from the Troupes de la Marine before
"breaking" and routing. However once "rallied by their piper," they provided crucial assistance to
the 58th and 15th foot, providing cover for the retreating army. The following April when the
French attacked Quebec, the Highland regiment was again scattered until the piper played his
bagpipes at the opportune moment: "a blast of his pipes . . . had the effect of stopping them short,
and they soon allow'd themselves to be form'd into some sort of order." Here the bagpiper
intervened when the regiment was in disarray, altering the outcome of battle. Highland
Regiments and bagpipes proved successful and the British army increased their use after the
Seven Years’ War.

The predominantly Scottish partners and clerks in the development of the post-conquest
Montreal fur trade transmitted these military instruments into the northwest. As the Great Lakes
area was centrally implicated in the conflicts of the period, the major posts there were heavily
militarized, and it is not surprising that there could be found military instruments at these
locations. Yet descriptions of these objects in the fur trade are scarce, suggesting how little we
know about how they were used in old and new functions and social relationships. One example
is provided by fur trader Daniel Harmon, who mentions that bagpipes were part of the music
provided at a dance at Grand Portage on Lake Superior in July of 1800. During the day, the local

61 James Thompson, A Bard of Wolfe’s Army, 198.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 199-200.
First Nations were "permitted to dance in the fort," while in the evening the bagpipe was played in combination with the violin and flute. This odd combination of instrumental music was appreciated by Harmon, who felt it “added much to the interest of the occasion.”\(^{64}\) Besides this stated appreciation of the bagpipes as a recreational instrument used for instrumental dance music at Grand Portage, the trail of references to bagpipes runs thin until the 1820s.

As the new Governor of the amalgamated Hudson’s Bay and North West Company in 1821, George Simpson designed his reception at the western trading posts with pomp and ceremony. Simpson was notorious for travelling long distances at rapid speeds, surveying the posts in a birch bark canoe propelled by an elite group of voyageurs. Touring the Columbia District in 1828, Simpson utilized the bugle and bagpipes to make dramatic entrances at the trading posts. In a similar way, Archibald McDonald, who accompanied the voyage from Hudson Bay to the Peace River, describes Colin Fraser playing the bagpipes in a variety of contexts. The instrument’s multifunctionality included entertaining employees and attempting to impress and impose on First Nations peoples. The conception of music on extended canoe voyages was so enshrined with rhythmic time-keeping (such the *chansons d’aviron*) that McDonald clarifies at the outset that bagpipes make “but a poor accordance with either the pole or the paddle.” In other words, they could not be adequately adapted to the utilitarian need of providing rhythm for the paddles over long distances, a noteworthy point at the outset of a

\(^{64}\) Daniel Williams Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America: Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Lat., Extending from Montreal Nearly to the Pacific, a Distance of About 5,000 Miles: Including an Account of the Principal Occurrences During a Residence of Nineteen Years in Different Parts of the Country* (Toronto: George N. Morang & Company, 1904), 14-17.
journey of thousands of kilometers. Yet the bagpipes would still fulfill important social functions and play a prominent role on this voyage.

On the river, travel days were strenuously long, often lasting sixteen or eighteen hours, but a brief window for leisure was opened up around dinner. Social historian Hugh Cunningham has emphasized that leisure activities during the Industrial Revolution have been interpreted both as expressions of class and as forms of social control, with the ability to bridge class divides, or to reinforce them. McDonald recounts a difficult day traversing mountain portages, at the end of which the piper “gave us a few marches before supper.” This is followed by the revealing statement that “this is admitted to have been a hard day’s work,” suggesting that the piper played for the men to make them feel better, or as a gesture of goodwill. In this open environment, the instrumental music brought together both master and servant, bridging class divides with melodies. Marches are favoured in both French Canadian and Scottish musical traditions as a dance music form, yet on this occasion the strenuous activities of the day ensured that it would be appreciated in moments of genuine relaxation. Class barriers may have been overcome by appealing to “national” songs. The “Scottishness” of the bagpipes is alluded to, and the men asked Colin Fraser to “give” “a few of his favorite strathspeys on the bagpipes.” These in turn are reported to have “went off very well to the ear of a Highlander.”

Beyond this example of the bagpipes used in the context of leisure, the remaining examples in McDonald’s diary indicate the instrument was used to create a more spectacular arrival at trading posts and among First Nations peoples. For instance, the arrival at Norway

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67 Archibald McDonald, Peace River, 7.
68 Ibid., 2.
House was consciously crafted to impress and awe. After the customary stop for a meal and change before the final stretch, McDonald noted that “the Highland bagpipes” in Simpson’s canoe was “echoed by the bugle” in McDonald’s. This evidence suggests that these instruments were combined to signal their distant approach; they were chosen seemingly to have the maximum amplification and effect, signaling their impending arrival. “On nearer approach to port,” these musical instruments were laid aside to allow the voyageurs an opportunity to sing their customary songs. This official acknowledgement of the French Canadians’ paddling songs seems to have bridged class and ethnic divisions, with McDonald characterizing these songs as “peculiar to them, and always so perfectly rendered.”69 Yet this tradition was combined with the bagpipes and bugle to provide a longer and more dramatic approach.

Simpson’s dramatic arrival continued upon landing. “His Excellency” proceeded to the fort in procession behind the piper, arriving like a small company of a Scottish regiment in the British army. At the fort he was met by three gentlemen and “a whole host of ladies.” It is obvious that this spectacle was meant to impress those in the fort. Yet McDonald’s statement that their arrival was “certainly more imposing than anything hitherto seen in this part of the Indian country” suggests that their spectacle was intended for a broader audience.70 The ultimate objective of presenting themselves in an imposing manner for the people of the fort, and the local First Nations more generally, then, becomes evident. The custom of a “Grand Entry” accompanied by song for peoples arriving at councils has a long precedent in the Great Lakes region, and Simpson’s actions can be seen as conforming to this custom and adapting to

69 Ibid., 4.
70 Ibid.
indigenous practices.71 Yet whether Simpson’s arrivals were perceived as a hostile imposition, or rather conforming to widespread indigenous customs is difficult to ascertain. Perceptions may have varied. Their “imposing” nature may have been meant as a display of power, but perhaps they were simultaneously interpreted playing into First Nations’ customary protocols, demonstrating seriousness of intent.

Simpson attempted a variety of techniques to amplify the grandeur of his arrivals.

Approaching Fort St. James by foot and horse, McDonald describes an elaborate procession:

The day, as yet, being fine, the flag was put up; the piper in full Highland costume; and every arrangement was made to arrive at Fort St. James in the most imposing manner we could, for the sake of the Indians. Accordingly, when within a thousand yards of the establishment, descending a gentle hill, a gun was fired, the bugle sounded, and soon after, the piper commenced the celebrated march of the clans - "Si coma leum cogadh na shea," (Peace: or War, if you will it otherwise.) The guide, with the British ensign, led the van, followed by the band; then the Governor, on horseback, supported behind by Doctor Hamlyn and myself on our chargers, two deep; twenty men, with their burdens, next formed the line.

This military procession with bagpipes and mounted riders served as a display of power, and the tune was selected specifically from the context of Scottish clan warfare. The use of bagpipes continued after Simpson and his men had council with the local First Nations: “At the close of the harangue, the chief had a glass of rum, a little tobacco, and a shake of the hand from the Great Chief, after which the piper played them the song of peace.”72 This time, McDonald does not provide the Gaelic name, yet the symbolism of the chosen tunes is apparent. It was selected as if its specific cultural meaning could be comprehended across linguistic divisions and cultural divides. Perhaps they also wanted to show off and celebrate Scottish identity, history, and music. Highland culture played a forward role on this “edge of empire,” to borrow Adele Perry’s phrase,

72 Ibid., 28.
via the conduits of English merchant capital.\textsuperscript{73} The influence of the HBC fits patterns discussed by Colin G. Calloway, whereby Scots (and sometimes Irish) had close and often ambiguous relationships with First Nations peoples. Kindred in the sense that they were both colonized peoples on the fringes of empire, Scots and Irish often acted as front-line “footsoldiers” in close proximity with First Nations peoples, though often in hostile rather than peaceful arrangements.\textsuperscript{74}

What is striking is that George Simpson’s attempt to impress and impose involved sharing the novelty of these instruments with local First Nations. He was interested in entertaining and providing musical curiosities to hunters associated with the forts. Showing off their musical instruments, McDonald comments on an encounter with three Beaver Indians, who were “amused at everything they saw,” especially the “various musical instruments.”\textsuperscript{75} Perhaps we can interpret the engagement with musical instruments as resonating with the universality of sensual, immediate, and “deeper” modalities.\textsuperscript{76} Involving both listening and touching, what had initially functioned as imposing and intimidating had now become points of interest across which cultural interactions could occur.

These themes are repeated throughout Simpson’s journey. At Fort Dunvegan, where there had been violence in the years prior owing to alcohol, Simpson met with seven or eight local First Nations. Through his interpreter La Fleur, he discussed the disturbances, and they in response, “appeared much pleased with what is said to them.” Simpson then distributed “a little

\footnotesize{73 Adele Perry, \textit{On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
76 Constance Classen, \textit{The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch} (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012).}
tobacco, and a very weak drop of rum and water with sugar,” conforming to longstanding customs of providing drink, but here watering it down. Based on their reaction to the encounter, McDonald was convinced that the sonic displays made a big impact. It was “the sound [my emphasis] of the bugle, the bagpipes, Highland Piper in full dress, the musical suuff [snuff] box, &c., [that] excited in them emotions of admiration and wonder.” On another occasion, Simpson stopped to meet the “principal Indians of the place,” and McDonald reports “exhibiting before them our various musical performances, &c., to their utter "amusement."” After the music ended, an address was made to them through the interpreter and council began.

Clearly military instruments influenced the fur trade’s expansion westwards. Music was central to the diplomatic – commercial dealings between the Hudson’s Bay Company in the late 1820s and wide-ranging groups of First Nations peoples. Drums, bugles and bagpipes featured prominently in the sonic encounter. They gradually lost their disciplinary associations, providing music for dances, and serving as objects of novelty during cross-cultural encounters, the instruments of colonial warfare were repurposed to serve the distinct culture that developed during the fur trade. While they may have been imported into northern North America in greatest numbers during the period of intensive warfare from the Seven Years’ War until the War of 1812, they also served a conspicuous role in Governor George Simpson’s encounters and interactions with First Nations peoples. What during wartime issued signals and served to rally troops was here repurposed in ceremonials to impress, and in recreation to amuse. It may have been that Simpson thought it wise to employ the bagpipes as a way to foster unity between the previously rival employees of the NWC and HBC, whose upper echelons consisted largely of Highland Scots who now had to work together. Yet they were also clearly meant to have an

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78 Ibid., 26.
impact on First Nations peoples as well. Drums are the instruments that most bridged the cultural divide, serving as a potent conduit of cross-cultural interactions, and in some cases, as among the Anishinaabeg on Manitoulin Island or the Cree of James Bay, influencing or simply being incorporated into indigenous musical culture.
Dances of Diplomacy: The Calumet and War

In the tumultuous and uncertain era of the mid-late eighteenth century, dancing constituted more than simple recreation. Beyond the frontier of settlement, the stakes were high for participating or not participating in dances. The British officials and merchants who hoped for an uncontested welcome in the Great Lakes after the conquest of the St. Lawrence were rebuked by First Nations peoples in 1763, with the message that trade would not occur unless peaceful relations, alliances, and proper conduct was first established.¹ English fur traders had to adopt the same diplomatic avenues as colonial agents, including “calumet” or “peace-pipe” rituals and war dances. While all pipes used in First Nations’ ceremonies were considered sacred, the “calumet” refers specifically to the “sacred pipe” complex, which involved joining an elaborate feathered stem and a carved bowl.² As fur traders pushed westwards, new varieties of these forms were encountered. Yet they arrived with pre-conceived expectations based largely on eastern First Nations groups such as the Iroquois, who accompanied fur traders in considerable numbers.³ Cole Harris has asserted that while western First Nations groups did not always seek outright military alliances before trade, they would not trade with enemies. Gift-giving and

¹ This topic has seen a recent revival of interest. See Gregory Evans Dowd, War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, & the British Empire (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002); Richard Middleton, Pontiac’s War: its causes, course, and consequences (New York: Routledge, 2007); Keith R. Widder, Beyond Pontiac’s shadow: Michilimackinac and the Anglo-Indian War of 1763 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013); the classic work on the subject is Francis Parkman, History of the Conspiracy of Pontiac: and the war of the North American tribes against the English colonies: after the conquest of Canada (Boston: C.C. Little and J. Brown, 1851).
smoking ceremonies were pursued because they established “a favourable political climate for trade.”\(^4\) This chapter examines how music and dance played a role in the establishment of proper relationships. While calumet and war dances ostensibly signaled opposite intentions in the context of colonial diplomacy and warfare, in the fur trade they shared a similar role in strengthening alliances and bolstering social relations.

5.1 Calumet-Pipe Dances

The historiography of the fur trade has shifted towards a focus on indigenous diplomatic institutions. In the 1960s and 1970s gift-giving was recognized as a central tenet of trading relationships, commencing an intense and prolonged debate over whether or not this, and other non-material aspects of trade disrupted the basic economic analysis of supply and demand.\(^5\) This was the “substantivist” position that challenged the “formalist” as outlined by economic historians such as Harold Innis. Gender studies and the cultural turn have led to a closer examination of other non-material aspects of these relationships. Sylvia Van Kirk describes marriages à la façon du pays (“according to the custom of the country”) adopting various local traditions of the peoples in the northwest and generally sharing two features: the fur trader had to provide a gift to the girl’s relations, and he had to go through peace-pipe or calumet rituals with her parents and/or close relations to “seal the alliance.”\(^6\) These observations are made about the


fur trade in the northwest, yet historians have more often located the calumet’s importance in the
Great Lakes region during the colonial era.

The calumet has been recognized as playing an important role across a wide variety of
political and diplomatic engagements between European colonies and First Nations peoples.
Gilles Havard describes the calumet’s centrality in the proceedings of the Great Peace of
Montreal in 1701, where smoking ceremonies and attendant rituals provided the framework for
diplomatic negotiations. He cites the accounts of La Potherie and Charlevoix to suggest that the
calamet originated on the plains in the seventeenth century.7 Daniel Richter and others have
discussed the calumet as a crucial component of Iroquois diplomatic practices, both with other
First Nations and Europeans.8 In Richard White’s conception of the Great Lakes as a “middle
ground,” calumet ceremonies are central to the expectations and cultural (mis)understandings
between Europeans and First Nations peoples. He describes the calumet as a widely recognized
symbol, with pipes decorated for various functions, including peace and war. Intermarriages and
adoptions formed one route to alliances and mutually beneficial relations with First Nations
peoples, while the calumet was "part of a more overtly political and ceremonial way of achieving
peace." In White’s formulation, the importance of the calumet can “hardly be overstated.”9
Locating its origins to the west of the Mississippi with the Pawnee, it subsequently spread to the

7 See Gilles Havard, The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native diplomacy in the seventeenth century,
translated by Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001),
224. To establish this claim he cites La Potherie and Charlevoix: La Potherie, Histoire, 2:14; Charlevoix, Histoire,
8 Francis Jennings, William Fenton, Mary A. Druke, and David R. Miller eds., The History and Culture of Iroquois
Diplomacy: An Interdisciplinary Guide to the Treaties of the Six Nations and Their League (Syracuse: Syracuse
University Press, 1985); Daniel K. Richter and James. H. Herrell eds., Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois
and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987); Daniel
Richter, The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization
(Chapel Hill, 1992), 30-49.
9 Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815 (New
Sioux, Illinois, and other Great Lakes peoples during the seventeenth century, and was eventually adopted by the Iroquois "in the form of the Eagle Dance." This musical thread is not pursued in the historiography, even while suggesting its centrality to diplomatic maneuverings. These varied historiographic references invite a closer investigation of the calumet ceremony.

“Pipe dance” songs were first recorded in the early twentieth century. They were collected by the pioneers of the emerging field of ethnomusicology. Alice Fletcher, Frances Densmore, and Marius Barbeau transcribed and recorded these songs from the Pawnee, Chippewa, Huron-Wyandot, and other groups. In its basic form, the keeper of the pipe removed it from its case, and while performing prayers and chants offered it first towards the sky, then down towards the earth, and then to the four cardinal points before dancing it around a central fire. The pipe was then passed on to the next person, who repeated the ritual. Amongst Plains peoples it is described slightly differently. There, the dance is said to belong to certain individuals for life. The women provided a feast, while afterwards the men danced. Drummers and singers provided the music for the dance owner, who, holding the peace-pipe or calumet, danced two or three times around the fire. Smoking formed an interlude, with tobacco lit before

the dances continued, eventually ending with everyone joining the dancer for three circumventions around the circle.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet a deep description of the calumet pipe ceremony, with its various associated materials, songs, and dances, was first provided by Alice Fletcher amongst the Pawnee. She recognized this ceremony’s importance and widespread distribution, but from the statements of Omaha, Ponka, and Dakota informants “was led to believe that among the Pawnees this ceremony could be found still preserved in its entirety.”\textsuperscript{13} It was known by different names: to the Pawnee, it was “Ruktaraïwariûs,” referring to the shaking or waving of the sacred feathered stems: the Osages’ name translated as “bringing the drum,” while the Omahas’ was “to sing with.”\textsuperscript{14} Fletcher settled on the term \textit{Hako} to describe the entire ceremonial complex, derived from the composite word \textit{hakkowpirus}, or drum. The ritual involved the coming together of two groups, commonly two clans. One side took control of the ceremony and whose leader was designated “Father,” while the other secured the site and suitable accommodations and whose leader was designated as the “Son.” The two sides enacted prescribed, complementary roles through numerous stages of ritual, each of which was accompanied by songs. During Fletcher’s research she collected almost a hundred associated with this ceremony.\textsuperscript{15} It was typically held in the springtime because they were, according to one of Fletcher’s informants, it represented a

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 17-18.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 19-24.
prayer “for the gift of life, of strength, of plenty, and of peace, so we must pray when life is stirring everywhere.”

Recent scholarship stresses the intertwining of social and spiritual considerations in explaining the significance of pipe ceremonies in First Nations cultures. The rituals associated with the calumet can be seen to mediate between groups of people and simultaneously with the spirit-world. Jordan Paper describes the “sacred pipe” as one of the “pan-Indian” rituals that originated before the arrival of Europeans, and whose materials and procedures are highly symbolic within First Nations’ cosmologies. The bowl of the pipe is interpreted “a sacrificial vessel that itself is a miniature cosmos,” with pinches of tobacco forming the sacrifice. The smoke is the offering, with the stem directing it towards points of symbolic significance. The ritual embodied a kind of “cosmos of social relationships,” radiating outward from the self to family, clan, nation, animal relations and finally to the outermost powerful spirits: the four directions, winds, the sky, and the earth/sea. The pipe bowl is interpreted as feminine, and with few exceptions is made of stone or clay, the substance the female earth, while the stem is made from trees that point up towards the sky, and is considered masculine. Only when the stem is inserted into the bowl is the pipe deemed potent: “in their conjoining, plants and living creatures are created.”

16 Ibid, 24.
19 Ibid.
Early in the seventeenth century, the French discovered the calumet because of its diplomatic potency. According to the account of Bacqueville de la Potherie, chronicler of New France, the calumet pipe commanded respect and had the power to halt warriors on the warpath. It played an important role for French explorer Nicholas Perrot, who describes how the calumet was “sung” to honour important individuals such as visiting war chiefs and diplomatic convoys. Indeed, this is how he was received at the west end of Lake Michigan at villages of Miamis and Mascoutens in the late 1660s. At a distance the Miamis were first terrified by the sound of his gun, with the women and children fleeing into the woods. On approaching, “many gesticulations” were “presented” along with the calumet, and Perrot was led to the cabin of a prominent warrior where all the men “danced the calumet to the sound of the drum.” At the next village he was presented again with a calumet, which the “chief” pointed in all directions. La Potherie interpreted this gesture as favourable to the French cause, assuming it was “to assure the Frenchman of the joy which all in the village felt as his arrival.” Yet it is likely that this was a gesture offering the sacrificial smoke to the four directions, as part of the broader ceremony and protocol for welcoming newcomers.21

Michael Witgen has recently explored how ceremonies were utilized to symbolically transform Frenchmen from strangers into relatives.22 While many of the spiritual meanings of these ceremonies were misunderstood by the French, on a basic level they were seen to represent goodwill and undertaken to secure alliances. Calumet ceremonies became institutionalized in French diplomatic maneuverings with Great Lakes peoples in the seventeenth century. La

21 Ibid., 85.
Potherie describes how the distinguished men from the Miami villages appeared with their calumets:

they sang, as they approached, the calumet song, which they uttered in cadence. When they reached the Frenchmen, they continued their songs, meanwhile bending their knees, in turn, almost to the ground. They presented the calumet to the sun, with the same genuflexions, and then they came back to the principal Frenchman, with many gesticulations. Some played upon instruments the calumet songs, and others sang them, holding the calumet in the mouth without lighting it. A war chief raised Perot upon his shoulders, and, accompanied by all the musicians, conducted him to the village.23

This grand reception was interpreted on a basic level as expressing welcome and honour. The next day the French delegation gave the Miamis a gun and a kettle as a sign of their gratitude. The connection between the calumet and material exchanges was thus established early in trading and colonial relations in the western Great Lakes.

On their voyage down the Mississippi in 1673, Joliet and Marquette had the opportunity to observe in detail a full calumet ceremony among various “Illinois” peoples. Perhaps the most comprehensive account from the seventeenth century is a section of their memoirs entitled “Of the Character of the Illinois; of their Habits and Customs; and of the Esteem that they have for the Calumet, or Tobacco-pipe, and of the Dance they perform in its Honor.”24 This description speaks of the dances as honouring the pipe itself, which was treated as a form of deity.25 At the same time, a visitor’s arrival was cause for its enactment:

The calumet dance, which is very famous among these peoples, is performed solely for important reasons; sometimes to strengthen peace, or to unite themselves for some great war; at other times, for public rejoicing. Sometimes they thus do honor to a nation who are invited to be present; sometimes it is danced at the reception of some important personage, as if they wished to give him the diversion of a ball or a comedy. In winter, the ceremony takes place in a cabin; in summer, in the open fields.

25 Ibid., 245-47.
Serving many functions and employed in a variety of situations, La Potherie describes calumet ceremonies as prevalent in the fringes between the eastern and plains regions. The setting for the ceremony was carefully chosen in the shade of a tree, where a large painted mat of rushes was spread, serving as a platform for the warriors to posit their weapons and medicine bundles in reverence. As the warriors filed into the circle to sit, they “salute the Manitou” by inhaling smoke and blowing on it as if “offering to it incense.” No less than a three-stage ceremony followed, beginning with each individual taking hold of the calumet and dancing with it to the rhythm of the drumming and singing:

Every one, at the outset, takes the calumet in a respectful manner, and, supporting it with both hands, causes it to dance in cadence, keeping good time with the air of the songs. He makes it execute many differing figures; sometimes he shows it to the whole assembly, turning himself from one side to the other. After that, he who is to begin the dance appears in the middle of the assembly, and at once continues this. Sometimes he offers it to the sun, as if he wished the latter to smoke it; sometimes he inclines it toward the earth; again, he makes it spread its wings, as if about to fly; at other times, he puts it near the mouths of those present, that they may smoke. The whole is done in cadence.

The second part consists of a mock-combat dance carried out to the sound of the drum. The man with the calumet invites a warrior to equip himself with bows, arrows and war-hatchets while he has nothing to defend himself with but the calumet. Joliet and Marquette found this aspect of the dance “very pleasing,” as it was performed “so well, with slow and measured steps, and to the rhythmic sound of the voices and drums.” The third and final part of the ceremony involves the calumet holder making a speech about his achievements in war, victories and captives taken, before passing around the calumet once more. He then receives a gift from the host nation, in this case a “fine robe of beaver-skin,” as a “token of the everlasting peace that is

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26 Ibid., 245-6.
27 Ibid., 246.
to exist between the two peoples."²⁸ Joliet and Marquette deemed this ceremony with its attendant music so significant that they devoted an entire section of their account to it and provided musical notation. It survives as among the earliest and fullest European transcription of North American First Nations’ music. Unlike those made by the Jesuits and other religious orders, the motivation here demonstrates the concerns of alliance and trade rather than fund-raising or conversion. It is presented with an earnest appraisal of its shortcomings, as the music on which it is based possessed “a certain turn which cannot be sufficiently expressed by note, but which nevertheless constitutes all its grace.”

Fig. 2. Calumet Song Transcribed by Jolliet and Marquette, *Early Narratives of the Northwest*, edited by Louise Phelps Kellogg, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917), 247-8.

²⁸ Ibid., 247-8.
The French explorer-traders Perrot, Joliet, and Marquette demonstrated their keen ears and keen eyes for the calumet dance not solely out of ethnographic curiosity. They recognized it was a crucial aspect of peace-making and diplomacy. With these French accounts in mind, Richard White interprets the calumet ceremony as a “conscious framework for peace, alliance, exchange, and free movement” in the western Great Lakes. One of New France’s crowning diplomatic accomplishments was the 1701 Great Peace of Montreal, in which calumets and smoking ceremonies were integrated into councils, displays, and exchanges. Its chroniclers recounted the prevalence of various indigenous diplomatic forms: “in an atmosphere of exuberance and reconciliation, Native people and Frenchmen exchanged goods and gifts, displayed wampum belts, smoked the peace pipe, and danced and feasted to establish a lasting alliance.”

At the time of the rapid expansion of the British trade in the mid-late eighteenth century, the calumet was still central to diplomatic protocol amongst First Nations of the western Great Lakes. Seven Years’ War veteran Robert Rogers described how the “calumet or pipe of peace” was revered “in many transactions, relative both to war and peace.” Pipe-stems decorated so that on presentation to another nation, intentions of either war or peace were evident from the feathers alone. Due to their sacred esteem they were employed in religious ceremonies and “all treaties,” considered “as a witness between the parties; or rather as an instrument by which they invoke the sun and moon to witness their sincerity, and to be, as it were, guarantees of the treaty

31 Ibid., 111.
32 Robert Rogers, *A Concise Account of North America: Containing a Description of the Several British Colonies on That Continent, Including the Islands of Newfoundland, Cape Breton, &c. as to Their Situation. Also of the Interior or Westerly Parts of The Country, Upon the Rivers St. Laurence, the Mississipi, Chrstino, and the Great Lakes. To Which Is Subjoined, an Account of the Several Nations and Tribes of Indians Residing in Those Parts, as to Their Customs, Manners, Government, Numbers, &c., Containing Many Useful and Entertaining Facts Never Before Treated Of*, 1765 ed. (London: The Author, J. Millan, 1765), 224.
between them.” Rogers was sensitive to the materials used, with the bowl made of carved soft red stone, and the stem made of “cane, elder, or some kind of light wood,” and activated symbolically when connected. 33 In council negotiations the calumet was understood to enhance the veracity of words spoken, serving as a sacred witness, or higher authority.

Christopher Gist, one of the fur traders who established posts in the Ohio valley in the 1750s, reported encountering the ceremonialism of the pipe. He was received in a town of the “Twigtwees,” or as the French called them, Miamees, with a salutation that he interpreted as a sign of honour, just as Perrot had a century earlier: “After firing a few Guns and Pistols, & smoking in the Warriours Pipe, [they] came to invite Us to the Town (according to their Custom of inviting and welcoming Strangers and Great Men).” 34 Gist was greeted with the calumet and its attendant ceremonialism just as French explorers had been a century earlier. Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) was well aware of the calumet’s significance on his journey west in 1763, mentioning in his journal where pipe-stone was quarried on the Ottawa River. During his tense reception with First Nations peoples in the Great Lakes, Henry sat quietly “in ceremony” when “Mina’va’va’na,” an Anishinaabeg chief loyal to the French entered into the solemn environment. 35 In this fragile situation, the calumet ceremony provided a space for Henry to engage in diplomatic negotiations with an otherwise hostile enemy, shielded by the ceremonialism of the pipe.

To the west and southwest of Lake Michigan, British traders pushed onto the Illinois, Mississippi and Missouri rivers where the calumet dance was a primary method of peace

33 Ibid., 224-5.
34 Christopher Gist, Christopher Gist’s Journals: With Historical, Geographical and Ethnological Notes and Biographies of His Contemporaries, edited by William M. Darlington, (Pittsburgh: J.R. Weldin, 1893), 47.
making, serving a role somewhat comparable to a flag of truce. Calumet ceremonies were what Jonathan Carver was expecting as he travelled west from Lake Michigan towards the Mississippi in 1766 with a copy of the French Father Hennepin’s journal. While navigating the St. Pierre [Minnesota] river, Carver encountered canoes that fled at his approach. Nervous about an ambush, and considering it "necessary to proceed with caution," he travelled up the river with the "pipe of peace . . . fixed at the head of [his] canoe." 36 When Carver reached a village of over one thousand Dakota Siouan speaking people, he was taken by the hand and "according to the custom that universally prevails among every Indian nation, began to smoke the pipe of peace." 37 Carver relates the activities of overwintering, describing how his participation in hunting and war parties facilitated learning their language and customs. 38 In many ways, the calumet ceremony was one of the first of a long series of diplomatic and cultural transitions as Carver transitioned to life among First Nations’ peoples.

In a chapter dedicated entirely to the subject, Carver asserts the prevalence of dancing, as the First Nations from his observation "never meet on any public occasion" without it, and when not engaged in war or hunting both men and women tended to amuse themselves by dancing every night. 39 He identifies four specific categories of dance as "the Pipe or Calumate Dance, the War Dance, the Marriage Dance, and the Dance of the Sacrifice." Arranged by function, Carver provides only a brief description of each, stating that while "the movements in every one of these are dissimilar. . . it is almost impossible to convey any idea of the points in which they are

37 Ibid., 38-9.
39 Ibid.
Nonetheless he describes how "The Pipe Dance is the principal, and the most pleasing to a spectator of any of them," owing to it "being the least frantic, and the movement of it the most graceful. It is but on particular occasions that it is used; as when ambassadors from an enemy arrive to treat of peace, or when strangers of eminence pass through their territories."\textsuperscript{41} It is apparent from these descriptions that the solemn and honourary ceremonialism was appreciated by Carver. He taps into language commonly used to describe the courtly manner of the aristocracy, obsessed as they were with maintaining proper “body carriage.”\textsuperscript{42} Being the most “graceful” of the dances, the calumet dance was deemed perhaps the most pleasing to the tastes of some fur traders, yet the servants and voyageurs of the companies may have had a different appreciation. Certainly the calumet dance would have been one of the most familiar to fur traders working in the late eighteenth century.

John Long was one of the early English traders amongst the Anishinaabeg peoples north of Lake Superior. There, he wrote of the importance of the calumet as a “symbol of peace.” He describes its material composition and symbolic significance in detail.

The calumet, or Indian pipe, which is much larger than that the Indians usually smoke, is made of marble, stone, or clay, either red, white, or black, according to the custom of the nation, but the red is mostly esteemed; the length of the handle is about four feet and a half, and made of strong cane or wood, decorated with feathers of various colours, with a number of twists of female hair interwoven in different forms; the head is finely polished; two wings are fixed to it, which make it in appearance not unlike to Mercury’s wand. This calumet is the symbol of peace, and the Savages hold it in such estimation, that a violation of any treaty where it has been introduced, would in their opinion be attended with the greatest misfortunes.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 268-9.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
The calumet was deemed central to treaty-making and recognized for its great symbolism and power. Montreal fur traders often negotiated its boundaries with the advice of their French Canadian voyageur crews. North West Company voyageur Jean-Baptiste Perrault was witness in 1788 to a delicate meeting between Sauteux (Anishinaabeg) and a band of Siouan speakers at Mackinac. Tensions at this encounter were high, with violence threatening. Yet the ceremonial structure and protection of the calumet allowed for a constructive interaction. Perrault relates how speeches and "harrangues," were exchanged before the calumet dances began.

La Bécasse prit le tambour, le mit en ordre et il arrangea un calumet. Les Scieux commencèrent à danser le calumet et ensuite ils dansèrent des découvertes après quoi ils présentèrent le tambour et le calumet aux Sauteux qui en firent autant, mais avec beaucoup plus de gâces.

After this ceremony had gone on for some time, a French man named Desnoyer observed that the Sioux watching the Sauteux were starting to evidence antagonistic facial expressions, muttering "quelques paroles mal placées." Concerned about a confrontation, Desnoyer advised stopping the dance, after which he "prit le tambour" and a sullen silence reigned for the remainder of the night. Confrontation was here avoided.44 This suggests that the calumet dance, in its more extended form, served as a common framework of interaction between potentially hostile adversaries. Yet even under the ceremonial auspices, the potential for hostility remained. Earlier in 1786-7 around Prairie du Chien, Perrault witnessed an interrupted calumet ceremony which occurred when someone broke the ceremonial expectations. A young Sioux warrior “refusa d'accepter le calumet, ce qui arrêta la cérémonie un moment.”45 Reprimanded by a chief in his band to “Apprends que ce lieu est sacré; tu devois faire tes réflexions avant de partir," the

45 Ibid., 64-5.
ceremony continued and peace was secured between the diverse group of Anishinaabe, Sauk and Fox, and Sioux.  

Admitted as a clerk into the North West Company in 1784, Peter Grant served in the Lac La Pluie and Red River departments. His description of the Sauteux Indians, the western Anishinaabeg people on the edge of the Great Plains, is one of the most ethnographically detailed from the era. Categorizing the "grand calumet dance" as one of their three basic types of dance, Grant asserts that it was "only performed on some extraordinary occasion:"

The dancer is provided with a rattle in his right hand and a war pipe stem in his left. This stem is curiously ornamented with feathers of different colours. . . He holds the stem in a horizontal position, keeping exact time with the song and drum, shaking his rattle in every direction, and working himself up by degrees into many strange and uncommon posture, stamping furiously along, with his body sometimes parallel to the ground, twisting himself and turning in an astonishing manner, and, yet, always keeping time with the music. At intervals, he brandishes his stem or rattle towards some spectators in such quick and masterly a manner as would make a mere stranger imagine that he actually wished to devour or swallow him up. The performer finishes by presenting his implements to another person, which is always considered a compliment, and in this manner the dance continues so long as there are parties willing to join.

From Grant’s perspective, the dancer’s twists and turns were "astonishing." His adjectives of "strange" and “uncommon” indicate his casting as exotic and tendency to “other” the subjects of the dance. While these descriptive adjectives may serve to distance him from the “barbaric” elements of the spectacles, his use of “masterly” demonstrates a degree of appreciation. That a fur trader had in-depth insights into this form of indigenous diplomatic ritual suggests its importance as an adjunct to trade. This custom led to appraisals of both functionality and aesthetics from fur traders such as Grant who witnessed their enactment over years of residency in the northwest.

46 Ibid., 64-66.
When the Montreal merchants extended forts across the northern plains, fur traders brought pre-existing expectations of what the calumet ceremony entailed. It came as quite a revelation to some fur traders that the First Nations in the northwest did not practice the calumet song and dance. Peter Grant observed from his years serving in the Lac La Pluie and Red River departments that "the northern tribes, especially the Maskegons [Swampy Cree] and those about Lac Lapluie and River Ouinipic seem to have entirely neglected it, but the Pilleurs [Chippewa – Anishinabe] and their southerly neighbours take great merit in their superior knowledge of this dance." Grant’s statement conveys cultural and class attitudes while fundamentally making a musicological judgment. This same point was re-iterated by other observers in Upper Canada such as George Heriot, who described how calumet smoking ceremonies among Iroquois and First Nations to the northwest were “practised with much solemnity,” but were unaccompanied by songs and dances. The eastern First Nations engaged with the calumet musically, exporting this culture into the plains, subarctic, northwest, and plateau - basin areas through the conduits of the fur trade.

On travelling north through Lake Winnipeg Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) noted the location where pipe-stone was found. While he was establishing trading relations with Cree bands westwards along the North Saskatchewan River in the 1770s, he describes numerous calumet ceremonies observed only in silence except for the “Indian cry” that served as the departing salute. Many groups in the northwest, from the Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Saulteux, Plains, Swampy, and Subarctic Cree had traditional smoking ceremonies into which the fur

48 Ibid., 336-7.
49 George Heriot, Travels Through the Canadas, Containing a Description of the Picturesque Scenery on Some of the Rivers and Lakes; with an Account of the Productions, Commerce, and Inhabitants of Those Provinces. To Which Is Subjoined a Comparative View of the Manners and Customs of Several of the Indian Nations of North and South America, 1st ed. (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1971), 472-3.
50 Henry, Travels & Adventures, 252-3.
51 Ibid., 259-261, 286.
traders tapped. Among some Dene groups, however, it seems that smoking ceremonies were entirely absent. On July 5th 1789, Alexander Mackenzie encountered five families of perhaps thirty people from two different tribes, Slave and Dog Rib, reporting that his party enticed them to smoke, “tho' it was evident they did not know the use of Tobacco. We likewise gave them some grog to drink, but I believe they accepted of those Civilities more through Fear than Inclination.”

Yet in his explorations to the northwest of Lake Athabasca, Mackenzie also encountered a chief who ceremonially opened his medicine bag and smoked from his sacred stem. The dances described in such detail around the western Great Lakes, Mississippi and Missouri rivers were not found in these northerly latitudes.

While pushing westwards across the plains, however, fur traders encountered new varieties of calumet songs and dances. In 1802 the Scottish born Charles McKenzie joined the Montreal trade as an apprentice clerk for McTavish, Frobisher and Company, one of the firms of the North West Company. While serving under Charles Chaboillez in the Fort Dauphin department, he was sent with clerk François-Antoine Larocque to the Mandan and Gros Ventre (A’ani) on the upper Missouri River. McKenzie’s account is extremely valuable because it includes both his preliminary discussions with fur trader Mr. Gissom about the pipe as a method of extending and securing trading relationships, followed by an account of the engagements themselves. It shows the degree to which elaborate calumet dances formed diplomatic protocol for nations not included by ethnomusicologists.

McKenzie first relates how Mr. Gissom "informed me that he was going to the Shawyens en Pipe" because he was sure of getting better returns than if he traded his few articles with the familiar groups in the area. Mr. Gissom asked McKenzie if he intends to "push them a Pipe," to

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53 Ibid., 136-8.
which he replied that he knew "nothing concerning pipes... but if they are not accustomed to trade, I can get a better bargain." "On the contrary," replied Mr. Gissom, "they'll laugh at you." McKenzie asked Mr. Gissom which "goods he intended to put upon the pipe," to which he replied a gun, horse, ax, fathom of cloth, one hundred balls, and powder. The metaphors of trading *en pipe* and of putting goods "upon the pipe" are here evidenced as part of the parleyance of fur traders, operating with pre-conceived notions about proper protocols for the pipe and extending these to new nations.

Upon approaching the Shawyen's [Cheyennes] Camp the group stopped to prepare their pipes: the Rattle Snake and Mr. Gissom each took his intended Pipe and filled it with all the Cerimonies that superstition could invent then cutting a green branch of Chock-Cherry and passing it through a piece of fat dried Meat the same which they planted in the ground along side of each Pipe. This being done, a deep silence reigned for some minutes, when the Rattle Snake burst out in a kind of a lamentation or a lamentable song, which lasted for a quarter of an hour, thus sung, a heavy murmure was heard at every fire, as a thanksgiving. Then the R't Snake gave his pipe to a lad who sat along side of him, and who after seeming to make the four elements smoke without lighting the pipe made a very hearty harangue in which he mentioned all the feetes the Rattle Snake had ever accomplished, and implored the pity and the assistance of all the living animals, owls, and insects. All these ceremonies being over and the pipe and green branch carefully put by, Mr. Gissom was desired to go through the same ceremony, but Monsieur declined making a lamentation... After making a grim face he hung down his head in deep meditation, and here I was obliged to leave the fire side for shame and laughter.

Mr. Gissom had sat down with the pipe alongside the Rattle Snake, but could not proceed with the suitable ceremonies, harangues, or songs, perhaps not taking the ceremony seriously. He suggested that he should be exempted, and instead "act like the Father of all the white people (meaning the King) when he made peace with his Children." Yet this suggestion of exemption on the basis of race and class incurred only shame. McKenzie called it a "bold undertaking in pushing the Pipe to the Shawyens." He suggests the complexity of the ceremony by stating that

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55 Ibid.
"If I have erred in this harrangue or from the beginning of these ceremonies, it is to be omitting a thousand absurdities which I was so much accustomed to hear every day."

Despite Charles McKenzie's reluctance to describe these ceremonies, he recounts how the following morning he departed with the Rattle Snake for the neighbouring camp. Their impending arrival was notified by two Cheyennes who ran ahead.

we began our slow pace with the Rattle Snake and Mons'r Gissom, each with his pipe in one hand and the Branch of Chockcherry with the fat Meat on, in the other. - walking before us, and singing a lamentable song. The Branch and Meat an Emblem of Peace and Plenty; and the Pipe that of Social Union - Many were the ceremonies which we were obliged to observe.\textsuperscript{56}

Conveying their understanding of the symbolic qualities of the pipe as representing “Social Union,” and the chokecherry branch symbolizing peace and plenty, the fur traders were swept along with the ceremonial obligations. They followed the lead of their ally and interpreter the Rattle Snake who led their procession by singing the appropriate “lamentable song.” Their advance was met by the "Chief" of the next nation, who approached on a white horse with two hundred warriors. After embracing the Rattle Snake, the Chief led them the final three miles to their camp with "the pipe which he received in his right hand, the end of the stem pointed to the Camp and himself sung or lamenting all the way, in a language which none of us could understand."\textsuperscript{57} Here, McKenzie’s descriptions begin to resemble those made by Alice Fletcher about the Pawnee \textit{Hako}. At the camp, harrangues were made to prepare "for the reception of the Pipe and Dancers," and respectable men were selected from both sides "to execute every formal motion of the Pipe and adopted Son." Yet this also differs and extends beyond what Fletcher recorded. In this case, the "Son" was literally sent naked and crying to Le Borgne, his new master, who received him kindly and clothed him and performed numerous ceremonies with flowers, weeds, bull's heads, human skulls, bones, scalps and other items. Finally the Son "began

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 18.
to Dance le grand Calmneti, and some of the G. Ven'trs came with small articles to trade and lay them down."58 This passage indicates the similarities between calumet and adoption ceremonies, as well as their correlation with trade. Other aspects such as the nudity, human bones, and scalps are features that escape the mention of ethnographers around the turn of the twentieth century. Yet these may have contributed additional layers of meaning and significance to the dances and ceremonies. It is clear that this event was part of establishing necessary social relationships before trading could begin. This is significant because material exchanges were the ultimate goal of fur traders, and the calumet dance proved a crucial entryway to establishing peaceful and proper relations and trading relationships. The associated ceremonialism, songs, and dances had to be navigated by fur traders, as the calumet formed a major component of the alliance-making process for various nations to the west of the Great Lakes.

For the Montreal traders, calumets were not merely exotic materials encountered in Native hands. In a North West Company Journal from 1786 (probably Cuthbert Grant Senior’s), trade goods are listed for Île-à-la-Crosse, with “Calumet” priced at six livres.59 On the Athabasca River, listed in this same journal “Pierre à calumet” is referenced as a known location, perhaps where pipe-stone was quarried.60 Peter Fidler’s entry from May 24th, 1805 describes how a group of Cree were going to hunt “above the pipe stone” near Cumberland House, and three days later he himself notes in his journal how he reached “the Pipe Stone.”61 While these references lack specificity, it is clear that locations from Grand Calumet Island on the Ottawa River to various locations across the northwest were known for their associations with the calumet. Perhaps their

58 Ibid., 35-6.
60 Ibid, 187.
names were derived from traditional sites for ceremonies, or as locations where pipe-stone
provided material for bowls. Whether or not the ceremony was associated merely with smoking
rituals, as it was for groups in the northern plains and western subarctic, or whether it was as in
the central plains accompanied by elaborate songs and dances with ritualized roles of “Father”
and “Son” playing out in elaborate ceremonies of peace-making and renewal, the calumet was
central to the expansion and establishment of the fur trade in northwestern North America.

5.2 War Dances

It was not the ceremonies of peace, but rather those of war that were most commented on
in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Euro-American observers. The genre has been
interpreted through the often-antagonistic filter of missionaries and Euro-American settlers,
while musicologists were able to collect examples of war songs only many years after warfare
had ended. Yet songs and dances of war loom prominently in popular literary genres of the
eighteenth century: captivity narratives, travel accounts, soldier’s stories, and conversion
narratives. Each genre readily drew on sensationalist descriptions of war and scalp dances to
emphasize the Indian’s “savage” nature. As Richard Cullen Rath has argued, “by saying that the
Indian howled, he placed him outside the realm of the civil, in the “howling wilderness.””

While war dances and their attendant “war whoops” were depicted in two dimensional terms by
some observers, fur traders described them in a variety of situations outside of the context of
war. Rather than serving as a firm line distinguishing Euro-Americans from First Nations, war
songs and dances contributed considerably to the cross-cultural interactions with fur traders.

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Musicologists discovered ongoing traditions of war songs while conducting fieldwork in the early twentieth century. Frances Densmore describes the war songs of the Anishinaabeg, “Miga’diwin’ina’gumo’win,” as including a particularly wide range of material. She acknowledges from the outset the many different kinds songs that were employed in the war dance, for inciting war, on the warpath, concerning the deeds of warriors, and for the scalp dance. The basic features of the war dance include a drumbeat in even strokes. For the scalp dance an accented stroke is preceded by an unaccented stroke about one-third its length. Although Densmore’s melodic analysis has been critiqued because she adjusts recorded tones to approximate notes on the piano, her rhythmic analysis is more detailed and nuanced. She demonstrates that the tempo of the voice is often entirely unrelated to the beat of the drum: yet these distinct rhythms are maintained steadily throughout. War songs were not anonymous or equally interchangeable in all situations; rather, they catered to their owner and specific context of usage. Densmore recorded a song to be sung by warriors of the Loon clan or dodem before starting on the warpath. Another was for an early departure, containing the lyrics “I will start on my journey before noon, Before I am seen.” Some of the Anishinaabeg’s war songs were originally learned from the Sioux, for instance a song honoring the exploits of a warrior named Little Eagle. Interestingly, even though they were enemies, the Sioux composed the song in his honour, where it was retained on the White Earth reserve in what is now Northern Minnesota. This demonstrates that war songs spanned nations and culture areas, fostering both antagonism and goodwill.

63 Densmore, Chippewa Music, vol. 1, 137.
64 Ibid., 138.
65 Ibid., 142-3.
66 Ibid., 140-141.
Historian Richard Cullen Rath has discussed how war songs and dances formed a broad cross-cultural ceremonialism that helped seal alliances between different First Nations peoples. In his analysis, war songs served as active diplomacy. Yet how war songs and dances were represented depends on the nature of the primary source. War songs represented fierce expressions of individual identity, with the re-enactment of personal military exploits in stylized performances that resembled theatrical displays. Undoubtedly, war dances etched themselves most firmly into the Euro-American consciousness as companions of the widely read accounts of frontier “Indian atrocities.” While the historical context of warfare and captivity produced the often sensationalistic and popularly read primary accounts, those of fur traders reveal an understanding of the political applications of war dances. The Montreal fur trade expanded during the period when British diplomacy was controlled and administered personally by Sir William Johnson, a notorious figure for sponsoring and playing an active role in war dance ceremonies with the Iroquois. This culture of patronage and diplomatic maneuvering through presentations of war dances was carried into the northwest along with the Montreal fur trade. Fur traders and the considerable numbers of Iroquois who accompanied them continued the diplomatic applications of the war dance while navigating those of western First Nations groups.

The captivity narrative of James Smith is one of the most ethnographically rich from the colonial period. It provides detailed descriptions of Iroquois and Anishinaabeg war songs and

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67 Rath, How Early America Sounded, 154-159.
68 This genre dates to the late seventeenth century in English, but peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when collections of these accounts appeared. See John Slover and Dr. Knight, “Indian Atrocities: Narratives of the Perils and Sufferings of Dr. Knight and John Slover, Among the Indians, During the Revolutionary War, with Short Memoirs of Col. Crawford and John Slover,” in Captivity Tales (1867; repr. New York: The Arno Press, A New York Times Company, 1974); Peter Williamson, “A Faithful Narrative of the Sufferings of Peter Williamson, Who Settled near the Forks of the Delaware in Pennsylvania Having Been Taken by the Indians in His Own House, October 2d, 1754,” in Indian Captivities: Or, Life in the Wigwam; Being True Narratives of Captives Who Have Been Carried Away by the Indians, from the Frontier Settlements of the United States, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time, edited by Samuel G. Drake (Auburn: Derby & Miller; Buffalo: Derby, Orton & Mulligan, 1853).
dances during the Seven Years War. His account includes names, including one of the warrior chiefs named Tecanyaterighto. When about to depart with a war party, he performed the war dance and song along with his companions, consisting of both vocal and instrumental music.

Smith described the accompanying water-drum as "a short hollow gum, closed at one end, with water in it, and parchment stretched over the open end thereof, which they beat with one stick, and made a sound nearly like a muffled drum." All those who were going on the expedition gathered together, and one of the older men began to sing. He timed the music by beating on this drum . . . on this the warriors began to advance, or move forward in concert, like well-disciplined troops would march to the fife and drum. Each warrior had a tomahawk, spear, or war-mallet in his hand, and they all moved regularly towards the east, or the way they intended to go to war. At length they all stretched their tomahawks towards the Potomac, and giving a hideous shout or yell, they wheeled quick about, and danced in the same manner back.69

Suggesting the cohesive movements of the warriors moving "forward in concert" resembled infantry marching to the fife and drum, Smith made an analogy with more familiar European military traditions. What most distinguished this sonic display was the "hideous shout or yell" which signaled for the warriors to turn about and dance back towards the audience, with their tomahawks and spears drawn menacingly. Smith is careful to distinguish this “war dance,” from the ensuing "war-song," which took the form of individual expressions of valor as warriors cycled into the middle, chorused by the group:

only one sung at a time, in a moving posture, with a tomahawk in his hand, while all the other warriors were engaged in calling aloud he-uh, he-uh, which they constantly repeated while the war-song was going on. When the warrior that was singing had ended his song, he struck a war-post with his tomahawk, and with a loud voice told what warlike exploits he had done, and what he now intended to do, which were answered by the other warriors with loud shouts of applause. Some who had not before intended to go to war, at this time, were so animated by this


70 Ibid.
performance, that they took up the tomahawk and sung the war-song, which was answered with shouts of joy, as they were then initiated into the present marching company.\textsuperscript{71}

This formula of warriors striking the war-post with weapons to signal the commencement and finale of their own narratives of military exploits is something that would recur in various accounts. This display recruited additional warriors, not in the European manner of military parading or national anthems, but through the display of individual warriors expressing their personal "warlike exploits" while proclaiming their determination to attack. Imitating the movements of combat, they prepared psychologically while demonstrating and honing their physical abilities. The simplistic syllabic accompaniment *he-uh* bound warriors from different nations into participation. The entire group supported and applauded the accounts of personal deeds, promoting trust and cohesion between diverse warriors of different cultures, clans, and nations.

Cadwallader Colden observed war dances not from the perspective of a captive, but as an early colonial representative of the British. He published in 1747 *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada* after years of conducting councils and political negotiations with the Haudenosaunee, detailing the nature of their political organization, the clan system, the importance of elder sachems, as well as the centrality of wampum to diplomacy and alliance-making.\textsuperscript{72} Colden describes Iroquois war preparations as prominently featuring singing and dancing. The night before a war party departs, "they make a grand Feast, to this all the noted Warriors of the Nation are invited: and here they have their War Dance, to the Beat of a Kind of

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\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Cadwallader Colden, *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada, Which Are Dependent on the Province of New-York in America, and Are the Barrier Between the English and French in That Part of the World: with Accounts of Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws and Forms of Government*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Osborne, 1747), 1-5.
Kettle-drum.” This style of drum generally refers to those with a rounded back and held by a person or frame. This category of drum is associated in European warfare with horse drummers and especially the timpani. Yet “kettle-drum” in Colden’s account could also refer to a skin stretched over a pot or a kettle, opening the possibility that Colden is actually referring to a trade-good hybrid drum, or perhaps even the iconic water-drums of the Haudenosaunee.

The Warriors are seated in two Rows in the House, and each rises up in his Turn, and sings the great acts he has himself performed, and the Deeds of his Ancestors; and this is always accompanied with a Kind of a Dance, or rather Action, representing the Manner in which they were performed; and from Time to Time, all present join in a Chorus, applauding every notable Act.

As warriors cycled into the center singing, dancing, re-enacting their own military encounters as well as those of their ancestors, those present joined together in chorus to express their encouragement of each individual warrior. Colden's ethnographic detail reveals his interest and familiarity with war dances. He explicitly states that he and his men found them fascinating, even asking their First Nations' allies for demonstrations. “I have sometimes persuaded some of their young Indians to act these Dances, for our Diversion, and to shew us the Manner of them,” Colden writes, “on these Occasions, they have work'd themselves up to such a Pitch, that they have made all present uneasy.” Fascinating as they may have been, war dances could unnerve even the most experienced colonial soldiers.

War songs and dances were not only performed and witnessed, but they became central to the metaphoric language of diplomacy. As Nancy Shoemaker and others have pointed out, metaphor and figures of speech were essential tools in colonial diplomatic discourse, providing mutually intelligible symbols and promoting both common understandings as well as

73 Ibid., 6.
76 Ibid., 7.
misunderstandings. To "sing the war song" was adopted into British diplomatic parlance as signifying commitment to a military expedition. The soldier Jelles Fonda described how the Onondagas declined to sing the war song in 1760 but promised to sing it later at Oswego, signifying that only then would they then be ready for military engagement. Similarly in the journal of Robert Rogers from Detroit, on August 8th 1763, he described how only after a long council meeting were the Wyandots prevailed "on to sing the War Song." The British thus viewed the war song as a confirmation of alliance. Like an oath, it needed to be voiced publicly. In this case the war party seemed reluctant to sing, yet this was expected by the British as a demonstration of alliance and commitment to go to war.

Someone who became very accustomed to the use of songs as metaphors of diplomacy was the influential Irish-born Indian agent William Johnson. To foster the “chain of friendship,” Johnson pursued a number of diplomatic avenues from the 1750s until his death in 1774. These were particularly significant, as Robert S. Allen has pointed out, because Johnson exerted a “pivotal influence” on eighteenth century British Indian policy. As Fintan O’Toole has recently argued, unlike other colonial traders and agents, Johnson rather uniquely grasped the “ritual dimension of exchange in Indian cultures.” Although the Irish may well have shared a spiritual and emotional kinship with First Nations peoples, as O’Toole argues, or shared sympathy as being a marginalized people on the periphery of the British empire, these factors alone do not

79 Ibid., 291-2.
explain why Johnson seemed particularly eager and capable of adapting to First Nations’
diplomatic forms. Accompanying his use of oratory, metaphoric language, the ceremomialism of
the calumet, and wampum belts, Johnson was initially impelled to participate in war dances in
the context of the immense crisis of the Seven Years’ War.

It was from the Albany conference of 1754 that the English colonies agreed to
collectively raise resources and militia, and Johnson received a royal commission as “Sole Agent
and Superintendent” of Northern North America.”

Operating directly from the Johnson estate on the Mohawk River, Johnson described the frequent councils and negotiations with various
First Nations groups who came to visit. He describes the arrival of a war party in 1757 when trading occurred “after an Entertainment which was made for them, at which they danced the
War Dance, they were supplied with Provisions &c. for their Journey & then marcht.”

While not describing in depth what kinds of “Entertainments” were offered, it suggests that musical exchanges preceded trade.

A more detailed description from Johnson’s estate appears two years later on September
17th 1759, when a war party from Caghnawaga arrived singing a slow march:

10 of their Warriors being naked, painted & feather'd, (one of whom had a Drum on his back made of a Cag covered with Skin) marched in Slow order in two Ranks, Singing their Song accordg. to the Ottawa Custom, Tom Wildman in the Rere Tank beating the Drum with one Stick, and the rest accompanying it with Notched Sticks which they Struck to good time on their Axes.

With drum constructed from a keg and notched sticks sounded with axes, the procession slowly approached Johnson’s house. Tom Wildman, the only named member of the war party, “advanced before the rest, & Sung his War Song, which he twice repeated, after which Sir Wm. gave them some Liquor, Pipes, Tobacco and Paint whereupon they returned back in the same

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order." That this party from Caghnawaga, living as they did near the junction of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers north of the Six Nations, marched in a manner identified by Johnson as the "Ottawa Custom" suggests an association with the Ottawa river and nation. The account suggests that Johnson rewarded the spectacle materially. By marching across his estate in war regalia and with deliberate and well-timed movements and music, the war party demonstrated its intimidating potential, coordination, and military prowess, not in front of the enemy but rather their allies as represented by Johnson and his associates. This detailed description suggests their war song made an impression, receiving provisions before marching off.


Fig. 3. Iroquois Water Drum made from Keg. Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of History. Drum – tambour (III – I – 463.1 a-c). Photos by author.

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85 Ibid., 852.
Over the course of the Seven Years’ War, Johnson became more involved and eventually intimately involved in war dances. He began by offering material recompenses, for example arranging for “an Ox to be dressed for their War Dance.” He himself was the subject of honour when he was given a feast of venison by one hundred and fifty Oneidas. In this encounter they treated him, he felt, “as being one of their Tribe,” accompanied by “a great War Dance.”

Johnson was clearly comfortable playing the role of host and providing for dances of allies. Yet he would go much further. On March 20th 1757, Johnson is recorded to have entered “the large Room where the Six Nations were dancing the War Dance & sung his War Song.” He was so familiar and comfortable with Haudenosaunee diplomatic forms that he sang his own war song and perhaps enacted his own war dance. We lack further details but know this was followed by a speech extolling the Six Nations in their preparedness and commitment to go to war, suggesting the political motivations for Johnson’ theatrical presentation.

The following year, on June 27th 1758 with a group of Onondagas, Oneidas, Tuscaroras and French Prisoners, Johnson again performed for an assembled body of Six Nations’ warriors. He encouraged those who wished “to be thought Friends & Bretheren to the English,” to be equipped immediately for war and join the military expedition that was departing for Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga). Johnson finished his speech and “threw down the War Belt & danced the War Dance, after which a principal Man of each Nation also Danced.” Johnson’s diplomatic approach seems to have been affirmed by the reaction of the others in this council. Yet these allies would generally resist joining Abercromby’s ill-planned attack on Fort Carillon. Indeed,

**Notes:**

86 Ibid., 810.
87 Ibid., 866.
88 Ibid., 667.
89 Ibid., 937-939.
Johnson's unceasing efforts through gifts and cultural appeals such as war dances have been interpreted as English desperation for First Nations’ allies in the Seven Years War after the loss of Oswego and Fort William Henry. Historians have written about Johnson's remarkable adaptability and “theatricality,” capable of engaging in war dances and songs during diplomatic negotiations and cementing his role as intermediary with the British Crown. He set a daunting precedent of performance for his colonial successors to maintain, and yet the patterns of exchange that he adopted continued to resonate with Indian agents and fur traders over the following decades.  

Thus rather than war dances representing displays of “savagery” as suggested by captivity narratives, this strain of primary documents indicates the importance of war dances to the political and cultural context that is still perhaps best expressed by Richard White’s concept of the “middle ground.” Rather than casting into sharp relief cultural differences, or, as Bloechl writes, interpreted as the “unearthly cries of demoniacs,” war songs and dances were, at least under the masterful command of William Johnson, fulfilling functional requirements of diplomacy and serving as a pragmatic effort to galvanize military allies during this time of war. This is significant for our purposes because British Indian policy affected the fur trade during the decades when it was expanding into the northwest from the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes corridor, something that had a palpable influence on the approach of many fur traders.  

Some of the first British traders into the northwest after the conquest were terrified by war dances, and related these scenes vividly in their writing. Jonathan Carver joined the Massachusetts colonial militia near the outset of the Seven Years’ War and afterwards travelled and traded through the western Great Lakes region. He departed westwards from  

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Michilimackinac in 1766 with a canoe full of goods, endeavouring to secure good relations, but finding a mixed reception amongst the First Nations on the St. Pierre (Minnesota) river. Carver was awoken one night by his French servant who had been “alarmed by the sound of Indian music.” On investigation they “beheld a party of the young savages dancing towards us in an extraordinary manner, each carrying in his hand a torch fixed on the top of a long pole . . which at once surprised and alarmed me.”92 Once convinced he was not really in danger, Carver described in considerable detail the war dances held "before they set out on their war parties, and on their return from them," asserting that, from his own experiences, these dances likewise struck "terror into strangers:"

It is performed, as the others, amidst a circle of the warriors; a chief generally begins it, who moves from the right to the left, singing at the same time both his own exploits, and those of his ancestors. When he has concluded his account of any memorable action, he gives a violent blow with his war-club against a post that is fixed in the ground, near the center of the assembly, for this purpose. Every one dances in his turn, and recapitulates the wondrous deeds of his family, till they all at last join in the dance. Then it becomes truly alarming to any stranger that happens to be among them, as they throw themselves into every horrible and terrifying posture that can be imagined, rehearsing at the same time the parts they expect to act against their enemies.93

Reliving the motions of their former glory and forecasting those necessary for subsequent victory, these dances combined individual and group expression and coordination, appearing “truly alarming to any stranger.”

Other fur traders were less terrified and apparently more intrigued by the nuances of the spectacles they were witnessing. One of the important early English fur traders in the Ohio valley, Christopher Gist, provides an account of a Twigtwee or Miami “Warriors Feather Dance,” a distinct variation of the war dance. Gist and his companions were invited to the longhouse to watch three painted “Dancing Masters” holding “long Sticks in their Hands, upon

the Ends of which were fastened long Feathers of Swans, and other Birds, neatly woven in the Shape of a Fowls Wing: in this Disguise they performed many antick Tricks, waving their Sticks and Feathers about with great Skill to imitate the flying and fluttering of Birds, keeping exact Time with their Musick."94 Then the more recognizable pattern of eastern woodlands war dance emerge: “while they are dancing some of the Warriors strike a Post, upon which the Musick and Dancers cease, and the Warrior gives an Account of his Achievements in War, and when he has done, throws down some Goods as a Recompence to the Performers and Musicians."95 Striking the post was an important symbolic gesture in the dance, signaling the transition between individual and group performance. This passage also suggests that the warriors cycling through the middle of the circle singing their war songs gave items to the musicians for their services, a feature often omitted from later descriptions.

The notoriety of William Johnson extended to First Nations peoples throughout the Great Lakes. English speaking fur traders were particularly cognizant of his methods. The fur trader John B. Long reported departing Montreal with two maître canots manned by ten voyageurs each for the north shore of Lake Superior, arriving at Pays Plat on Nipigon Bay on July 4th, 1777.96 Here they unloaded their cargo and packed it into smaller bales for easier transportation over the many difficult portages (his guide estimated one hundred and eighty remained) before arrival at their overwintering grounds. Encountering the local First Nations whom Long estimated to number one hundred and fifty, primarily “of the Chippeway tribes” (Anishinaabeg), they provided fish, dried meat, and skins in exchange for a few “trifling presents.” The chief Matchee Quewish held a council proposing to adopt Long as a “brother warrior,” something

94 Christopher Gist, Christopher Gist’s Journals, 53-4.
95 Ibid.
recommended by more experienced traders because it resulted in being “favoured exceedingly.”

In the description of Long’s adoption ceremony, he invokes William Johnson, “of immortal Indian memory,” and his ceremonial procedures. In particular he describes the symbolic use of wampum “when Sir William Johnson held a treaty,” holding one end of the wampum belt while a First Nations chief took the other, touching it in appropriate places when it was their turn to speak.97

Yet Long also mimicked Johnson’s close participation in the ceremonies of war. The adoption or initiation ceremony pivoted centrally around the war song and dance, and the adoptee or initiate’s response to it. First a feast was made consisting of dog’s flesh boiled in bear grease and huckle-berries. After the meal, the war song is sung with the following words:

Master of Life, view us well; we receive a brother warrior who appears to have sense, shews strength in his arm, and does not refuse his body to the enemy." After the war song, if the person does not discover any signs of fear, he is regarded with reverence and esteem; courage in the opinion of the Savages, being considered not only as indispensible, but as the greatest recommendation. He is then seated on the beaver robe, and presented with a pipe of war to smoke, which is put round to every warrior, and a wampum belt is thrown over his neck.98

The key factor determining an adoptee’s recommendation was whether or not they showed fear. Familiarity and experience, as well as courage and fortitude might contribute to success in this ceremony that combined the war song and dance with the other highly symbolic forms of the calumet and wampum belt.

In Peter Grant’s account of the Sauteaux Anishinaabeg from his experiences in the Red River department, the “war dance” was one of the three most common kinds of dances besides the “grand calumet” and the “common dance.”99 His description of the war dance includes the

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97 Ibid., 294-5.
98 Ibid., 294.
warrior going through the motions of loading and shooting a gun, as well as using traditional weapons:

The "war dance" is a representation of the different manoeuvres of discovering, attacking and scalping an enemy. The performer begins with a hanger, *cassette*, or some other offensive weapon, which he flourishes in a variety of threatening attitudes, while dancing; he then hops along for some time, apparently with the greatest caution, and squats down suddenly on his hams behind his weapon. After having feigned the different motions of loading a gun, he levels his piece at his supposed enemy, runs forward and, supposing his victim yet alive, pretends to fall upon him, striking several blows of the *cassette* on his head and finally dispatches him by a mortal stab near the heart with his dagger. He then instantly pretends to make a circular incision with his knife around the head to raise the scalp, which he attempts to take with his teeth, after which he gives the whoop and dances around the circle.

Integrating the motions of the gun into the traditional war dance, the only vocal contribution made by the performer of the song was the whoop at the end. Grant states with confidence how these performances were appraised, with merit accorded depending “on the dexterity and rapidity of the different movements, though, at the same time, some attention must be given to the measure and cadence of the music.”

Thus it was not only the movements but their execution in accordance to the rhythm that was seen as important. Straddling the line between theatrical demonstration and dance, these performances demonstrated warriors' experience and courage, prepared them psychologically and physically for battle, forged community participation, and served as a form of storytelling.

By the final decades of the eighteenth century war dances are written about less as terror inducing spectacles and more as formulaic accompaniments to trade. The accounts of Perrault from the 1780s signal a close degree of familiarity with ceremonial war dances. He first witnessed and described calumet dances near Prairie du Chien in 1786-7, which were the precursor to a large war dance. In his description he stresses that there was a “chef de guerre” [chief of war] who led the expedition and also led the “chante la guerre” [song of war].

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100 Ibid.
Beginning with the calumet dance and proceeding to a war dance was a pattern also recorded by David Thompson, who was witness to a somewhat uneasy encounter between Iroquois employed by the North West Company and the “Nahathaways” [Cree]. It began with a feast of bison and deer, and after dinner the Iroquois began with “a few common dances.” Then they “commenced their favorite dance the grand Calumet.” This was “much admired and praised;” yet when the Iroquois finished and “requested the Nahathaways to dance their grand Calumet,” they replied that they “had no smoking dance.”¹⁰² The response, as related by Thompson, indicates something of the symbolic meaning these dances provided.

Performing these dances came with reciprocal expectations. The insinuations were obvious: if the Cree had no war dance, they could not possibly be warriors. At this point, according to the account, Thompson intervened. He saw a “smile of contempt” on the lips of Spik a nog gan (The Gun Case) a proven Cree warrior fifty years old who Thompson knew “excelled in the dance.” Thompson reports that he helped goad him into performing.

Somewhat nettled, he arose, put on a light war dress, and with his large dagger in his right hand, he began the War dance, by the Scout, the Spy, the Discovery, the return to camp, the Council, the silent march to the ambuscade, the war whoop of attack the tumult of the battle, the Yells of doubtful contest and the War whoop of victory; the pursuit, his breath short and quick the perspiration pouring down on him his dagger in the fugitive, and the closing War whoop of the death of his enemy rung through our ears. The varying passions were strongly marked in his face, and the whole was performed with enthusiasm. The perfect silence, and all eyes rivetted on him, showed the admiration of every one, and for which I rewarded him.

This performance had a tangible effect first on Thompson: he “rewarded” the dancer with unspecified goods. The Iroquois “seemed lost in surprise, and after a few minutes said, our dances please ourselves, and also the white people and Indians where ever we go, but your dance is war itself to victory and to death.” The reaction to the Cree war dance and acknowledgement and appreciation of its differences underscores both the mutual comprehension and distinctiveness of the cultural traditions. For Thompson, he was “much pleased with the effect this dance had on the Iroquois,” as it seemed to “bring them to their senses, and showed them, that the Indians of the interior countries were fully as good Warriors, Hunters and Dancers, as themselves.” Now, instead of expressing their “self conceit and arrogance,” the Iroquois stopped talking about war and “turned to hunting.” Performance in dance was thus seen as a demonstration of abilities in hunting and warfare, serving as an important marker of masculinity. They also served, according to Thompson’s account, to convince his Iroquois employees of the strength and bravery of the First Nations peoples in the “interior countries.” Dance was thus seen to demonstrate skills and qualities valued in the fur trade, expressing an important kind of “cultural capital.”

The primary evidence suggests that First Nations in the northwest had their own varieties of war songs. Yet they were used in patterns of trade in much the same ways as eastern groups. Operating to the south of Lake Superior in 1804-5, François Victor Malhiot described his apprehensions in guarding the Fort with only one other employee when a war party numbering seventeen stopped by to hold a feast. “After making me eat some, they left us, to my great

103 Ibid.
104 Although this term has been widely adopted by social and cultural historians, Pierre Bourdieu originally wrote about notions of symbolic capital and symbolic power in conjunction with his theory of habitus, which examined how structures of the mind, values, and expectations were shaped by social environments and lived experiences. See Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
satisfaction, for my provisions are diminishing rapidly.”¹⁰⁵ Suggesting that this encounter involved obligatory gifts of provisions, Malhiot was understandably concerned. He had recently learned of a “row” at the neighbouring XY company fort when they ran out of rum and the post-master Chorette was roughed up and his stores pillaged. For Malhiot, this was a stressful situation as he was “expecting another war party from day to day. God grant they may not be so long in importuning me.”¹⁰⁶ Malhiot was worried about meeting ceremonial expectations while facing a supply shortage, but seemed resigned to this facet of trade.

While he visited a camp of Cree and Assiniboine near the North West Company post of Fort Alexandria, Daniel Harmon was invited to witness their war dance. The appearance of the warriors impressed him, and he described the thirty dancers as "all clothed with the skins of the Antelope, dressed, which were nearly as white as snow; and upon their heads they sprinkled a white earth, which gave them a very genteel appearance."¹⁰⁷ He described their dance, both its movements and music:¹⁰⁸

Their dance was conducted in the following manner. A man, nearly forty years of age, rose with his tomahawk in his hand, and made, with a very distinct voice, a long harangue. He recounted all the noble exploits which he had achieved, in the several war-parties with which he had engaged his enemies; and he made mention of two persons, in particular, whom he first killed, and then took off their scalps; and for each of these, he gave a blow with his tomahawk against a post, which was set up, expressly for that purpose, near the center of the tent. And now the musick began, which consisted of tambourines, and the shaking of bells, accompanied by singing. Soon after, the man who had made the harangue, began the dance, with great majesty; then another arose, and joined him; and shortly after, another; and so on, one after another, until there were twelve or fifteen up, who all danced around a small fire, that was in the centre of the tent. While dancing, they made many savage gestures and shrieks, such as they are in the habit of making, when they encounter their enemies.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
¹⁰⁷ Daniel Williams Harmon, A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America: Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Lat., Extending from Montreal Nearly to the Pacific, a Distance of About 5,000 Miles: Including an Account of the Principal Occurrences During a Residence of Nineteen Years in Different Parts of the Country (Toronto: George N. Morang & Company, 1904), 44.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 44-5.
This description of the Cree and Assiniboine war dance is valuable, as it seems to closely resemble those of eastern First Nations, including the action of striking a post in the center. The instrumentation is described as consisting of tambourines as well as bells, presumably obtained through the fur trade, and shaken to provide rhythm for the war dance. For Harmon, their duration was what was perhaps most extraordinary: 109

In this course, they continued, for nearly an hour, when they took their seats, and another party got up, and went through with the same ceremonies. Their dancing and singing, however, appeared, to be a succession of the same things; and therefore after having remained with them two or three hours, I returned to my lodgings; and how long they continued their amusement, I cannot say.

Whether or not First Nations visiting the forts were able to perform their war dances inside the house or hall or outside the gate was often based on the individual proclivities of the post-master and his relationship with each particular group. At the North West Company’s Fort Alexandria, Daniel Harmon described a war party stopping in after some time on the warpath, receiving material compensation for their dance. “Agreeably to the custom of the country, I gave them a few trifling articles, not as a reward for having been to war, but because they have done us honour, as they think, by dancing in our fort.” 110 Harmon, like other fur traders, did not want to risk alienating allied warriors and hunters, potentially hindering future returns. He recognized the dances as symbols of honour and ability, conforming to ceremonial expectations by letting them dance inside the fort and supplying them materially.

Other fur traders, such as George Nelson with the North West Company reported the frequent dances that occurred in front of his door. On June 7th 1809 he describes an Anishinaabeg war dance, an occurrence which he designates as “nothing strange.” He describes how “the indians come + dance war dances before our house door, + Mr Cameron gives them some tobacco + vermillion as he strikes at the Poteau [Post] saying that he was at two different

109 Ibid.
110 Ibid., 55-6.
battles + was wounded in one." The visual spectacle of war dances could be restricted by walls and palisades, yet the singing, drumbeats, and shouts travelled over fences and through doors. For most fur traders, war dances could not be avoided, occurring in this instance right outside fur trader’s living quarters.

The war song and dance were associated with other basic ceremonies fur traders encountered, especially wedding ceremonies à la façon du pays, or according to the “custom of the country.” It is the fur trader John Long who described the procedures of marriage in a section of his journal entitled “Indian Courtship.” Permission to marry must be requested from the woman’s father, and various speeches and ceremonies must be observed before the young man provides a feast to the entire family. It is after this that they, according to Long, “dance and sing their war songs.” Mentioned here as a part of the wedding ceremony, Long does not interrogate its application or functions. The aspect of recounting personal histories and demonstrating physical prowess must have familiarized new families with each other, reinforcing new clan-based military commitments. Musically, wedding ceremonies could present distinct styles and variations, promoting adaptations in the broader cultural exchange.

In the plateau-basin region to the west, Ross Cox witnessed an elaborate wedding ceremony between a Métis hunter named Pierre Michel and a Flat Head woman. This account emphasizes the transformative rituals she underwent, receiving instructions from the older women and her uncle, and undergoing the physical transformations associated with adopting European dress and style. 

113 In this case she apparently relinquished her “leathern chemise, the place of which of which was supplied by one of gingham, to which was added a calico and green cloth petticoat, and a gown of blue cloth” ; Ross Cox, The
A procession was then formed by the two chiefs, and several warriors carrying blazing flambeaux of cedar, to convey the bride and her husband to the fort. They began singing war songs in praise of Michel’s bravery, and of their triumphs over the Black-feet. She was surrounded by a group of young and old women, some of whom were rejoicing, and others crying. The men moved on first, in a slow and solemn pace, still chanting their war-like epithalamium. The women followed at a short distance; and when the whole party arrived in front of the fort, they formed a circle and commenced dancing and singing, which they kept up about twenty minutes. After this the calumet of peace went round once more, and when the smoke of the last whiff had disappeared, Michel shook hands with his late rival, embraced the chiefs, and conducted his bride to his room.

In this description, the outsider male is welcomed into the woman’s family by recognition of his bravery and worth, through expressed through the medium of war songs. The ceremonialism of marriage involved a procession, singing, dancing, and conducting calumet ceremonies immediately outside the gates of the fort. Again, war songs and dances fulfill roles not associated immediately with war, but rather with performing masculinity and strengthening social relations.

Yet war dances could at any point revert back to their wartime functions. Though references are limited, there is evidence that the Haudenosaunee practiced their war dances at trading posts throughout the northwest. When the Hudson’s Bay Company became embroiled in violent confrontations on the northwest coast, they were content to allow the songs and dances of the Iroquois revert to their warlike function. On June 16th, 1828, when preparing to leave Fort Vancouver for a potentially hostile encounter with the Clallems, “the Iroquois went through a war dance in character before the hall door.”

When the time came for the encounter, the Iroquois, “Owhyhees” (Hawaiian) and “Chunook” (Chinook) who were all part of the HBC contingent “painted themselves,” implying that preparations for war united these diverse groups.


114 Francis Ermatinger, _Notes and Correspondence on the Expedition to the Clallem Tribe 1828_, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg Manitoba, (D4/123), 2.
War dances in times of conflict signified something different than in times of peace, yet both served to promote social cohesion and reciprocal relationships among those present. They also could serve as training and mobilization for conflict.

Some fur traders speculated on the origins and cultural significances of war songs. In the late eighteenth century, recently articulated notions of unilinear cultural evolution influenced popular discourses. Indigenous peoples in the Americas were characterized by European thinkers as having never progressed out of the stage of barbarism, embodying humanity’s “natural” state, with recognizable equivalents from the ancient world.¹¹⁵ Fur trader James McKenzie cited the writings of a Jesuit priest in noting the “similarity in the looks, disposition, manner of life and religious rites of the Indians to those of the Israelites.”¹¹⁶ The most “scholarly” iteration of this nature was made by fur trader Roderick MacKenzie, who also served in his life as a member of the Legislative Council of Lower Canada, Member of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, Member of the American Antiquarian Society, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries at Copenhagen. He wrote an ethnography of the First Nations peoples of the Athabasca as a partner of the North West Company in 1795, emphasizing how “The North West Indians have undoubtedly a great resemblance to the ancients,” referencing the Medes, Lydians, and Scythians, Armenians, Israelites, and Greeks. This “historic” interpretation was coupled with an environmental determinism, as he draws parallels with the cultural characteristics of “inhabitants in the same latitude around the Pole.” Like the ancients and some

northerly Eurasian peoples, the First Nations of the Athabasca were said to “Sing War songs.”\(^{117}\) This account by MacKenzie represents a rare detached analysis of war songs based on the eighteenth century theories of social and cultural evolution. Rather than describing their functional applications and musical form, they are here slotted into theoretical models. These belied the nuanced, multifarious applications to which the likes of MacKenzie were exposed during their careers as fur traders.

The writing of fur traders highlights the prevalence and importance of musical genres quite differently than the work of ethnomusicologists. Calumet and war dances played prominent roles not only inter-tribally but in colonial diplomacy, first with the French and then the British. Fur traders describe these dances among a wide range of First Nations, serving a variety of different functions. While sometimes playing into tropes about “Indian” savagery, their accounts demonstrate a keen eye for detail and a pragmatic approach to the numerous functions and applications of war songs and dances. An important factor in this history is that the Haudenosaunee brought their traditions with them into the northwest, where they became the frame of reference for fur traders who then encountered different forms. Beginning diplomatic negotiations with calumet ceremonies followed by war songs and dances was a common pattern. Rather than functioning to make peace and war, calumet and war dances in the context of the fur trade strengthened alliances and social relations. While William Johnson adopted the ceremonialism of the calumet and war dance to secure allies in the context of the Seven Years’ War, most fur traders at the very least patronized these forms as part of the diplomatic protocol that accompanied trade. Overall, one can conclude that their accounts acknowledge the role of songs and dances particularly in relation to ceremonies that regulated and fostered social

relationships. Rather than demonstrating absolute cultural differences, or constituting ethnically distinct, incompatible, and incomparable musical forms, they served as an important arena for cross-cultural interactions and exchanges.
6 Soundmoments en Route

The previous chapters have explored how sound, music, and dance functioned in engagements and relations between Europeans and First Nations peoples. These mediums presented opportunities and challenges for cross-cultural exchanges. Yet there also presented the opportunity for interaction between the employees of the trading companies, who were, after all, a polyglot mixture of Scottish, English, French Canadian, and First Nations peoples. The fur trade employed most personnel in the summer season, and the vast majority of their time was spent travelling. Most man-hours were devoted each summer before 1821 to transporting goods between Montreal and Grand Portage or Fort William. This journey, though stretching over the enormous expanse of thousands of kilometers, consisted of a narrow path of relatively well-trodden territory. This terrain was laden with symbols and landmarks that helped convey meaning. The voyage was ritualized through the landscape, whose features elicited responses from oral stories to songs.

Over the last few decades the focus of historians has shifted inwards to sensations of the body and outwards to analyses of the environment. Landscapes have been revealed to evoke emotions, associations, and meanings. The intersection of people and place has increasingly been queried with an eye for the multiplicity of narratives and significances, which vary tremendously between different cultural traditions.¹ While historians of immigration were early to recognize

the significance of the incredible fluidity of human populations, recent writings in mobility studies have promoted further awareness amongst historians. Cultural theorist Stephen Greenblatt has summarized five goals in his publication *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. Of particular relevance to the following chapter are two points: to “identify and analyze the ‘contact zones’ where cultural goods are exchanged,” and to identify how these locations contributed to a “sensation of rootedness.” These points will be addressed through the methodology of sensory and soundscape history.

The concept of a “soundmark” was first introduced by R. Murray Schafer, who defines it as “derived from *landmark* to refer to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make is specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community.” The following chapter will investigate particular locations along the route from Montreal into the northwest through the concept I have termed “soundmoments,” which represented an invocation of particular sounded responses and were associated with special meanings by the fur traders passing through. These were instances when sound-making was of primary concern. They could consist of cheers, prayers, oral stories, and songs, whichever suited the ritual occasion and was

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3 Greenblatt outlines the five points: 1. Mobility must be taken in a highly literal sense 2. Mobility studies should shed light on hidden as well as on conspicuous movements of peoples, objects, images, texts, and ideas 3. Mobility studies should identify and analyze the “contact zones” where cultural goods are exchanged 4. Mobility studies should account in new ways for the tension between individual agency and structural constraint 5. Mobility studies should analyze the sensation of rootedness; Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 250-252.

deemed most appropriate. Yet the parameters of these sonic scripts could be quite flexible. Soundmoments followed rules unwritten yet culturally prescribed, serving to mediate understandings of proper human engagement with the landscape, its history and meaning.

The rituals on the passage to the northwest tended to emphasize the vulnerability of the individual to the powers of unseen forces, whether human or supernatural. Fur trading entailed travelling long distances through a series of vocational rites of passage, with voyageurs and their bourgeois travelling in close quarters. The pre-dominance of French Canadians in the Montreal trade brought with it a vernacular Catholicism that interwove with First Nations’ influences. Carolyn Podruchny has traced the importance of mock baptisms along the route to the northwest, initiating voyageurs into new realms of occupational status and reinforcing notions of reciprocity and the bourgeois’ dependency and obligations. This chapter will draw on the work of Podruchny and cultural theorists concerning rites of passage and ritual, including Victor Turner’s discussion of liminality. By focusing on events described by fur traders rather than song texts, I hope to emphasize performativity in the canoe brigades, accessing what Stephen Greenblatt describes as “the reenacted “cultural archive.”

Soundmoments characterized significant locations along the route from Montreal to the Great Lakes. Some demarked “contact zones,” defined by Mary Louise Pratt as “social spaces

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8 Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*, 248.
where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other.” Locations significant to First Nations peoples were often significant to fur traders for different reasons. Contested understandings were articulated variously through place names and sounded responses. Keith H. Basso has explored the relationships between oral societies and landscapes in *Wisdom Sits in Places*. He emphasizes how it is on “communal occasions - when places are sensed together,” where expressions about their significance appear alongside those delineating proper conduct and “symbolic relationships.” Fur traders, like ethnographers, interpreted new landscapes by listening to utterances of informal discourse, with different places acquiring value and significance by virtue of what was expressed and observed. Place names, meanings, and their social transmission placed “flexible constraints on how the physical environment can (and should) be known, how its occupants can (and should) be found to act.” Relationships to place are expressed, represented, and enacted through stories and songs, providing meanings which are, in Basso's words, “woven into the fabric of social life, anchoring it to features of the landscape and blanketing it with layers of significance.” On the Ottawa route to the Great Lakes, important locations were demarked by soundmoments, and daily and seasonal routines sounded with layers of meaning. Rituals mediated interpretations of the landscape and demarcated regional transitions otherwise potentially veiled, layering geographical and historical knowledges onto the collective experience through the aural realm.

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11 Ibid., 72.
12 Ibid., 110.
6.1 Departure

Montreal had served as the hub of the Great Lakes' fur trade since the seventeenth century. The rapids of Lachine marked a dividing point in the St. Lawrence, serving as the loading and departure point for canoes headed into the interior. At the southwestern tip of the island of Montreal was St. Anne's, the small town and church that was the last stop in Christendom and last chance to receive a priest’s blessing before travel further inland. Arnold van Gennep's classic The Rites of Passage presents a three-phase model beginning with rites of separation, which he calls "preliminal rites," serving as the initial phase that displaced individuals from their previous lives.13 This was accomplished at two special locations on the island of Montreal, at the rapids of Lachine and St. Anne's church. At both locations, ritualized behaviour produced a distinctive soundscape demarking departure.

For voyageurs, most of whom came from rural communities around Montreal and to a lesser extent Trois Rivieres,14 this was the final place their friends and family could say goodbye. This was an annual event, occurring when the weather was suitable, usually in early May. When John MacDonald of Garth recalled his first departure west in a canoe brigade in 1791, he recalled how a "crowd of friends and spectators were there to witness our departure,” and how this was “a great event before the time of steamers.”15 George Nelson reported the sights and sounds at Lachine, where "In May each year we would see numbers of young men, each one with his bag, containing a few of the most necessary articles of clothing; on his back, with a paddle & “setting

14 Allan Greer, Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 180.
pole” in his hand, bidding “Farewell” (alas! how many for ever!) to relations & friends.” The gravity and potential finality of the departure was acknowledged. Most would return in the autumn, while others would stay on in the interior for years and some would die. Yet the soundscape resounded not with the sounds of crying, but with singing. The young men "Embarking in their bark Canoes, with tears in their eyes & singing as if going to a banquet!"

The experience of departure was marked with a lamentful tone, even if the sources do not provide an idea of which songs may have been sung. The primary sources suggest that the solemn mood reflected the prolonged social separation and dangers ahead. Paddling into Lac des Deux Montagnes, the canoe brigades left the sounds of those on shore behind.

The first stop was at a small Catholic church on the southwest corner of the island of Montreal. St. Anne, known as the mother of the Virgin Mary and protector of fishermen and sailors, was customarily prayed to for safe water travel. Since the seventeenth century she held a special significance to those who visited New France, from Jacques Cartier to the Jesuits. For example, Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré is a small town and church about thirty five kilometers northeast of Quebec City and was the site of much noisy devotion from the mid-seventeenth century, when "tous les bateaux passant en face de l’église de Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré tirent des coups de canon en signe de joie pour avoir été protégés contre les dangers du fleuve." Alain Corbin has explored how in early modern Europe the sounds of church bells "sacralized" territorial space, such that communities worked vigorously to establish themselves within earshot. Bells served as practical tools of communication for marking time and events, but were

17 Ibid.
18 Thérèse Beaudoin, L’Été Dans la Culture Québécoise XVii - XIX siècles (Québec: Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la Culture, 1987), 167-9.
19 Ibid., 168.
also imbued with symbolic and supernatural significances. Catholic theologians of the
Reformation ascribed to bells the "power to open a path for the good angels from heaven and
ward off the creatures of hell."[^20] France was known as the country of "ringing towns" because of
churches, and New France followed in this tradition. Montreal was established in 1642 by the
Société de Notre-Dame as the religious settlement "Ville-Marie." Over the following decades
other Catholic religious orders such as the Sulpicians arrived. By the eighteenth century, St.
Anne’s on the southwestern tip of Montreal was situated on the edge of French settlement, where
the sounds of church bells from Catholic settlements ringing along the St. Lawrence abruptly
ended. As the familiar “sacralized” space was left behind, the uncertain soundscape of the river
came to the foreground.

Prayers for safe passage and displays of Catholic devotion characterized the soundscape
at St. Anne’s during the brigade’s brief visit. The descriptions written by Protestant English-
speaking fur traders about the customs of French Canadian and Haudenosaunee crews are
distanced by the vectors of race, class, and religion. Two distinct representations of the ritual
departures of the voyageurs emerge in the documents, characterizing them either as noble and
pious, or wild, drunken, and vulgar. Jonathan Carver, one of the early English traders to travel
with French Canadian voyageurs on their route up the Ottawa river in the early 1760s, described
having no choice but to participate in the "custom to be observed, on arriving at Saint-Anne's."
Omitting mention of donations, prayers, or hymns, he instead cites the custom of distributing
eight gallons of rum to each canoe, a gallon for each man, intended to last the duration of the
voyage yet normally consumed on the spot. "The saint, therefore, and the priest, were no sooner

dismissed, than a scene of intoxication began," initiating singing and fighting that lasted the night until the crew departed the following morning.  

Yet English speaking Montreal merchants displayed accommodation and tolerance with the customs and rituals of the voyageurs. The Presbyterian John MacDonald described "land[ing] at St. Anne where the men paid their devotion to their titular saint," a seemingly neutral description. When Roderic MacKenzie departed in June of 1789, he wrote:

St. Ann's church was the last church on our route, and the Voyageurs, in consequence, generally drop a piece of money into a box there, as an offering, to secure the protection of "La Bonne Sainte Anne" during their absence, and I, with a view to do as the people of Rome do, joined my mite to that of the rest of the crew.


22 Garth, “Autobiographical Notes of John McDonald of Garth a Partner in the North West Company 1791 1816,” 2.
A more richly descriptive account is provided by Captain George Back in the early 1830s that describes simultaneous compliance and resistance to this.

On coming abreast of a village, near which stood a large cross, a few paces from the church, the more devout of the voyageurs went on shore, and, standing in a musing posture, implored the protection of the patron saint in the perilous enterprise on which they were embarked; while their companions, little affected by their piety, roared out to them to “s’embarquer,” and paddled away to the merry tune of a lively canoe song.\(^\text{24}\)

Re-embarking with a yell and a paddling song, these descriptions disrupt the portrayal of uniformly devout and pious voyageurs offering prayers to their patron saint. The primary accounts from the fur trade do not emphasize the singing of hymns by voyageurs departing St. Anne's, but rather of individual acts of devotion and prayer. These accounts differ from the romanticized depiction enshrined by the Irish poet Thomas Moore who passed through in 1804, and whose “A Canadian Boat Song” possesses the famous line "We'll sing at St. Anne's our parting hymn!"\(^\text{25}\)

If Lachine served as a place of reckoning and was pervaded with a sense of loss, so was St. Anne’s. John Macdonell reports that his brigade arrived and “found the Priest saying mass for one Lalonde, who had been drowned, by the men's account, one hundred and ten leagues above this place.”\(^\text{26}\) St. Anne’s was a place where prayer and commemoration occurred for those who had died upriver, a place of mourning for those who had passed away at various locations along the perilous journey. Cultural historian Edward Muir has echoed the sentiments of Victor Turner and Max Gluckman in stating that that rituals rarely unify social divisions but an "create

\(^{24}\) Captain George Back, *Narrative of the Arctic Land Expedition to the Mouth of the Great Fish River, and Along the Shores of the Arctic Ocean, In the Years 1833, 1834, 1835* (1836; repr. Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig LTD. Booksellers & Publishers, 1970), 32-33.

\(^{25}\) This line had a particularly influential impact on representing the voyageurs and French Canadians more generally as simple, pious characters against a rustic backdrop. See Thomas Moore, *A Canadian boat song. Arranged for three voices by Thos. Moore, etc.*, (London: James Carpenter, 1805).

\(^{26}\) John Macdonell, in *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John MacDonell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faires, and Thomas Connor* (Minnesota: Society of the Colonial Dames of America: The University of Minnesota Press, 1933), 68.
solidarity in the few parts of society shared by all." In this case, boundaries of race, class, culture and language could be bridged within the brigades through Christian rites and worship. At the outset of each voyage, departure was associated with the activities and sounds of devotion and prayer. The "sacralized" space marked by ringing church bells, the blessings of the priest, the individual recitation of prayers, and perhaps the singing of hymns indicates something of the deeply held Christian convictions of the crews, even if not all members participated. Leaving was ritualized into an act that acknowledged the importance of the Church and the significance of leaving it behind.

A song sometimes cited as being sung shortly after departure and entitled *Quand un Chretien Se Determine à Voyageur* [When a Christian decides to voyage], which takes the form of advice from experienced voyageurs to the young *mangeurs de lard* (porkeaters). It warns of the physical dangers and privations of the voyage, including the harsh conditions caused by the elements, the mosquitoes, as well as the spiritual dangers posed to the soul. This composition bears strong traces of literary origins, and was first published in the 1860s. Yet I have found no references to it in the written records of fur traders or travelers who described the Ottawa River route before 1840. It might be a later composition, perhaps one of many written in the mid-late nineteenth century extolling Christian piety and virtuousness as a hallmark of French Canadian history.

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29 Madeleine Béland, *Chansons de voyageurs, coureurs de bois et forestiers* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1982).

30 The earliest recorded reference I have traced of this song is in *Les Soirées Canadiennes, [3e Année], 6e Livr. (juin [1863])*, (Québec: Brousseau Frères, 1863); We must be careful, because voyageur imagery was used by French Canadian intellectuals, poets and singers in the St. Lawrence, looking back from the mid-late nineteenth century on the pre-industrial eras of lumbering and fur trade for romanticized national inspiration. See Yolande Grisé, “La
6.2 River Travel

The canoe was the primary location of socialization that passed through the river-environment. It was their mobility that provided access to the series of meaningful locations along the way. River travel embodied a particular routine and social dynamic that restructured hierarchies and leadership roles. Corresponding to what Victor Turner describes as the "liminal period" in a rite of passage, canoe travel shifted from structured hierarchical society to "an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated" community who "submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders." The bowsmen and steersmen of each canoe, known as the *bouts*, were experienced and well-paid, forming a voyageur elite who commanded the canoes upriver while leading the crews through ritual progressions. Specific locations evoked the oral stories of the *bouts*, such as the "curious cave" on the side of a hill on the north side of the river about which Alexander Henry ("the Elder")’s crew told "marvellous tales," though he does not describe their specifics.

Devotional rites played a prominent role throughout the journey. Daniel Harmon describes his crew taking off their hats and making the sign of the cross, while at least one man in each canoe "repeat[ed] a short prayer" whenever they entered a new river or passed crude gravesites erected for deceased voyageurs. This was a frequent occurrence, invoked "at almost

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every rapid which we have passed, since we left Montreal." Harmon comments dryly that the men "say their prayers more frequently" on the river "than when at home."33

Unlike military travel when the officers’ orders were conveyed through drum and bugle, canoe travel was regulated by the vocal orders of the bouts. The daily regime fell to an individual who was responsible for directing the entire brigade and was known as the guide. John McLean described how the guide roused the men each morning with the call “Lève, Lève.” If the men did not rise quickly and tie up their beds, “the tents go down about their ears, and they must finish the operation in open air.”34 John Henry Lefroy, a scientist sent out in a canoe brigade from Montreal in the 1840s, described how the crew lay down after supper “until the cry of lève! lève! turns us out before three in the morning.” For him, the morning rush was unpleasant, with “the discomfort of this mode of travelling is chiefly a want of time for washing, dressing and so on.”35 A similarly disgruntled description is provided by Robert Ballantyne, who described how at the “first blush of day” he was awakened by “the loud halloo of the guide, who with the voice of a Stentor gave vent to a “Lève! lève! lève!” that roused the whole camp in less than two minutes.”36 While Ballantyne worked for the HBC for six years from ages sixteen to twenty-two, his subsequent career as a writer is revealed by his florid description of this auditory custom.

At the first peep of day our ears were saluted with the usual unpleasant sound of “Lève! Lève! Lève!” issuing from the leathern throat of the guide. Now this same “Lève” is in my ears a peculiarly harsh and disagreeable word, being associated with frosty mornings, uncomfortable beds, and getting up in the dark before half enough of sleep has been obtained. The way in which it is uttered, too, is

33 Daniel Williams Harmon, A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America: Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Lat., Extending from Montreal Nearly to the Pacific, a Distance of About 5,000 Miles: Including an Account of the Principal Occurrences During a Residence of Nineteen Years in Different Parts of the Country (Toronto: George N. Morang & Company, 1904), 9.
34 John McLean, Notes of a Twenty-Five Year’s Service in the Hudson’s Bay Territories (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1932), 117.
particularly exasperating; and often, when partially awakened by a stump boring a hole in my side, have I listened with dread to hear the detested sound, and then, fancying it must surely be too early to rise, have fallen gently over on the other side, when a low, muffled sound as if some one were throwing off his blanket would strike upon my ear, then a cough or a grunt, and finally, as if from the bowels of the earth, a low and scarcely audible "Lève! Lève!" would break the universal stillness, growing rapidly louder, “Lève! Lève! Lève!” and louder, “Lève! Lève!” till at last a final stentorian “Lève! Lève! Lève!” brought the hateful sound to a close, and was succeeded by a confused collection of grunts, groans, coughs, grumbles, and sneezes, from the unfortunate sleepers thus rudely roused from their slumbers.37

These auditory descriptions provide an idea of the sensory progression of the day while on canoe travel. They also reveal something of the language divide between the English speaking fur traders and the French speaking voyageurs. The latter conducted and regulated the operation of canoe travel, with the English-speaking bourgeois temporarily relinquishing their command. Once the group had embarked, the bouts would continue their leadership role by controlling labour primarily through the mechanism of singing, something that will be examined further in Chapter Seven.

The sounds of the river and its immediate environs would have influenced the experience of travel, although fur traders’ journals tend to be too laconic for this kind of detail. R. Murray Schafer described what he calls the "keynote sounds of a landscape" created by its climate and geography, its wind, water, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals.38 Each river had its distinctive soundscape that changed dramatically with the surrounding topography and weather conditions. Different types of forests produced different auditory effects. There was an audible transition moving from the deciduous forests in the south, which were marked by rattling and rustling leaves, to the increasing numbers of evergreens to the north, known for their clear reverberation and tendency to seethe and roar when the wind blows.39 The pre-Cambrian shield

37 Ibid., 195.
38 Schafer suggests that while "keynote sounds may not always be heard consciously," the fact that they are "ubiquitously there suggests the possibility of a deep and pervasive influence" on behaviours and moods. Schafer, The Tuning of the World, 9-10.
39 Ibid., 23.
that characterizes the rocky topography of much of Northern North America was introduced along the Ottawa River route, whose hard surfaces echoed sounds. Yet fur traders tended only to describe environmental sounds tangentially related to storms or weather events that impeded their progress.

The sounds of water constituted an important keynote sound until its rushing signaled the danger of approaching rapids and waterfalls. To those inexperienced with canoe travel or travelling on a river without an experienced crew, these sounds could be terrifying. When Lt. Henry Timberlake attempted to guide a canoe into Cherokee country with two others in 1761, he encountered enormous difficulties and ran aground before they “heard a terrible noise of a waterfall, and it being then near night, I began to be very apprehensive of some accident.” The unique sounds of rivers were sometimes described in canoe travel writing, such as the loud rushing sound provided by sand-bars in the Missouri river described by Henry Brackenridge in his journal: “This ripple, like all others of the Missouri, is formed by high sand bars, over which the water is precipitated, with considerable noise.”

David Thompson recounted how in his early career as a cartographer and trader he was camping on along a river when at night he "heard a Beaver playing about us, flapping his broad tail on the water, with a noise as loud as the report of a small pistol, which was a novelty to us.” Relating the beaver tail’s slap as “a noise as loud as the report of a small pistol,” Thompson was interpreting the animal’s sound based on his familiarity with the Euro-American soundscape. Ross Cox lamented the northern landscape of the fur trade as “just rocks, rivers, lakes, portages, waterfalls, and large forests.”

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animals were sometimes employed as symbols of the wilderness. While travelling, according to Cox, there was only the “bears roaring a tattoo every night, and wolves howling a réveille every morning.”\textsuperscript{43} Like a number of fur traders, Cox had prior military experience and had been accustomed while on campaign to hear the bugle’s tattoo before bed and the réveille in the mornings, relating these sounds and their absence to those heard while travelling by canoe.

6.3 Petit Rocher: La Complainte de Cadieux

A site of special significance bisected the Ottawa River portion of the journey. Approximately halfway between Montreal and the Mattawa the river was dramatically blocked by Grand Calumet Island and a series of particularly ferocious rapids. The carrying place here was called the portage de sept chutes, bypassing, as the name suggests, seven waterfalls. According to Alexander Mackenzie, this portage was two thousand and thirty-five paces long over a "high hill or mountain."\textsuperscript{44} This trail hosted the dramatic story of a young voyageur left behind by his crew while fleeing an Iroquois war party. His gravesite was maintained along the path, and his “death song,” which he supposedly composed and carved onto tree bark while dying, was sung by the voyageurs. This soundmark is richly documented in the written record has been collected by numerous folklorists, musicologists, and historians. The following survey of this material reveals fur traders were particularly fascinated by this location, with oral stories explaining its significance variously, while the song more consistently recounts a tale of


\textsuperscript{44} Alexander Mackenzie, \textit{Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America: To the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793 with an account of the rise and state of the fur trade}, vol. 1 (Toronto: George N. Morang & Company, 1902), lxii.
abandonment, miracle, and death.

Map 3. Petit Rocher to St. Anne’s. Made with Google Maps by the author.

Fig. 4. Sketch of rapids and portage around Grand Calumet Island. Courtesy of Université d'Ottawa, Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française - Fonds Louis-Guillaume-Lévesque (P76) - Écrits: poésie et prose - P76/1/3.
The journal of George Nelson, a clerk in the X Y Company, provides an early account from his very first voyage from Montreal to Grand Portage in 1802. According to this version, in 1759 a canoe of voyageurs was returning home from the "upper Countries" and on the portage they encountered a "large party" of Iroquois warriors who "immediately set up their frightful War yell & pursued." The Canadians jumped into their canoe and were taken over the rapids. Remarkably they did not suffer any damage. When the Iroquois ran to the end of the portage, they saw "a tall woman in white robes standing in the bow of the Canoes." According to this account, they perceived this as representing the "protection of a divinity," and thus they abandoned their pursuit. Nelson’s men informed him, "(& it is generally believed by the Romans [Catholics]) there they saw a woman, they believed to be the Virgin Mary, conducting the canoe." At the end of this description Nelson relates that "one unfortunate creature" who had a bruised heel had hidden in the bushes, and when a canoe from Montreal returned ten days later they found him dead "in a hole he had himself dug out with [a] paddle." Without naming the voyageur or describing the song, Nelson's account focuses on the events of the encounter that he learned while on the portage, featuring its "miraculous escape."

Traveling with voyageurs along the Ottawa in 1821, Dr. John Bigsby related the story he heard when passing this location. His emphasizes the musical component. The carrying-place circumvented a dangerous set of rapids that set the "scene of one of the most beautiful of the Canadian boat-songs. I have heard it repeatedly, but did not take it down. It is supposed to have been found inscribed on the bark of a birch-tree a little above the Falls."

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
the voyageurs are saved by "Mary, the Virgin Mother, who immediately appears to them in a rainbow amid the spray of the cataract, and beckons them onwards - to leap the fall." They are spared from hostility and harm altogether, except for "one unhappy man" who had left the canoe. This account differs from Nelson's in the details. The hostile Iroquois are here described anonymously as "hostile Indians," and the apparition of Mary beckoned the canoe over the falls rather than was perceived after it had successfully been traversed.

Nicholas Garry described the reaction of his voyageurs upon reaching Grand Calumet Island in 1821. After observing the cross that marked the gravesite, he related how "many years since" a canoe of coureurs des bois became engaged in battle with hostile "Indians," and landed on this island with a wounded man. They were closely pursued and were forced to hastily re-embark, running the rapids and leaving him behind. On their return they found that he was dead. "They then buried him in this Spot and he became a sort of Saint.” Implicitly acknowledging the improbability of the tale, Garry asserted that “though he could neither read nor write many songs and phrases are extant which, it is said, he composed.” Here the story of the miraculous escape over the rapids recurs, but while the Virgin Mary does not appear, Garry emphasizes that Cadieux himself was “a sort of Saint.” It was to him that later voyageurs offered their prayers and sang the song he had supposedly composed.

The details of the narrative change even more dramatically by the pen of J.G. Kohl in the 1850s. His account seems to be the earliest to record the name of the voyageur as “Jean Cayeux,” who was said to be on a hunting trip on the Ottawa river near Grand Calumet Island with his family when he was suddenly surrounded by the Iroquois. His wife and children took the canoe while Cayeux was left behind on a rock in the middle of the river. As the canoe passed through

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the rapids, they folded their hands in prayer. This is when "a white form appeared in the bow of the canoe," recognized as the "blessed Virgin." The Iroquois pursued the family all the way to the next French fortification, after which they returned to Grand Calumet Island. Here they chased Cayeux through the forest, "howling" after him. Eventually eluding his pursuers, with his final energy Cayeux constructed a shelter of branches and dug himself a Christian grave. He erected a cross, and he cut and carved on the wood his complainte, the entire history of his tragic fate. (So, at least, my Canadians asserted. They believed they sang the very song composed by Cayeux on his death-bed, but I imagine they could only have been some short allusions to his end.) The wooden cross soon rotted away, but the copy of his complainte is saved. And the cross has been repeatedly renewed up to the present time, and the Voyageurs still know the spot exactly.50

Kohl's version maintains certain elements of the core narrative. The miraculous escape, the apparition of the Virgin Mary, the grave of the solitary man, and the singing of his death song are all consistent with earlier accounts. Yet it differs in its plot and many of its details from the other accounts. Was Jean Cadieux a voyageur, or simply on a hunting trip?

The oral story established the context of the song, while the song textured the narrative. Complimentary elements of oral tradition, narrative and song entwined into a magico-religious narrative of Christian miracle and salvation. That the oral tradition revolved around a specific location was crucial, as the voyageurs knew "the spot exactly" where Cadieux was buried. Passing the gravesite provided the signal and justification to narrate and sing this part of the "cultural archive." Transcribed as early as 1863 and 1865, Cadieux's song has since been recorded in more than a dozen slightly different versions.51 Tachê's version of 1863 was transcribed from "le vieux Morache, ancien guide." The old voyageur framed the song by

relating it to the precise location along the journey, as "on ne manque pas de s'arrêter au Petit Rocher de la Haute Montagne: qui est au milieu du portage des Sept-Chutes, en bas de l'île du Grand Calumet."\textsuperscript{52} Marius Barbeau presents a version based on the widespread core narrative:

\textbf{La Complainte de Cadieux, Coureur de Bois (CA. 1709)}\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
Petit Rocher de la haute montagne, & Little Rock on the high mountain \\
Je viens ici finir cette campagne! & I have come here to finish this campaign! \\
O doux échos, entendez mes soupirs! & Oh, soft echoes, listen to my sighs! \\
En languissant, je vais bientôt mourir. & While languishing here, I will soon die.

Petits oiseaux, vos douces harmonies, & Little birds, your gentle harmonies \\
Quand vous chantez, me rattach' à la vie. & When you sing, it keeps me alive. \\
Ah! si j'avais des ailes comme vous, & Ah! If I had wings like you, \\
Je s'rais heureux avant qu'il fût deux jours & I would be happy before two days' time.

Seul en ces bois que j'ai eu de soucis, & Alone in these woods, I have worried \\
Pensant toujours à mes si cher amis! & Thinking always of my dear friends! \\
Qui me dira, ah! sont-ils tous noyés? & Who will tell me, Ah! have they all drowned? \\
Les Iroquois les auraient-ils tués? & Have the Iroquois killed them?

Par un beau jour que, m'étant éloigné, & On a nice day when I have gone far away, \\
En revenant, je vis une fumée, & On returning, I saw smoke, \\
Je me suis dit: - Qu'est-ce qui loge ici? & I said to myself: who lodges here? \\
Les Iroquois m'ont-ils pris mon logis? & Have the Iroquois taken my home?

Tout aussitôt, je fus en embassade, & Immediately, I went in delegation \\
Afin de voir si c'était embuscade. & In order to see if it was an ambush
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{52} Taché, \textit{Forestiers et Voyageurs}, 158-168. \\
J'ai aperçu trois visages français,
M'ont mis le coeur d'une trop grande joi'.
Mes genoux pli'nt, ma faible voix s'arrête
J'ai tombé là. A partir ils s'apprêtent.
Je restai seul. Pas un qui me consol'.
Quand la mort vient, [pas] un [ne s'y] désol'.
Un loup hurlant vint près de ma cabane.
Voir si mon feu n'avait plus de boucane.
Je lui ai dit: - Retire-toi d'ici,
Car sur ma foi, je perc'rai ton habit!
Un noir corbeau, volant à l'aventure,
Vint se percher tout près de ma toiture.
Je lui ai dit: - Mangeur de chair humain',
Va t'en chercher autre viand' que la mienn'!
Prends ta volé, dans ces bois, ces marais.
Tu trouveras plusieurs corps iroquois.
Tu trouveras des tripes, aussi des os.
Mange à ton saoul! Laisse-moi en repos!
Rossignolet, va dire à ma maîtresse,
À mes enfants qu'un adieu je leur laisse
Que j'ai gardé mon amour et ma foi,
Que désormais, faut renoncer à moi.
C'est aujourd'hui que le mond' j'abandonne.
Mais j'ai recours à vous, Sauveur des hommes.
Très Sainte Vierg', ne m'abandonnez pas!
Permettez-moi d'mourir entre vos bras!

I saw three French faces,
My heart filled with great joy.
My knees shook, my feeble voice stopped.
I fell there. They were preparing to leave.
I stayed alone. No one consoled me.
When death comes, no one is sorry.
A wolf howled very close to my cabin
To see if my fire had any more smoke.
I said to him: - Leave here.
Because on my faith, I see your clothing!
A black crow, flying for adventure,
Came to perch close to my roof.
I said to him: - Eater of human flesh,
Go find flesh other than mine!
Take off, into the woods & marshes.
You will find many iroquois corpses.
You will find the tripes and bones.
Eat until you’re drunk! Let me rest!
Nightingale go tell my mistress
And my children farewell,
That I have kept my love & faith
And from now on they must forget me.
It is today that I leave this world.
But I have recourse in you, Saviour of men.
Blessed Virgin Saint, ah! don't abandon me.
Let me die in your arms!
The opening line establishes the location of Cadieux’s death, at the specific site of the "petit rocher de la haute montagne [little rock of the high mountain]." After lamentations and encounters with animals of symbolic importance, he implores the Virgin Mary not to abandon him. This represents Barbeau's standardized "texte critique," representing the core narrative found in more than a dozen slightly different versions recorded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet the textual differences between the various transcribed and recorded versions of this song are much less varied than the narratives related from the fur trade accounts.  

Perhaps this is because they were transcribed in the 1860s or afterwards, and a uniform version had become established. Or perhaps the mnemonic qualities of melody, rhythm, and rhyme acted to preserve and disseminate unified features of the core narrative. Walter Ong suggests in his book *Orality and Literacy* that music could act “as a constraint to fix a verbatim oral narrative.” While this is a topic beyond the scope of this dissertation, Ong’s suggestion is worthy of consideration, as the rhymed couplets are remarkably similar between versions.

Variations in the oral stories, for instance whether or not Cadieux was separated from his wife and child on a hunting trip or from a voyageur brigade can be cross-verified with the song. The lyrics in stanza three imply that he was with a canoe brigade, with his “cher amis” whom he worried might have drowned or been caught by the Iroquois. Yet his wife and children are also mentioned with "ma maîtresse . . mes enfants [my wife.. my children]..." Thus the lyrical framework loosely supported both interpretations. Although it is impossible to determine in which ways the song changed over time, the extant versions are on the whole remarkably uniform. Yet songs recorded after the fur trade era by folklorists must always be treated skeptically. The moral, literary, linguistic and historical agenda pursued by folklorists has been

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54 Marius Barbeau conducts a thorough analysis of the variations between 13 versions of the song. Differences are mostly attributable to variations in wording rather than meaning: Ibid., 167-171.

examined in detail. Collectors from Ernest Gagnon to Marius Barbeau stressed a particular version of French Canadian music, culture, and history, embodying *joie de vivre*, family, community, national values, Catholic devotion, as well as a cultural continuity with medieval France.  

Yet in the case of this song, its origin story, content, and repeated re-affirmation in the written record set it apart as worthy of close analysis. The various collected versions have specific records of oral transmission associated with them. Yet some scholars have detected the evidence of literate composition. Marius Bareau identifies the version he recorded in 1918 as the oldest, with Ovide Soucy having learned it fifty years previous from his seventy-five year old uncle, dating it to approximately 1810. In its collection, it was emphasized by old voyageurs such as the guide Morache as literally the "chant de mort du brave Cadieux." Its form has been identified as a European *complainte*, canticle, or "Come-all-ye!" Barbeau defines the features of its composition that set it apart from the folk and jongleur songs of France: the decasyllabic metre with a masculine caesura at four feet, reveal that the composer "avait quelque notion de l'art poétique des écoles." The eleven stanzas closely follow the A A B B rhyme scheme. A detailed musical evaluation of the dozens of recorded versions of this song is outside of the scope of this study, yet at this level of analysis the detection of literary influence on the oral narrative and song should be acknowledged. The song’s improbable origin from Cadieux himself, likely

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59 Taché, *Forestiers et Voyageurs*, 175.
60 Marguerite Béclard d'Harcourt, quoted in Barbeau, “La Complainte de Cadieux, coureur de bois (ca. 1709),” 182.
61 Ibid.
an illiterate voyageur, was crucial to how it was encountered, and reinforced by the lyrics written from his perspective as he lay alone dying.

Although supplications to the Virgin Mary are an integral aspect of all versions, the emphasis within the song on supernatural encounters with animals figures prominently. Narratives where humans encounter and interact with anthropomorphized animals are a staple of medieval and early modern French folklore.\(^{62}\) The song begins with Cadieux addressing the environment, bidding it to listen: "O doux échos, entendez mes soupirs!" The various animals represent omens of life and death. Cadieux asserts that the gentle harmonies of little birds kept him alive. Yet he resists the howling wolf and a black crow, both symbols of death in European folklore. Finally Cadieux bids the Nightingale to tell his mistress and children about his own tragic fate. The nightingale bird is found only in Europe, and has been associated since classical times with laments, and is commonly found in French folklore as a symbol for tragic situations. This cultural vocabulary is representative of French folklore and is consistent with French Canadian themes as explored by Barbeau.\(^{63}\)

The three stanzas of this song which mention the Iroquois are particularly worthy of note. Alone in the woods Cadieux imagines his friends and worries if they have drowned or if the Iroquois had killed them. When he sees smoke, he wonders if "Les Iroquois m'ont pris mon logis?" The reference in stanza nine about the bones of the Iroquois in the forest is random and cryptic and is unexplained in the song and oral stories.\(^{64}\) That the Iroquois are the antagonists of the narrative reflects the earlier period of New France, while by the later eighteenth century French Canadians and Iroquois alike laboured under the same banner of the English merchants.

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\(^{64}\) Barbeau, "La Complainte de Cadieux," 163.
The song remained relevant, teaching lessons about the dangers of the river and abandonment in the wilderness, pertinent themes in the era of New France and later during the English fur trade.

When the old voyageur guide Morache narrated the story and song to French Canadian folklorist Taché, he related it specifically in reference to its location. In his mind, the song was strongly associated with the landscape. He emphasized that "Chaque fois que les canots de la compagnie passent au Petit Rocher, un vieux voyageur raconte aux jeunes gens l'histoire de Cadieux; les anciens voyageurs qui l'ont déjà entendu raconter aiment toujours à l'entendre, quand ils ne la redisent pas eux-mêmes." The song was collected and published in numerous editions as Petit Rocher, or Petit Rocher de la Haute Montagne, referencing its particular location and trigger as a soundmoment along the portage des sept-chûtes.

Grand Calumet Island was many days away from the security of the St. Lawrence, and Cadieux's tale seems to have made a strong impression on crews on the portage. Emphasizing the danger posed to voyageurs "left-behind," the story stood as a powerful parable, depicting the suffering of the abandoned voyageur, "poor Cadieux." Tormented by hostile Iroquois and wolves alike, he found solace only in the mercy of the Virgin Mary and death itself. This story may have functioned to frighten young voyageurs, reinforcing their sense of vulnerability, perhaps inspiring increased Catholic devotion and prayer as the brigades continued. Carolyn Podruchny has described how "religico-magical rites" were an integral part of the voyageurs' vocation, serving to emphasize "the dangerous and frequent tragedies in their jobs." The complainte of Jean Cadieux represented a kind of musical rite of passage, institutionalized on the longest portage of the Ottawa River. The event elicited by the location was a soundmoment consisting of story-telling and song.

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65 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 16.
It is significant that just beyond Grand Calumet Island was the point of ritual baptism along the Ottawa River. After passing through Lake Coulonge and the dramatic *Rivière Creuse*, or Deep River that was bound by "very high rocks" on the North end, this dramatic setting marked the onset of a new landscape, and a low sandy beach emerged to the South.66 This is the first and likely the oldest location where ritual "baptisms" for those who had never passed further took place, known as the "Pointe aux Baptêmes." In 1686 Chevalier de Troyes mentioned the location and the custom of baptizing those who had not passed before.67 Alexander Henry ("the Elder") in the 1760s described the long beach emerging far into the river, "a remarkable point of sand, stretching far into the stream, and on which it is customary to baptize novices."68 Carolyn Podruchny has interpreted these rituals as cultural performances at sites of significance, marking "thresholds crossed," as voyageurs physically entered new landscapes and socially new occupational identities and stages of manhood.69 This was the site where the pre-Cambrian shield was dramatically encountered. It would characterize river travel for the subsequent journey west, representing not only a visual change but an auditory one, with hard echoing shores serving to amplify.

The question of why fur traders so readily underwent ritual baptisms imposed by their subordinates is posed by Podruchny’s article on the subject.70 The gentlemen or *bourgeois* did not write favourably about being subjected to the authority of their subordinates. These customs were often equated to those of sailors who enforced rituals and expected a drink from those who had never before passed places of significance. Those who did not conform could be sure,

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69 Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 16.
according to Daniel Harmon, of "being plunged into the water, which they profanely call, baptizing."\footnote{Harmon, \textit{A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America}, 2.} This gateway point along the Ottawa River functioned as a meaningful point of transition as well as a place to stop for a drink, celebrated only after passing the particularly ferocious series of rapids at Grand Calumet Island, with the frightening story and mournful song of Cadieux perhaps still fresh on their minds. That the landscape here transformed may have served as an implicit signal to all that it was a place of significance and transition. Certainly, the sounds of the canoemen’s songs would now reverberate as they bounced off the rocky shores, particularly high cliffs like in the \textit{Rivière Creuse} and French River.

As a point of comparison, there was a place to the northwest of Lake Superior that marked another momentous transformation in the landscape, and another major point of baptism. Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) recounted how in 1800 on the first day after departing Grand Portage the men stopped to enjoy their regale at a “delightful meadow” where there was “plenty of elbow-room for the men’s antics,” a description that suggests movement and perhaps dancing.\footnote{Alexander Henry the Younger, \textit{New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry}, edited by Elliott Coues, vol 1, (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines; New York: F. Harper, 1897), 8.} Edward Umfreville spoke not of undergoing baptism, but rather “Paying my Baptême here,” providing his crew with the obligatory dram at this location in 1784.\footnote{Edward Umfreville, “Journal of a Passage in a Canoe from Pais Plat in Lake Superior, to Portage de l’Isle in Riviere Ouinipique,” Archives of Ontario, (MU 2200), 48.} This point of baptism coincided with the height of land northwest of Lake Superior, significant in signaling the new drainage basins and territories. John Macdonell’s account is by far the richest, suggesting the mandatory nature of the ceremony and providing a dram. Macdonell was “instituted a \textit{North man} by \textit{Batême} performed by sprinkling water in my face with a small cedar Bow dipped in a ditch of water and accepting certain conditions,” such as enforcing these ceremonies on others.
and never kissing a voyageur’s wife against her free will, “accompanied by a dozen of Gun shots fired one after another in an Indian manner.” Though Macdonell writes that “the intention of this Bâptême being only to claim a glass,” the ceremony itself seems meaningful in a variety of ways, solemnified by the ritualized soundmoment of firing guns in an “Indian manner.” Reinforcing indigenous sound-symbols was an aspect of the “baptisms” that presented an alternate social order, loudly presented for all to hear without words.  

Although the portage of Cadieux was by far the most famous for its lament, others also appear to have been associated with lamentful music. At the forks of the Ottawa and the "Petite Riviere" [Mattawa], treacherous rapids and white-water provided many interruptions before Lake Nipissing. Two portages near this junction possessed musical associations, as well as one of the most dangerous reputations of the entire journey. Alexander Mackenzie describes "Portage Pin de Musique" at four hundred and fifty six paces, and the following portage "mauvais de Musique." Mackenzie does not explain the justification for these names aside from the comment that this was a path "where many men have been crushed to death by the canoes, and others have received irrecoverable injuries." In the mid 1810s, Ross Cox described the portage "called Mauvaise de la Musique, the road of which is extremely awkward and dangerous." Recounting a story told him by his voyageurs, Cox relates that "A few years before, a man while carrying a canoe fell against a large rock, by which his head was completely severed from his body. His grave is in the middle of the pathway." Nicholas Garry also mentions it, and while the precise names of these two portages vary in the accounts, they represented two notable "musical

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74 John Macdonell, in Five Fur Traders of the Northwest, 99-100.
75 Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America, lxiv.
76 Cox, The Columbia River, 341.
portages” on the route between Montreal and the Great Lakes. With the associated tale of death and the markings of gravesites, the evidence suggests a similar pattern to that of Cadieux. In the context of particularly dramatic environmental features, gravesite markers were powerful visual symbols that influenced interpretations of place. Yet they often triggered an auditory response, whether they were prayers spoken under the breath, stories told, or songs sung. The sources do not reveal whether or not the musical portages referred to another complainte similar to Cadieux’s, or rather hymns, or other music that commemorated life and death.

6.4 Sinmedwe’ek: La Cloche

An ecological transition perhaps as significant as that marking the first baptism was the emergence onto the Great Lakes. Natural features signified the momentous transition: down the narrow channels of the French River to Georgian Bay, the relative shelter of the river, woods, and cliffs gave way to the open expanse of the Great Lakes. The wind and the waves picked up dramatically as the canoes from the French River travelled along the north shore of Georgian Bay. The propensity for powerful westerly winds to push the canoes up against the rocky shoreline represented one of the dangers of this section of the voyage. On reaching the northern channel between Manitoulin Island and the mainland, an important narrows yielded a degree of shelter from the winds and waves and was the location of an important soundmark. Here Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) in his account from September 1st, 1761 confirms having "reached an island, called La Cloche.” He provides the justification for its place name, describing

77 Garry, The Diary of Nicholas Garry, 38; Cox wrote it as "portage des Pins de La Musique," Cox, The Columbia River, 341; George Heriot described them merely as numbered musical portages: "portage premier musique," and "portage musique," George Heriot, Travels Through the Canadas, Containing a Description of the Picturesque Scenery on Some of the Rivers and Lakes; with an Account of the Productions, Commerce, and Inhabitants of Those Provinces. To Which Is Subjoined a Comparative View of the Manners and Customs of Several of the Indian Nations of North and South America, 1st ed (1807; repr. Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1971), 240-1.
how it is named “because there is here a rock, standing on a plain, which, being struck, rings like a bell.”

To Anishinaabeg peoples, these "ringing" or "sounding" stones have long been held in sacred reverence. While prehistoric “rock gong” sites have been identified and investigated as a significant component of the cultural heritage of various African cultures, research in Canada appears to be much more limited. Although the Anishinaabeg designation is Sinmedwe’ek, for

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79 They have also been called "sin'dewe," as well as "Assin-mad-wei-wig.' "Sounding" or "ringing" stones. The European interpretation that they sounded like "bells" is absent from the original Anishinaabek designation, despite some claims that the phrase can be translated as the "bell rocks." See Darrel Manitowabi, "Sinmedwe'ek: The other-than-human grandfathers of North-central Ontario," *Papers of the 39th Algonquian Conference* (London: The University of Western Ontario, 2008): 444-458.
"ringing" or "sounding" stones, or Mishomis, for grandfathers, the name “La Cloche” derives from the era of the French fur trade. From Henry’s account it is clear this place was named before the mid eighteenth century. While La Cloche indicates that early French explorers related the sound of the rocks to church bells, it also suggests there was one bell. Alexander Henry describes a single sounding boulder, as do other accounts based on oral histories.

How La Cloche influenced the soundscape of the northern passage is difficult to ascertain. Oral stories collected in the twentieth century describe ceremonial ringing to announce events and special occasions such as the passing of a chief. It also served as an alarm system to warn of the approach of hostile forces. Anishinaabeg elders recall that the rocks could be heard as far away as the north shore of Manitoulin Island, as far east as Lake Nipissing, and as far south as Parry Sound. According to traditions maintained in the Whitefish River reserve, one large boulder was surrounded by seven others that rung. These were all honoured by the community as other-than-human ancestors, presented with gifts such as tobacco as offerings. It was believed that these rocks imparted special powers and knowledge through sounds that allowed for connections with the spirit world. Sophie Edwards has investigated how La Cloche served as an important location of social, economic, and spiritual passage. The Anishinaabeg clearly held it in sacred reverence prior to the arrival of Europeans. In the account of Anna Jameson, who when travelling along the trading route in 1836-7 wrote “The place derives its name from a large rock, which they say, being struck, vibrates like a bell. But I had no

82 The translation as "bell rocks," can be found in Arthur J. McGregor, Wiigwaaskingaa: Land of Birch Trees (Maniwaki: Anishinabe Printing, 1999), 80.
85 Ibid.
opportunity of trying the experiment, therefore cannot tell how this may be. . . the Indians regard the spot as sacred and enchanted.”

This soundmark became institutionalized during the Montreal fur trade era. It was mentioned by Roderic McKenzie in 1789, and by the 1790s Fort La Cloche was constructed as a trading post nearby. The first NWC post may have been on Great La Cloche Island, while by the early 1790s it was re-established on the north shore. The place-name extended beyond Great La Cloche Island to the La Cloche mountain range across the North Channel in to what is now Killarney Provincial Park. In 1788, when E.E. Gothermann, captain of the Royal Canadian Engineers toured Lake Huron, he sketched his map with La Cloche prominently marked as the only significant landmark along the "rocky and barren" north shore between the French River and Sault. Ste. Marie.

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Fig. 5. "Sketch of Lake Huron, 1788: circumnavigated by Gother Mann, Capt. commanding Royal Engineers in Canada." Library and Archives Canada. No restrictions on use, copyright expired [cartographic material].

Fig. 6 Sinmedwe’ek or “La Cloche.” Postcard from the 1920s. Personal Collection, Shelley Pearen.
How was La Cloche perceived by fur traders? Unfortunately the documentary record is thin, but we can tell that it may have played into conceptions of place. It was close to the site where Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) first transformed his appearance in 1761, putting on the clothing “usually worn by such of the Canadians as pursue the trade into which I had entered.” At first he was received with civility and kindness, until it was revealed he was English. 89 His experience with the Anishinaabeg at La Cloche convinced him of the necessity to put aside his English clothes and instead adopt the voyageur’s distinctive sash, loose shirt, blanket coat, and red cap, smearing his “face and hands with dirt, and grease.” 90 It was here that Henry adopted the approach pioneered by French fur traders before him, to be adopted by subsequent traders from Montreal. Yet we do not know what kinds of ritualized soundmoments fur traders experienced here. They presumably would have learned about the site through the name of the trading post.

89 Henry, _Travels & Adventures_, 34.
90 Ibid., 34-5.
Adjacent to the site of an Anishinaabeg village, the Sinmedwe’ek may have reinforced notions of First Nations’ sovereignty and presence. Yet its re-naming as “La Cloche” possesses an unmistakable undertone of Christianity, associating it with church bells. Yet what kind of “sacralized” space was demarked by their ringing? Was it interpreted as the extension of Christendom into the Great Lakes, or as sounding an entirely different kind of space and spirituality?

While Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) was received at an Anishinaabeg village, with the construction of Fort La Cloche the soundmoments associated with arrival here may have been transformed into the customary singing and saluting with gunfire. Fort La Cloche was a relatively minor fort compared with Sault Ste. Marie or the western depots of Grand Portage and Fort William on the west end of Lake Superior. Yet it would have been the first European fort passed by the Montreal canoes on the Great Lakes, and thus the singing and saluting characteristic of these arrivals would have characterized the auditory environment. While the name Fort La Cloche in a sense commemorated the culturally significant soundmark, it enshrined its transformed name while introducing a new and more dominant set of sounds to the immediate environment.

The journey between Montreal and the western Great Lakes consisted of a ritualized progression of soundmoments. Significant locations were marked by responses that provided an interaction with the landscape and an influence on its interpretation. Histories, myths, dangers, and cultural significances were marked by songs and oral stories. Soundmoments drew the

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91 While La Cloche is perhaps the most distinctive soundmark place-name from the fur trade era, it is likely not alone. Manitoba likely derives from the Cree words “’Manitobou bou’,” which means “the narrows of the great spirit,” which referred to a known soundmark on Lake Manitoba, where it narrowed roughly halfway between its northernmost and southernmost point. Here “the waves on the loose surface rocks of its north shore produce curious bell-like and wailing sounds, which the first Indian visitors believed came from a huge drum beaten by the spirit Manitou.” Sacchetti, “Rock Gongs,” 8-13.
brigade crews together and provided meanings at specific locations. La Cloche on the western end symbolized the Anishinaabeg presence and perhaps new sonic spaces and spirituality pathways, while St. Anne’s on the eastern end symbolized those of the French Canadians and the Catholic Church. The series of soundmoments along the way punctuated transitions between locations, landscapes, and cultures.
7 Fur Traders as Fieldworkers: Hunting, Conjuring, and Healing Songs

What kinds of music did fur traders describe when they transitioned from merely “passing through,” to staying for extended periods amongst First Nations peoples? Did descriptions of communal songs of diplomacy, welcome, and warfare give way to more individual forms of musical expression in First Nations’ communities? Ethnographic insights might be expected from fur traders with the longest careers. Yet this chapter will demonstrate that it was during the period of rapid expansion and mercantile competition from 1760 - 1821 when the western plains, the western subarctic, the northwest coast, and the plateau - basin area peoples were encountered and integrated into fur trading networks, and that the explorer-traders the forefront of this expansion provided some of the deepest insights into First Nations’ musical culture.

At the large posts such as York Factory on Hudson Bay it was possible to have a long career while remaining relatively isolated from First Nations peoples. James Hargrave worked in Rupert’s Land for the HBC during much of the 1820s, yet gleaned few ethnographic insights about indigenous cultures. When his brother in Europe requested a description of First Nations’ customs, he replied that his “information regarding the domestic habits of the Indians is more limited than what might be expected from a 8 y[ear] residence among them, and I can enter little
into detail regarding the arts they employ in hunting the fur animals of the country.”¹ While acknowledging that “arts” were employed in hunting practices, Hargrave was unable or unwilling to provide further details.

Those traders on the cusp of pushing the boundaries of the known trading territory, on the other hand, tended to leave considerable records due to their close contact and overwhelming dependency on First Nations’ peoples. Similarly, those overwintering in the northwest for a number of years, and those trading en déroine described at length the preparatory songs and ceremonies of the hunt during their extended stays in First Nations’ camps and villages. Forays into First Nations’ communities resulted in exposure to traditional hunting practices and songs that sought to interpret and control unseen forces. Fur traders were particularly interested in practices related to hunting and healing, including the use of songs. Music was described as serving different functions than in Euro-American culture at the time. First Nations’ songs were used as conduits to obtain and express spiritual power and were seen as essential to the preparation of the hunt and success in healing. These musical applications were often described alongside religious complexes such as the midéwiwin (Grand Medicine Society), shaking lodge, wabanowiwin. This chapter will examine the descriptions of First Nations’ songs and ceremonials that were often shielded from the view of administrators, travelers, and soldiers of the era, but that fur traders gathered from their extended forays in the northwest.

Trading en déroine was a particularly intensive period of intercultural immersion in the working lives of fur traders. Carolyn Podruchny has defined trading en déroine as “traveling with a small complement of goods to Aboriginal homes or hunting lodges, singly or in pairs, to

trade for furs on a small scale on behalf of a fur trade company.”

For fur traders, this was the most intimate form of trading contact, with small groups travelling to live for short or extended periods of time in First Nations’ communities, allowing for the opportunity to observe musical practices in the daily life of the community. Yet fur traders were not merely passive witnesses. They sometimes described how the European material goods they supplied were incorporated into First Nations’ ceremonial instruments and dress. While fur traders viewed rituals through what Elizabeth Vibert describes as the “refracting lenses of their own cultures,” they also listened through culturally conditioned auditory filters. Yet it was not mere curiosity of the exotic that spurred fur traders’ interest in First Nations’ music. Many came to the realization that these practices influenced their own profits and livelihoods in the northwest.

Although First Nations across northern North America pursued a variety of strategies for procuring food, all supplemented their diet with the hunt. Fur traders relied on the successes of First Nations hunters, a fact whose historical significance was first stressed by Harold Innis. According to a recent reappraisal by Arthur J. Ray, “Innis clearly appreciated the central role aboriginal people played in the enterprise,” beginning a departure from the Eurocentric concerns of previous scholars. Ray’s own work greatly expanded on the significance of First Nations peoples in the fur trade and their hunting and gathering lifestyles. He demonstrated how groups such as the Cree and Assiniboine employed seasonal migrations, gathering for the buffalo hunt

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on the plains in the summer while dispersing to overwinter throughout the woodlands. While Ray and other historians have come to appreciate First Nations’ imperatives in trade such as the “important ceremony” of gift-giving, historians have largely overlooked the musical rituals integral to hunting practices.

7.1 Hunting Practices

When William Apess, a Native American of Pequot origin, travelled along the southern Great Lakes in the 1810s, he described how First Nations hunters “chanted the wild beasts of prey with their songs.” This was changed in a recent published version of his memoirs into “[en]chanted the wild beasts of prey with their songs,” transforming its connotations. The original wording of Apess suggests instead animals chanted into being, summoned, or “conjured” by songs. This is more in accordance with the representations of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, who have described the centrality of songs to hunting practices of indigenous peoples. A recent survey of this literature argues that music informed and enriched "virtually all aspects" of hunters' lives, with the conclusion that no people "value music more highly or embrace its social and symbolic uses with greater fervor and vitality." While recorded

in tremendous variation across North America, many of the basic features of hunting songs have been described consistently across many cultures.

As fur traders overwintered in the northwest, they experienced first hand preparations for the hunt. Duncan Cameron wrote about the Anishinaabeg of Lake Nipigon north of Lake Superior. “Whenever they intend going out to hunt the moose or the reindeer,” he wrote, “they conjure and beat the drum a long time the night before.” For Cameron, preparatory ceremonies were striking both their frequency and duration. He indicates that these preparations had the intended purpose of “charming any animal they may then find.” Rather than attributing success to their stealthiness or tracking, “whatever good luck they have, is attributed to their drum and Medecine bag.” Adeptness with these material objects was seen as crucial to the fortunes of the hunt. A concern with their proper rituals and musical applications was central to the methods of Anishinaabeg hunters.

David Thompson’s career began amongst the Cree of what is now northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the 1780s and 1790s. His writings describe the importance of dreams and visions as the basis of hunting. “For to acquire this important knowledge,” Thompson wrote, “they have recourse to Dreams and other superstitions; and a few of their best conjurers sometimes take a bold method of imposing upon themselves and others.” This passage suggests that Thompson had no choice to observe the "imposing" activities of the conjurors. Like an ethnologist doing “fieldwork,” Thompson identifies his informants by name. He writes in personal terms about the songs he heard “early every morning.”

One of my best acquaintances, named “Ise pe sa wan,” was the most relied on by the Natives to enquire into futurity by conjuring; he was a good hunter, fluent in speech, had a fine manly voice; and very early every morning, took his rattle, and beating time with it, made a fluent speech of

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about twenty minutes to the Great Spirit and the Spirits of the forests, for health to all of them and success in hunting; and to give to his Poo wog gin, where to find the Deer, and to be always kind to them, and give them straight Dreams, that they may live straight.11

The close connection between speaking, conjuring, singing, and hunting is here evident. Not only are superficial actions described, but Thompson emphasizes music's role as a conduit to the spirit-world. It was this connection that brought health and success in the hunt. Ise pe sa wan requested accurate dreams for the hunters so they could effectively track animals. The relationship between accurate dreams and success in the hunt was made apparent to Thompson by watching Ise pe sa wan perform with his rattle every morning.

When circumstances were dire and food in short supply, fur traders living en déroine could become closely cognizant of their hosts’ hunting practices. In George Nelson’s account of his first years in the trade west of Lake Michigan during the 1802-4 seasons, the local Anishinaabeg and his French Canadian crew approached starvation. As a result Nelson encouraged the local hunters to “make their medicine.” He accomplished this through a gift of tobacco: “but more by incitement I give some tobacco to the Commis & one of his brothers an old man to make their medicine (as they call it) or prayers to kill something – particularly bears for there are but very few other animals here.”12 Tobacco and ritualized smoking accompanied hunting ceremonies, linking these activities to the fur trade. Nelson provides a detailed description of the sounds and emotional tone of the proceedings. He had never witnessed the ceremony executed with such solemnity, which he attributes to the direness of their circumstances.

Altho’ this is not the first time that I’ve seen them & been with them while at these ceremonies, yet I never seen any carried on in so grave & serious (& I believe I may say solemn) a manner –

not the least noise – giggling – whispering or laughing as is most usually their custom – but here silence was only interrupted long & low speeches – songs & beating upon a piece of stick with each of the three men two small drumsticks painted – they sung many songs & several very handsome ones if we may judge of them by their tunes – quite different from the usual strain of their songs they would frequently sing ‘till near day; & in short conduct the whole of their ceremonies in a manner by far more consistent than many of us Christians do in our churches – if I may be allowed to make the Comparison - . . . we were frequently invited to these ceremonies – where we were entertained with smoakeing. 13

Competition between hunters manifested as musical displays. Nelson describes how one hunter found that “the others with their medicine & other ceremonies could not get any thing," and himself "set up all this last night (‘till quite day light) alone singing, beating the drum & harangueing & smoking” in preparation to kill a bear the next day.

Nelson describes in detail Anishinaabeg hunting songs. He writes how the hunters he witnessed “frequently conjured, i.e. prayed & sang, & laid out all their most powerful nostrums, to kill bears.” 14 Rather than concerns about overhunting or animal scarcity, Nelson relates how during a period of famine one of the Anishinaabeg hunters proclaimed apprehension about being "polluted." The cause of this sentiment was due to a murder he had committed, and declared this to be the reason of his ill fortune on the hunt.

How many appeals, what beating of drums, singing, smoking &c. &c. Still to no purpose. At last Le Bougon, or Chubby, he who had killed the indian in the autumn, who was with us, said he would try. “I should succeed, I know, because I have never yet failed; but I have polluted myself & I have no hope! What an event! how wretched am I now”! 15

This demonstrates the intensely individualistic nature of hunting songs, employed to ensure success in the hunt by interacting with unseen spiritual forces. Through musical "appeals," the hunter sought to repair his ill-fortune.

On another occasion, Thompson describes a hunter's preparations.

At dark, he began, laying out & exposing all his nostrums, roots, herbs, & dolls, to Pray (harangue), sing, beat his immense large drum, & smoke. He kept close to it the whole night. At Sun rise he gave a cry to attract attention, & accosted the others “old man, naming le Commis, you

13 Ibid., 143-4.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 145-6.
will find a large Bear, after much trouble in that wind fall, on the opposite Side of this Creek. You, young man, to the Commis Son, you will follow your fathers track 'till you have passed the 2 Small lakes – you will see a Fir tree thrown down by the wind, beyond that is another wind fallen tree, by the root of which you will a young one, his first year alone. I also have on up this river"! And, if I remember right, he gave one to Le Commis elder brother, who was with us.16

The "immense large drum" was significant because it sounded all night while the conjurer attempted to control and predict the hunt. The language of Nelson suggests that medicine-men were seen as giving animals to hunters. Nelson concludes this description with a significant admission. “This is so strange, & so out of the way that I will ask no one to beleive it...yet, I sayit is true, beleive who may,” writes Nelson, “those who will not beleive [sic] the Gospel will still less credit this,” but the hunt was successful for several nights afterwards.17

These successes may have influenced overwintering traders to try playing First Nations’ instruments in their own attempts at conjuring. Nelson recorded how one day he and the voyageur Sorel “proposed to imitate the indians conjuring.” He describes how they “speechifyed, sang, beat the drum, smoked & danced.” "Sorel, he who sang the best, imitating them, would run to the chimney yelling “something shall be cooked in that place” – part indian, part french & English – “tomorro, tomorrow, at latest, I smell it.”18 Thus singing abilities were equated with conjuring efficacy, and musically talented individuals were more trusted in their abilities. When le Commis brought sides of moose he had killed the next day, both Nelson and Sorel attributed it to their musical preparations. Sorel, a French Canadian, gained recognition for his medicine hunts “and was frequently called upon after this.” Thus not only First Nations hunters were respected for the efficacy of their hunting ceremonials and songs. Fur traders and voyageurs could adopt them when trading en déroine. Successes and failures in hunting were attributed to

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 146.
18 Ibid., 153.
skills in conjuring. While Sorel was known as a strong singer, Nelson nonetheless records that he eventually was deemed to have lost “his influence.”

This degree of involvement may have been the product of the desperation caused by famine. Yet it demonstrates flexibility and cultural adaptation. Other fur traders conveyed awareness and knowledge of First Nations hunting songs. Edward Ermatinger in the 1820s could identify songs associated with the hunt, recording in his memo book and journal how a hunting party returned “singing the song expressive of having killed.” Medicine feasts were a major way fur traders were invited to community events. Duncan Cameron related how although they excluded boys, women, and children, fur traders such as Cameron had “often been invited to those grand feasts, and as it would be exceedingly insulting to refuse such an invitation, I always had to accept.” With no choice in the matter, Cameron felt that “the politeness bestowed on me amply repaid by the foolish capers I was obliged to cut to perform my share of the ceremony.”

Recognizing it would be socially unacceptable to refuse attending, Cameron stresses that he was a reluctant participant. “They call their “Medecine” or conjuring feasts, at which they observe a number of ridiculous ceremonies, such as eating without a knife, striving who can finish his share first, dancing, walking so many times around the fire, retiring one by one in rotation, and several other foolish ceremonies too tedious to insert here.” Despite proclaiming disdain for these ceremonies, Cameron’s frequent attendance is acknowledged in his remark that he was “often” invited to these events. This reveals their importance and the social pressures exerted on fur traders. Cameron attended despite his hesitation, because otherwise he risked insulting his hosts.

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19 Ibid.
21 Duncan Cameron, Les Bourgeois De La Compagnie Du Nord-Ouest, 254.
22 Ibid.
John Tanner worked for various competing companies around Red River and Lake of the Woods during the 1810s. His arrival in the northwest from the frontiers of Kentucky began when he was captured at the age of ten and adopted into an Anishinaabeg family and given the name “Shaw-Shaw-Wa Be-Na-Se” or “The Falcon.” According to his autobiography he was famous for his hunting abilities and was called in during a time of famine to conduct a medicine hunt. At the point of being reduced “nearly to starvation,” Tanner relates how he “had recourse, as a last resort, to medicine hunting. Half the night I sung and prayed, and then lay down to sleep.”

I saw in my dream a beautiful young man come down through the hole in the top of my lodge, and he stood directly before me. “What,” said he, “is this noise and crying that I hear? Do I not know when you are hungry and in distress? I look down upon you at all times, and it is not necessary you should call me with such loud cries." Then pointing directly towards the sun's setting, he said, "do you see those tracks?" "Yes," I answered, "they are the tracks of two moose." "I give you those two moose to eat." Then pointing in an opposite direction, towards the place of the sun's rising, he showed me a bear's track, and said, "that also I give you." He then went out at the door of my lodge, and as he raised the blanket, I saw that snow was falling rapidly. I very soon awoke, and feeling too much excited to sleep, I called old Sha-gwaw-ko-sink to smoke with me, and then prepared my Muz-zin-ne-neen-suk, as in the subjoined sketch, to represent the animals whose tracks had been shown me in my dream.

Attracted by songs and prayers, the spirit entered the lodge while Tanner was dreaming, guiding him to the animal tracks. Demonstrating the importance of song, prayers, and dreams in conjuring a successful hunt, Tanner’s narrative is extraordinarily detailed and rich, relating his own personal vision, one of the few recorded in the annals of the early nineteenth century. Nanabozo, the Anishinaabeg cultural hero and trickster figure, is invoked in Tanner’s explanation of hunting preparations.

The songs used on occasion of these medicine hunts have relation to the religious opinions of the Indians. They are often addressed to Na-na-boo-shoo, or Na-Na-bush, whom they intreat to be their interpreter, and communicate their requests to the Supreme. Oftentimes, also, to Me-sukkum-mik O-kwi, or the earth, the great-grandmother of all. In these songs, they relate now Na-na-bush created the ground in obedience to the commands of the Great Spirit, and how all things for

the use, and to supply the wants of the uncles and aunts of Na-na-bush, (by which are meant men and women,) were committed to the care and keeping of the great mother. Na-na-bush, ever the benevolent intercessor between the Supreme Being and mankind, procured to be created for their benefit the animal whose flesh should be for their food, and whose skins were for their clothing.  

His abilities with dreams, visions, and songs may have resulted in being called in during times of famine. He relates one such event occurring in late winter, when a long stretch of unsuccessful hunts reduced his overwintering community to “extreme hunger.” When he finally found a moose, and was creeping near with difficulty his best dog broken free and scared it off. Sacrificing the dog that night to feed his family, other starving First Nations families community at this point called on Tanner “to make a medicine hunt.”

I accordingly told Me-zhick-ko-naum to go for my drum, and as preparatory to the commencement of my prayers and songs, I directed all my family to take such positions as they could keep for at least half the night, as, after I began, no one must move until I had finished. I have always been conscious of my entire dependence on a superior and invisible Power, but I have felt this conviction most powerfully in times of distress and danger. I now prayed earnestly, and with the consciousness that I addressed myself to a Being willing to hear and able to assist, and I called upon him to see and to pity the sufferings of my family. The next day I killed a moose, and soon after, a heavy snow having fallen, we were relieved from the apprehension of immediate starvation.

Tanner relates the drum as the most essential material for conducting a medicine hunt, with “prayers and songs” serving as intertwined components of the hunter’s preparation. It was to the success of these efforts that success in the hunt and a welcome change of weather was attributed. Tanner’s unusually close upbringing in Anishinaabeg society set him apart from most fur traders, and his participation in medicine hunts reveals the extent to which songs and drums played a central role.

7.2 Midéwiwin

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26 Ibid., 202-3.
The *midéwiwin* or Grand Medicine Society served and still serves a prominent role in Anishinaabeg society. It is a restricted society with secretive rites of initiation and training. Songs with the power to attract animals are owned by specific individuals, and are “sung by their possessor before starting on a hunting expedition.”

Frances Densmore in her fieldwork among the Anishinaabeg does not list hunting songs as a separate category, but rather as within the framework of the *midéwiwin*, asserting the proclaimed “ability of the Midé-wini’ni to control the wild creatures of the woods.”

Preparing for the hunt included the use of medicine bundles, drums and/or rattles. The *midéwiwin* rituals and procedures were described with varying degrees of familiarity by fur traders. Because it could have implications on their supplies, there was often only brief acknowledgement of its occurrence in their journals. Yet others became familiar with its procedures and described some of its musical features in detail.

First observed by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists around the turn of the twentieth century, the ceremonial components of the *midéwiwin* include smoking, various rituals with medicines, and singing. Frances Densmore’s interpretation is that its “chief aim is to secure health and long life to its adherents, and music forms an essential part of every means used to that end.”

The *midéwiwin* permitted both men and women into the eight degrees of rank, with advancement through ceremonies that required the bestowing of gifts. Meetings in the spring and fall were significant events, and all members were “expected to attend one meeting each year for the renewal of their “spirit power.”” This was an important power utilized throughout the year for various purposes including hunting and treatment of the sick. While these descriptions

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28 Ibid., 83.
29 Ibid., 51, 85.
30 Ibid., 13.
31 Ibid.
resonate across studies, some claims appear to be influenced by the era in which fieldwork was conducted. According to Densmore, the society forbade lying and the use of liquor, and punishment could be enacted through curses, which were known to kill. In addition, she claims that the society “teaches that long life is coincident with goodness, and that evil inevitably reacts on the offender.” As we shall see, not all of these characterizations correspond well with observations made in the preceding centuries by fur traders, and may instead reflect a Christian moralizing influenced by the intense missionary presence of the mid-late nineteenth century.32

Fur traders were sometimes informed about the midéwiwin by the First Nations peoples with whom they were trading. Many described not its ceremonies, but merely its relationship with their returns. From his 1804-5 journal in the Cross Lake Snake River area, Thomas Connor mentions how a band of First Nations referenced the “Mitty Ceremony” alongside a request for rum. Describing how he “refused & abused them as they deserve,” Connor responded with hostility.33 Other fur traders such as A. McLellan reported the occurrence of a “Scautoux” [Saulteux] cutting off a horse’s tail, occurring on the same day, and perhaps because of, the making of the “Grande Medicin.”34 These references suggest that traders associated the midéwiwin with material losses and could respond with hostility.

Other fur traders provided more intimate and extensive descriptions. Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) described the ceremonies held at Red River, taking special note of the midéwiwin’s gender dynamics. As Sylvia Van Kirk has written, fur traders were often interested

32 Ibid., 13-14; Some have argued that Christian views of heaven and hell seem to have influenced midéwiwin ideas about retribution for ethnical conduct. See Michael D. McNally, Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Native American Culture in Motion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.
in and concerned with gender roles in First Nations’ societies. On one occasion, Henry “found the Indians were busy employed in making the Grand Medicine.” He described it as “a ceremony generally performed every spring, when they all meet and when there is always some novice to be admitted into the mysteries of this grand and solemn affair.” Henry describes them as semi-public events, identifying the new inductees as “two young men … a woman and M. Langlois's Girl.” Unlike the familiar norms of separate spheres and gender exclusive orders, Henry hinted at the sexual impropriety of such mixed arrangements and the mysterious ceremonies and rites conducted therein. He describes the “many curious circumstances reported concerning the admittance of women into this Great mystery of mysteries. The most ancient and famous for the art among the men, it is said, have every privilege allowed them with a novice and are granted every favour they wish to enjoy.” Yet these observations were not directly obtained, but rather gathered from what “is said.” Whether from a First Nations, French Canadian, or European source is unclear, yet it seems clear that the midéwiwin was often shielded from the eyes and ears of outsiders.

Others with extended service in the northwest sometimes became more intimately acquainted with the mysteries of the midéwiwin. George Nelson admitted that it took him years to acquire an understanding of its ceremonies. In one of his later journals, Nelson admitted that he “admired a good deal, having now a far better idea of their Theology, & understand their language also much better than I did 13 years ago when I saw them the first time.” Writing from Tête-au-Brochet in 1819, Nelson describes how the First Nations were “very busy in

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preparing for the meetaywee, to initiate two men & a woman in their Brotherhood, confirmation, whatever it may be termed.” He devoted considerable time observing, writing that he “passed a part of the night in looking at them, having been invited; & to day I went to see them go through the initiation.” The opportunity for this ethnography resulted from a disruption of travel due to inclement weather, common theme in the written record of the fur trade. Nelson’s attendance was cut short, as “unfortunately the wind changed all of a sudden to the N.E. & I took my leave of them just as they began their preparatory Dance and speeches.” It is not clear whether or not Nelson himself had been initiated, yet he stresses his familiarity and respect for these proceedings towards the end of his career in 1819. The constraints of northern travel and trade dictated that favourable weather conditions needed to be made use of due to the short travelling season, and in this instance Nelson was forced to re-embark on his voyage rather than linger and describe the ceremonial proceedings.

Of all the North West Company fur traders, Peter Grant provides perhaps the most detailed description of the midéwiwin. From his perspective, the shrouded ceremonies of this society had close European equivalents. "The Mitewie," as Grant labeled it, "is a mysterious ceremony, rather of the nature of our Free Masonry, but with this remarkable difference that both sexes are equally admitted as members." Gender neutrality was "remarkable" to Grant, who added that candidates for initiation had to be respected members of the community. New initiates were expected to give presents, a "requisite to constitute the meeting of the Order." The society seldom or never met for ceremonies except for when a candidate was to be initiated. Grant describes how a sizable lodge was constructed in which several long poles are suspended like a

38 Ibid.
39 See for example, David Thompson, The Writings of David Thompson, 231.
41 Carolyn Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 114-121.
scaffold, and on which the various presents of the initiates were displayed. The following description touches on the opening procession, the men and women seating themselves at the opposite ends of the lodge, and the singing, drumming, and dancing that interwove throughout the ceremonies.

All the members, dressed and painted as on all great occasions, go to this lodge in procession and preceded by drums, and, rattles. They take their seats indiscriminately on each side of the lodge, the men on one side, and the women on the other. The oldest and most considerable men generally begin the ceremony by singing and beating the drum. After beating the drum for a considerable time, one of the fraternity gets up and gently dances right opposite the music, and, by degrees, a whole group of dancers join, keeping exact time with the drum and, when heartily tired, quietly sit down in their places and smoke their pipes, without observing any particular ceremony. After breathing a little, the drummers summon up the dancers again, and the new members are allowed to join the dance.\textsuperscript{42}

Beginning with the elders and slowly incorporating the newcomers, the dance possessed a unified step and continued for a long duration, until the dancers were "heartily tired." Grant describes this ceremony continuing "with very little variation for the greater part of the day," until the drums were "laid aside for a moment," when smoking ensued, during which "a general silence prevails in the lodge."\textsuperscript{43} The silence was broken when one of the members rose with his medicine bag, holding it horizontally before him and "running with a short quick step" around the lodge, uttering unfamiliar and "unintelligible sounds as he proceeds."

After parading two or three time around in this manner, he shakes his bag with great dexterity, makes a push with it towards one of the members and immediately retires to his seat. The person pointed at pretends to be affected in an extraordinary manner; he groans, inclines his head in a languishing manner on his breast, or falls prostrate on the earth; he sometimes, indeed, contents himself with a little jerk backwards of the head, but always muttering something to himself, expressing his gratitude to the person who gave him the pretended shock. The same cheat is carried on until every member present has acted his part, and the newly adopted member properly instructed in the mystery.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 361-2.
This description focuses on the medicine bag, revealing the attempt to harness and display its power. This description contains many details that appear to be based on repeated observations. Grant does not assert whether or not he was initiated as a member, stressing that while only members and new initiates were allowed inside the lodge, the veil of secrecy was not absolute. Outsiders were permitted to stand at the door and watch: "none but members ever presume to enter the lodge; the others are permitted to stand at the door and look at the performers as long as they please." Perhaps Grant stood long hours at the door, or perhaps he himself was initiated. According to his description, the power of the medicine bags was never doubted, even by those outside. Indeed, the cultivation of a favourable image of the magical efficacy of the medicine bag or bundle seems to be one of the main functions of the ritual. According to this description, outsiders "never presume to doubt the miraculous virtue of their medicine bags, and great pains are taken by those honorable members to improve such opinion."45

These accounts demonstrate a close acquaintance gained by some fur traders, who had extended and immersive experiences navigating First Nations’ cultures. Europeans who travelled through the trading post network with the assistance of the Company could be less sensitive, lacking the motivation to maintain respectful and reciprocal relationships. The artist Paul Kane transgressed various taboos on his journey throughout the northwest in the 1840s. Upon reaching the Red River area, he relates entering a “medicine lodge,” where he encountered four chiefs "sitting upon mats spread upon the ground gesticulating with great violence, and keeping time to the beating of a drum."46 Kane was uninvited and describes how "something, apparently of a

46 Paul Kane, Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America: From Canada to Vancouver’s Island and Oregon Through the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Territory and Back Again (Toronto: The Radisson Society of Canada Limited, 1925), 47.
sacred nature was covered up in the centre of the group, which I was not allowed to see.” As they perceived his entrance, "they almost instantly ceased their "pow-wow," or music, and seemed rather displeased at my intrusion."47 In contrast to descriptions of invitations in the writings of fur traders that I have examined, Paul Kane recounts that he entered the midéwiwin lodge uninvited. This approach clearly granted fewer insights into songs and ceremonies of the secretive society. Fur traders recognized the reciprocal relationships upon which their livelihoods depended, and viewed the midéwiwin variously with annoyance, indifference, and interest. Yet those with long careers at the interior posts and trading en déroine tended to display more cultural sensitivity, perhaps due to dependency on their First Nations hosts.

7.3 Shaking Tent

A dramatic “conjuring” ritual was presented in a public display referred to variously as the “spirit lodge,” “conjuring box,” or “shaking tent.” First Nations scholar Vine Deloria Jr. describes the “Spirit Lodge” ritual in his book The World We Used to Live In as one of the most “profound ceremonies” that appeared “almost exclusively” among Algonquian speaking peoples.48 Frances Densmore recorded and described the songs of the “juggler” before his hands and feet were bound. He was placed inside a lodge constructed from eight poles twelve to fourteen feet high, sunk two or three feet into the ground. After his song, four men carried him eight times around the circle, and he was placed inside the enclosure. “One of the four men then called, “Come, ye people of the sky, come and smoke.” In a few moments the poles began to

48 He emphasizes that these peoples spanned the northern half of the continent from the Blackfoot of southern Alberta to the Cree of the arctic circle to eastern groups in Quebec and the Maritimes. Deloria Jr., The World We Used to Live In, 88-9.
shake; the whole structure rocked and swayed as though a tornado were blowing.”

What proceeded were a number of sound events that have been interpreted variously. Voices emerged from inside the tent that scholars have been termed “archaic or esoteric linguistic resources.” They were part of traditions involving the jiisakii, or “shaking tent tradition of divination,” relying on the specialized knowledge of a supernatural language. “Esoteric knowledge of manidookaazo,” writes McNally, “translated as "to talk supernatural" or "to take on spiritual power by one's own authority," giving healers and diviners privileged access to the spiritual powers.”

Frances Densmore secured interviews at an early date with First Nations’ peoples well acquainted with this art. She recounts the explanation of a man who regularly performed the shaking tent before becoming a Christian.

The old man replied that he could not explain it, as he was an entirely different being at that time. His manido’ animals were the bear and the snake. . . as nearly as he could make out . . [he] seemed to imagine himself a snake when giving this exhibition. Two intelligent Indians have given it as their opinion that the juggler imagines himself to be some animal supple and lithe enough to work itself free from the cords, and that this imagination, or mental concept, is so strong that the body responds and does what would be impossible at any other time. It has been frequently suggested that the spectators are hypnotized and imagine they see what they do not see. The foregoing explanation suggests that the hypnotic influence is exerted by the juggler on his own body. Music is considered indispensable to the performance of this feat.

Representing to Europeans a novel methodology for accessing supernatural powers, the visual spectacle referred to by the term “shaking tent” had crucial sound and musical components apparent in its descriptions.

Fur traders often witnessed and took part as active audience members in these shamanistic displays. On Alexander Henry (”the Elder”)’s initial journey through the Great

49 Frances Densmore, Chippewa Music, vol. 1, 123.
51 Ibid.
52 Frances Densmore, Chippewa Music, vol. 1, 124.
Lakes, he witnessed an important spirit lodge event of the Anishinaabeg. At Sault Ste. Marie in 1763, soon after a canoe had arrived from Ft. Niagara with anticipated news, a council was called by the chief Mut’chi’ki’wish. This event served to determine whether or not a large group of Anishinaabeg would accept the invitation of Sir William Johnson to Fort. Niagara. Henry describes the creation of a house or wigwam large enough to hold nearly the population of the entire village. In the centre "a species of tent for the use of the priest, and reception of the spirit" was constructed. The frame of wood consisted of five pillars of timber from different types of trees, planted two feet in the ground, with a diameter of four feet, and standing ten feet tall and covered with moose-skins. The ceremony began with the approach of darkness, when several fires were kindled inside the large house to illuminate the tent. The striking visual imagery of the ceremony is first commented on. The "priest," as Henry calls the medicine-man or juggler, enters "nearly in a state of nakedness;" and when inside, "the edifice, massy as it has been described, began to shake." From this moment onwards, the description of the event transitions to its remarkable auditory features.

the skins were no sooner let fall, than the sounds of numerous voices were heard beneath them; some yelling; some barking as dogs; some howling like wolves; and in this horrible concert were mingled screams and sobs, as of despair, anguish and the sharpest pain. Articulate speech was also uttered, as if from human lips: but in a tongue unknown to any of the audience.53

Crossing the threshold from human to animal and supernatural voices, sounds of suffering were emitted alongside the "articulate speech" of an unknown language. These "confused and frightful noises," in Henry’s opinion, were followed by "perfect silence." Now an unfamiliar voice arrived with a low and feeble tone that resembled to Henry the cry of a young puppy. Its sound incited the applause and excitement of the audience, with someone explaining

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that "this was the Chief Spirit, the TURTLE, the spirit that never lied!" This contrasted with the previous voices from "evil and lying spirits," at which the audience had "hissed." The Great Turtle spirit arrived with songs in various voices emerging from the tent. “New sounds came from the tent. During the space of half an hour, the audience heard a succession of songs in which a diversity of voices met the ear. From his first entrance, till these songs were finished, we heard nothing in the proper voice of the priest.” After half an hour of music performed by a “diversity of voices,” the Great Turtle spirit began to answer questions from the audience, with accompanying offerings, or "sacrifices” of tobacco deposited into the lodge.

Occurring near the completion of the Seven Years’ War, the questions the Anishinaabeg were asking were of considerable political significance. They concerned whether the British were preparing to make war on them, and if there were large numbers of soldiers at Fort Niagara. Henry describes how the tent shook and rocked so violently that he expected it to collapse. Yet the answer would arrive, as "a terrific cry announced, with sufficient intelligibility, the departure of the TURTLE." For fifteen minutes, silence reigned and Henry waited to discover the subsequent developments. The return of the spirit was announced when the voice returned. Yet the language of the Great Turtle, as before, was "wholly unintelligible to every ear," except that for the “priest” relaying the messages to the audience. It was not until this intermediary gave his translation that the audience learned the nature of what Henry termed an “extraordinary communication." The spirit had apparently flown across Lake Huron to Ft. Niagara, and then travelled to Montreal, reporting that Fort Niagara was largely quiet while the St. Lawrence river was covered with flotillas of soldiers “in number like the leaves of the trees,” making their way.

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 161.
56 Ibid., 160-61.
to attack the First Nations. The chief posed a new question: if they went to visit Sir William Johnson, would they be received as friends? "Sir William Johnson," said the spirit (and after the spirit, the priest), "will fill their canoes with presents; with blankets, kettles, guns, gun-powder and shot, and large barrels of rum, such as the stoutest of the Indians will not be able to lift; and every man will return in safety to his family." This inspired applause and the reaction of a hundred voices, proclaiming their support for the voyage. The transmission, through the intermediary of the medicine-man, conveyed the voice of the Great Turtle, inarticulate to human ears but deciphered by the priest outside the lodge and conveyed to the group, securing their faith in the journey. Alexander Henry bore witness to these events and described them in great detail, providing an insight into the machinations that contributed to Sir William Johnson’s successful treaty of Fort Niagara in 1764 that included two-dozen First Nations, and which helped set the course for future Anglo-Anishinaabeg alliances. It is also one of the most detailed descriptions provided.

Yet other fur traders would also have opportunities to observe these ceremonies. Based on his experience with his Cree acquaintance Ise Pe Sa Wan in the 1790s, David Thompson described the procedures and preparations for what he described as the “Conjuring Box.” Ise Pe Sa Wan began with a “sweating bath,” followed by the construction of a lodge. Four long poles, approximately sixteen feet in length, were placed in a square in the ground three feet apart, taller and more dramatic than later descriptions. Five feet above the ground four cross pieces were tied to the poles and three feet above these four more were tied, and the sides of the entire structure was covered or “dressed” in leather deer skins. After having his hands, arms, and legs tied together, Ise pe sa wan was placed inside in a sitting position, with his rattle by his side.

57 Ibid., 161-2.
58 David Thompson, The Writings of David Thompson, 106.
Thompson describes how silence heightened the sensations of onlookers, as they prepared for the ceremony to begin.

All is now suspense, the Men, Women, and Children keep strict silence; In about fifteen, or twenty minutes; the whole of the cords, wrapped together are thrown out, and instantly the Rattle and the Song are heard, the conjuring box violently shaken, as if the conjuror was actually possessed; sometimes the Song ceases, and a speech is heard of ambiguous predictions of what is to happen. In half an hours time, he appears exhausted, leaves the leather box and retires to his tent, the perspiration running down him, smokes his pipe and goes to sleep.59

Thompson, like others brought into contact with these ceremonies through the fur trade, were sometimes in awe, sometimes in fear, and sometimes incredulous concerning the jongleurs’ performance. Thompson states that while the men who bound the jongleur might be responsible for false knots, his examination convinced him there was no such collusion. Thompson relates an occurrence when five Scotsmen arrived while a conjuring box was being erected. As “no business could be done until this was over,” Thompson describes how they watched the preparations. When they perceived the conjuror about to be tied,

they said, if they had the tying of him, he would never get loose. This I told to the Indians, who readily agreed the Scotchmen should tie him: which they did in the usual way, and they placed him in the conjuring box; quite sure he could not get loose; In about fifteen minutes, to their utter astonishment, all the cords were thrown out in a bundle, the Rattle, and the Song in full force, and the conjuring box shaken, as if going to pieces; my men were at a loss what to think or say. The Natives smiled at their incredulity; at length they consoled themselves by saying the Devil in person had untied him, and set him loose.

With the man in the conjuring box removed from view of the spectators, the ceremony became most importantly an auditory event. After the ropes were jettisoned, the song and rattle were heard, followed by a voice emerging from inside the box that was different from that of Ise Pe Sa Wan. This voice, purportedly the voice of one or more spirits, answered questions posed by those outside the lodge. Through Ise Pe Sa Wan, David Thompson was influenced by these traditions, describing at length the ritual and its mechanics.

59 Ibid.
Thompson’s account suggests that he and his men were curious about the spirit lodge and its mechanics. Yet how they differed in their interpretations is difficult to assess. As Carolyn Podruchny has demonstrated, voyageurs enacted a series of magico-religious rites on their voyages through the northwest. These included Catholic practices and images of good and evil, heaven and hell, angels and devils. Thompson did not believe, as his men did, that the Devil untied Ise pe sa wan. He instead identifies this explanation as merely consolation for their incomprehension. Duncan Cameron states that his voyageurs at Lake Nipigon north of Lake Superior swore to hearing the voice of the devil emerge from the “jonglerie. “Some of the Canadians, who are almost as superstitious as the Indians themselves, will swear that they most distinctly heard two voices in the jonglery, alluding to the Devil, whom they suppose to be at the bottom of it.” Cameron affirms that he “often listened and never could hear the old gentlemen's voice.” Yet Cameron recognized that to his hosts, this ceremony was of the utmost importance. This was the ceremony “conjurors are most proud of,” and the audience served to validate the polyglottal performances. Cameron recognized the main purpose of this ceremony was to “foretell future events.” The medicine man entered the lodge “with only his rattle,” while another person sat outside the lodge and deciphered the sounds. Yet it was the sounds resonating from inside the lodge that evoked the most interest.

He then begins to make a terrible noise in the language the bystanders cannot understand, and himself neither, probably, and shakes his rattle, imitating the noise of different animals. This part of the performance being over, he answers the questions which may be put to him and which generally relate to the return or whereabouts of absent friends for whose safety they may have been uneasy.

60 Carolyn Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 58-64.
61 David Thompson, The Writings of David Thompson, 106.
63 Ibid.
While somewhat incredulous, Cameron recognized the imitation of animal noises, and describes
the wide array of questions that answers received. The “jongleurs, as the French call them, are
never at a loss with an answer, and will tell you with the greatest assurance or impudence what
they are doing at the time.”

John McDonnell observed these ceremonies the Red River area in 1793-95. A "familiar
spirit," visited the "juggler" who answered questions "generally as dark and ambiguous as those
of the ancient oracles among the heathen, and which may be interpreted in many different ways." Like other fur traders, McDonnell focused on the lodge that housed the ceremony, using both
French Canadian and Anishinaabeg terms.

This spirit never appears but in the jonglerie, a small circular appartment raised a man's height,
inclosed with raw hides and bound with thongs. Into this place the juggler is trust, sometimes tied
neck and heels, and a few minutes after, the Tabou and Chichiquoi begin beating and he kicks the
cords that bound him out of the juggling place, though no person is seen within. The jonglerie is
about three feet in diameter.

John McDonnell suggests that the jongleur inside the lodge beat the tambour with the rattle,
combining the sounds of the two instruments. This description from the 1790s demonstrates an
understanding of the materials, procedures and terminology of the performance.

7.4 Wabanowiwin

A spiritual revival movement originated around the turn of the nineteenth century among
Anishinaabek and potentially other First Nations peoples from western Lake Superior to the

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64 Ibid.
65 John McDonnell, “Mr. John McDonnell: Some Account of the Red River (About 1797) With Extracts from His
Journal 1793-1795,” in Les Bourgeois De La Compagnie Du Nord-Ouest: Récits De Voyages, Lettres Et Rapports
Inédits Relatifs Au Nord-Ouest Canadien: Publiés Avec Une Esquisse Historique Et Des Annotations Par L.R.
Lake Winnipeg areas known as *wabanowiwin*, or in the journals of fur traders some variation of "Wabbano" or "Wah Bino." This term originated, according to Barry Gough, from the Algonquian word for ritual, and involved singing, dancing and conjuring. William Moreau writes that it meant "what is represented by the east." Its songs and ceremonials were attempts "to influence the manitos of game animals," while its practitioners were known for the spectacular handling of fire and burning objects. Most analysis indicates it occurred mostly in the spring, similar to the *midéwiwin*. The accounts of fur traders demonstrate that in the early nineteenth century it was also practiced in the winter and that the material imprint of the fur trade influenced this revivalist indigenous religion. *Wabanowiwin* provides a remarkable case study because it originated during the climax of a competitive and rapidly expanding trade in the northwest. This spiritual tradition bore the influence of dramatically increased pressure on fur bearing animals, which was also part of the reason why groups like the Anishinabe and Iroquois migrated westward during this period. The primary accounts of the fur trade indicate that *wabanowiwin* relied on musical methods and resources for fostering spiritual power, applied primarily for healing and hunting purposes, social functions of particular interest to fur traders.

David Thompson appears to have been the first outside observer to leave a comprehensive description of the origins and operations of the *wabanowiwin*. During his first year with the North West Company in 1797-8, Thompson overwintered near Lake of the Woods,

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67 David Thompson, *The Writings of David Thompson*, 234.
providing him with the opportunity to describe what he termed the "Wah bino." While waiting for the river to clear of ice, Thompson "collected some information on the Religion and Ceremonies of these people." Thompson recorded that he learned “of late a superstition had sprung up, and was now the attention of all the Natives. It appeared the old Songs, Dances and Ceremonies by frequent repetition had lost all their charms, and religious attention; and were heard and seen with indifference." While ecological transformation and overhunting due to pressures from the fur trade may have been the source of difficulty, to improve their chances hunters sought new rites and spiritual powers to assist them. "Some novelty was required and called for," reports Thompson, and two or three medicine men, "contrived to dream (for all comes by Dreams) after having passed some time in a sweating cabin, and singing to the music of the Rattle." After sweating and singing for some time, the mysteries of this new spiritual practice arrived through dreams. Thompson provides a detailed record of how the new rites were devised.

they saw a powerful Medicine, to which a Manito voice told them to pay great attention and respect, and saw the tambour with the figures on it, and also the Rattle to be used for music in dancing: They also heard the Songs that were to be sung: They were to call it the Wahbino: It was to have two orders; the first only Wah bino and second Kee che Wah bino; and those initiated to bear the name of their order (fool, or knave) Every thing belonging to the Wah bino was sacred, nothing of it to touch the ground, nor to be touched by a Woman.

With divinely inspired songs and symbols, the society developed with two orders focused on maintaining the sanctity of its materials and methods. Unlike the midéwiwin, it barred women from participating.

Based on the visions and "guidance of the Wah bino sages,” special “tabours were made" of a circular frame eight inches deep and a foot and a half wide. These were covered with "fine

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71 David Thompson, The Writings of David Thompson, 231.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
parchment," according to Thompson, by which he likely means tightly stretched hide. On these were painted symbolic figures in red and black. According to Thompson, to these "were suspended many bits of tin and brass to make a gingling noise." Metal pieces refashioned from trading materials and affixed to the edges of the drums seems to have been a trademark of their design. Thompson also noticed that the rattle had a peculiarly ornamented handle, while the *wabano* drum sticks were flat, carved, and painted with figures. "The Mania became so authoritative that every young man had to purchase a Wahbino Tambour; the price was what they could get from him.” Not only were special instruments designed, but "figured dances were also sold." While Thompson expresses some concern about the “Wah bino” proponents "getting rich on the credulity of others," he ultimately labeled these practices as "harmless" "mummery."

"Since there must be some foolery," he wrote, “this was as harmless as any other." Thompson inquired from an "old Chief" what he thought of the new spiritual practice, to which he looked at Thompson "full in the face, as much as to say, how can you ask me such a question."

Thompson describes a *wabanowiwin* dance. When a "Kee chee Wah bino Man" arrived, he made a speech about the power of the *wabano*, and Thompson described the dance that ensued. Thompson reported seating himself on the ground, while five young men who were nearly naked and painted above the waist arrived.

The Wah bino Man began the Song in a bold strong tone of voice, the Song was pleasing to the ear, the young Men danced, sometimes slowly, then changed to a quick step with many wild gestures, sometimes erect, and then, to their bodies being horizontal: shaking their Tambours, and at times singing a short chorus. They assumed many attitudes with ease, and showed a perfect command of their limbs. With short intervals, this lasted for about an hour.

This extraordinary description includes Thompson’s appraisal that these songs were pleasing to the ear and included a chorus. He was praiseworthy of the dance and the control and diversity of

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 231-2.
76 Ibid., 232.
movement displayed. Interested in the reception of this performance, Thompson inquired into its meaning. He was informed that these songs were meant to control the animals. "By what you have seen, and heard; they have made themselves masters of the Squirels, Musk Rats and Racoons' also of the Swans. Geese, Cranes and Ducks." The set of animals influenced by Wahbino songs was perceived to be limited by specific parameters. When Thompson inquired about Bison, Moose and Red Deer, he was informed that these “Manito's are too powerful." While he did encounter some First Nations who viewed "the Wah bino as a jugglery between knaves and fools," he ultimately reports that for a "full two years it had a surprising influence over the Indians, [who] too frequently neglected hunting for singing and dancing." Yet these practices were intended to increase success in the hunt.

While Thompson ultimately viewed singing and dancing as inimical to hunting practices, the new religion only further emphasized the indigenous perspective of their role as integral. Like other fur traders, Thompson relied for much of his information on French Canadians who had prior experience in the northwest. Mr. Cadotte informed Thompson that although he spoke the language, he could not understand any of the phrases in these songs: "only a chance word." This led to speculation between Thompson and Cadotte that they must have "a kind of mystical language among themselves; understood only by the initiated." While Thompson viewed its novelty as the source of its popularity, he may have been influenced by Mr. Cadotte’s opinion that most of the wabano singers were "idle Men and poor hunters."

On the Montreal traders' route from Lake Superior into the northwest was a long sandy beach between Rainy River and Lake of the Woods. There, several large lodges containing forty to fifty families each became "enamoured of the Wahbino Song and Dance." From Thompson’s

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 232-3.
perspective, this community involved "so many dancing together they too often became highly excited and danced too long." Some made drums with strings of animal bones from mice, squirrels, frogs, and birds' claws. Then when the drum was struck and the strings of bones changed positions, their shapes and alignments "pretended to tell what was to happen."\(^79\) Thompson described the spectacle of long poles tied from tree to tree, on which were carefully hung the sacred \textit{wabano} medicine bags and tambours of each man.\(^80\)

Thompson found himself competing with the \textit{wabano} practitioners for respect. On one occasion when Thompson was taking a measurement with the parallel glasses and quicksilver, his acquaintance claimed his \textit{"Wah bano"} was strong. Thompson took this to mean "By what you are doing, you give to yourself great power, my Wahbino can do the same for me." Thompson replied that "the Great Spirit alone was strong, your Wah bino is like this, taking up a pinch of sand and letting it fall."\(^81\) According to the account, the next morning the wind continued as a gale, and this acquaintance returned and declared he had reconsidered the practice. At night the wind had disrupted the pole on which the tambour and medicine bag were tied, making them fall on the ground. To add insult as they lay there, "the Dogs had wetted them," a sacrilege that challenged their aura and belief in their spiritual power. If the Wahbino controlled unseen forces to the extent its practitioners claimed, how could its associated sacred bundles and drums suffer such treatment? As news of this accident spread, Thompson reported that “the sensible men took advantage of it; and by the following summer nothing more was heard of the Wah bino

\(^79\) Ibid., 233.
\(^80\) Ibid.
\(^81\) Ibid.
Yet despite this assertion, the *wabanowiwin* would continue to attract adherents and be encountered by fur traders.

Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) describes the arrival of the *Wabbano* in the vicinity of Red River in late October of 1800. A man named Mimintch came to trade, introducing to Henry's hunter to a new drum and instructions on the new songs and ceremonies. "He has given my hunter an elegant Drum trimmed with all the ceremonies of the Wabbano medicine," wrote Henry, taking interest in the transactions of his hunter. This new drum was accompanied by "a number of different medicines and songs concerning that ceremony," constituting “articles of superior value and high consideration amongst those people. . .". While Henry does not indicate precisely what materials lined the edge of the drum, it is possible it included, as Thompson described, refashioned bits of tin and metal. Henry was suspicious of Mimintch, because he brought only a few furs and despite his debts requested alcohol. Yet his journal indicates that he was reluctant about the influence of this new spiritual system on his First Nations hunters.

Yet the *wabanowiwin* was something Alexander Henry (“the Younger”) would frequently encounter. A few months later, on a warm day in late January he described a scene of games and songs. The Saulteaux and Assiniboine women played "Coullion" on the ice while the men played “Platter,” while others were "beating the drum to keep chorus with their Wabbano songs." This description, like earlier ones, suggests group choruses were common in the songs of the *wabanowiwin*. While the warm weather may have provided the opportunity for outdoor recreation, spring was still a long ways off, and hunting was “out of the question at this season of the year." Thus these ceremonies and songs could occur well before the onset of spring. On

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82 Ibid., 233-4.
84 Ibid., 108.
May 27th, 1802 he described a group "Making the Wabbano" after a meeting of the \textit{midéwiwin}.\footnote{Ibid., 130.}

\textit{Wabanowiwin} songs were used not only in conjunction with hunting, but also with healing. Henry relates how Waiquetoe's wife had been shot in the back and a First Nations man named Auguemance had tried to heal her, but had only been partially successful. Finally coming to Alexander Henry ("the Younger") as a last resort, he informed was informed that

by means of his art in medicine and his superior knowledge of the Wabbano, he had extricated a bit of Iron from out the back of his patient which had given her much relief, but that by means of his conjuration he found she had some piece of hard metal in her neck, which baffles all his powers of medicine to extract. He was now exhausted all his skill in vain, has sung all his grand medicine and Wabbano songs, and beat his drum both day and night for some time past, but still the bit of metal does not appear. He however does not dispair and hopes to get it out, there being only that now, which prevents her recovery.

Auguemance had already operated on the woman in conjunction with the \textit{wabanowiwin}, only seeking the aid of the fur trader when all other avenues had failed. Henry interpreted the actions of Auguemance to be merely "a trick of the fellow to get more property from the husband."\footnote{Ibid., 109.}

While originating near Lake of the Woods, John Tanner's testimony indicates that the \textit{Wabanowiwin} spread west to First Nations' groups on the prairies. As fur traders tended to make note of the movement of material, Tanner recounts seeing a man in the distance carrying two large "Ta-wa-e-gun-num," or "Waw-be-no" drums. "As we were one day travelling through the prairie, we looked back and saw at a distance a man loaded with baggage, and having two of the large Ta-wa-e-gun-num, or drums used in the ceremonies of the Waw-be-no."\footnote{John Tanner, \textit{A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner}, 121-2.} The image of this man carrying two large drums reflects the incredible determination and effort in spreading this new spiritual movement, as well as the centrality of musical instruments to this process. Tanner asserts that the older and more respected Anishinaabeg considered it "a false and
dangerous religion," yet Tanner indicates it was still "fashionable" (and spreading) by the 1830s. Tanner juxtaposes its mechanics with the Grand Medicine Society: "The ceremonies of the Waw-be-no differ very essentially from those of the Metai, and are usually accompanied by much licentiousness and irregularity." Providing a detailed description of the special drums employed, Tanner describes how the wabbano used a frame drum, rather than the hollowed log drum of the midéwiwin.

The Ta-wa-e-gun used for a drum in this dance, differs from the Woin Ah-keek, or Me-ti-kwaw-keek, used in the Me-tai, it being made of a hoop of bent wood like a soldier's drum, while the latter is a portion of the drunk of a tree, hollowed by fire, and having the skin tied over it. The She-zhe-gwun, or rattle, differs also in its construction from that used in the Me-tai.

The drums of the wabanowiwin were thus more portable, with Tanner comparing the frame drum to a European "soldier's drum." Unlike prior descriptions, both men and women are described as participating in the ceremonies, and Tanner provides a long description of the dances that incorporated elements of juggling and fire-throwing.

The initiated take coals of fire, and red hot stones in their hands, and sometimes in their mouths. Sometimes they put powder on the insides of their hands, first moistening them, to make it stick; then by rubbing them on coals, or a red hot stone, they make the powder burn. Sometimes one of the principal performers at a Waw-be-no, has a kettle brought and set down before him, which is taken boiling from the fire, and before it has time to cool, he plunges his hands to the bottom, and brings up the head of the dog, or whatever other animal it may be which had been purposely put there. He then, while it remains hot, tears off the flesh with his teeth, at the same singing and dancing madly about. After devouring the meat, he dashes down the bone, still dancing and capering as before.

In this dramatic performance, the initiates of the wabanowiwin demonstrated their immunity to extreme heat. Tanner attributes their abilities not to the potency of the songs, but to the herbs employed to neutralize the pain and heal burns.

They are able to withstand the effects of fire and of heated substances by what they would persuade the ignorant to be a supernatural power, but this is nothing else than a certain preparation, effected by the application of herbs, which make the parts to which they are applied insensible to fire. The plants they use are the Wa-be-no-wusk, and Pe-zhe-ke-wusk. The former grows in abundance on the island of Mackinac, and is called yarrow by the people of the United States. The other grows only in the prairies. These they mix and bruise, or chew together, and rub over their hands and arms. The Waw-be-no-wusk, or yarrow, in the form of a poultice, is an
excellent remedy for burns, and is much used by the Indians, but the two when mixed together seem to give to the skin, even of the lips and tongue, and astonishing power of resisting the effects of fire.\footnote{Ibid., 122-3.}

Like the midéwiwin, the wabanowiwin focused largely on healing rites, the appropriate use of herbs, and their ceremonial application alongside the appropriate songs and dances. The cultural and material influence of the wabanowiwin is palpable in the accounts of fur traders, concerned as they were with the procedures of hunting and healing. It developed at the height of trading competition and along the fur trade route to the northwest. It appears to have represented an aesthetically innovative yet "traditionalist" cosmological system, with the employment of songs that may have bore witness to European musical influence in the realms of vocal style, chorus, and material influence. Yet the intended applications in facilitating hunting and healing practices were distinctly indigenous.

### 7.5 Healing Songs

The accounts of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists indicate that many First Nations groups used songs as an integral component to their healing practices. These songs were judged less by musical criteria and more by how well they fulfilled their intended function. Yet they have captivated musicologists for over a century, constituting one of the most important functions of music in traditional First Nations societies.\footnote{Bruno Nettl, Elaine Keillor, and Victoria Levine, “Amerindian Music,” \textit{Grove Music Online}, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/45405>, accessed 11 Dec. 2013.} While practitioners of the mide possessed special kinds of healing songs, these were “entirely different” from those of other First
Nations’ healers, employing a different “method of treatment.” Like the “medicine” songs for ensuring success in the hunt among the Anishinaabeg, songs for healing the sick usually possessed no repetition, but rather the entire song constituted a single rhythmic unit. Frances Densmore and others have recorded healing songs in First Nations’ cultures across Northern North America.

Bruno Nettl argues in his classic ethnomusicology of the eastern-plateau Salish (Flathead) that before medicine songs can be understood, music must be considered “as mediator between human and supernatural societies.” Songs served as “important bearers of supernatural power and of messages from the supernatural.” While words of medicine songs were typically very limited, sometimes only possessing vocables, at other-times they possessed simple lyrics that proclaimed to cure. Among the First Nations of British Columbia, Densmore recorded a song with the following lyrics: “I Am Going to Cure This Sick Man.” On the Northwest Coast, medicine men might sing with the sick person for days, changing the songs each night and remaining until the person recovered. Among the Nitinat and other groups, when a person was very sick, more people joined in the healing songs, which was seen to “add their power to that of the doctor.”

From an early period, fur traders had a special relationship with First Nations’ medicine-men. As Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman have pointed out, in the eighteenth century HBC

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91 Ibid., 18.
92 While this is not the place for an exhaustive bibliography of this ethnomusicological literature, a good overview of the subject is presented in Ted Gioia, *Healing Songs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
95 Ibid., 30-41.
representatives made special gifts to prominent medicine-men, who would be taken “singly with their wives into a room where they are given a red leather trunk with a few simple medicines such as the powders of sulphur, bark, liquorice, camphorated spirit, white ointment, and basilicon, with a bit of diachylon plaster.” Expanding the medicines available to those who cured illness in First Nations societies, this trading ceremony can be seen as an acknowledgement of the special role of healers in First Nations societies.

It is clear that healing methods and songs constituted a particular fascination for fur traders. Alexander Henry (“the Elder”), who travelled throughout the Great Lakes and into the Lake Winnipeg and Saskatchewan River areas, wrote that “in all parts of the country, and among all nations that I have seen, particular individuals arrogate to themselves the art of healing.” For their services, medicine men were customarily materially recompensed for their endeavours. Henry describes how he was invited to witness a healing ceremony, along with several other elder chiefs of a girl around twelve years of age, because he was himself seen as possessing healing powers. The invitation was interpreted as a “compliment . . . paid to myself, on account of the medical skill for which it was pleased to give me credit.” Describing the healing ceremony, Henry begins with a description of the “physician (so to call him)” sitting on the ground with a bucket of water and bones that looked like those taken from a Swan's wing. The following description intersperses singing and shaking the rattle with the activities of the “physician.”

In his hand, he had this shishiquoi, or rattle, with which he beat time to his medicine-song . . . After singing for some time, the physician took one of the bones out of the basin: the bone was hollow; and one end being applied to the breast of the patient, he put the other into his mouth, in order to remove the disorder by suction. Having persevered in this as long as he thought proper, he suddenly seemed to force the bone into his mouth, and swallow it. He now acted the part of one

suffering severe pain; but, presently finding relief, he made a long speech, and after this, returned to singing, and to the accompaniment of his rattle. With the latter, during his song, he struck his head, breast, sides and back; at the same time straining, as if to vomit forth the bone. Relinquishing this attempt, he applied himself to suction a second time, and with the second of the three bones; and this also he soon seemed to swallow. Upon its disappearance, he began to distort himself in the most frightful manner, using every gesture which could convey the idea of pain; at length, he succeeded, or pretended to succeed, in throwing up one of the bones. This was handed about to the spectators, and strictly examined; but nothing remarkable could be discovered. Upon this, he went back to his song and rattle; and after some time threw up the second of the two bones. In the groove of this, the physician, upon examination, found, and displayed to all present, a small white substance, resembling a piece of the quill of a feather. It was passed round the company, from one to the other; and declared, by the physician, to be the thing causing the disorder of his patient.

This performance interspersed music with other operative actions. The audience seemed to play a vital role in observing the efforts of the medicine-man, and verifying his materials. Henry states that most believed these physicians, “whom the French call jongleurs, or jugglers,” could cause as well as cure disorders. The operation that Henry witnessed was not successful, as the girl died the next day. Yet he became convinced of their ability to cure small wounds. “With regard to flesh-wounds, the Indians certainly effect astonishing cures. Here, as above, much that is fantastic occurs; but the success of their practice evinces something solid.”

Despite maintaining a suspicion of the medicine-men, in Henry's evaluation their "reward may generally be said to be fairly earned, by dint of corporal labour.” When a man with an axe wound was brought into the fort at Sault Ste. Marie, Henry observed a First Nations' healer retrieving his “penegusan,* or medicine-bag,” and through his operations producing an effective remedy.

Samuel Hearne devoted five pages of his journal from 1769-72 to First Nations' medical operations and songs. Hearne used the term “doctor” to describe the Cree medicine men he...
encountered on his voyages. 101 He observed a man with a “dead palsey” or “paralytic stroke” that rendered him affected down one side from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, other inner afflictions prevented him from eating food and reduced him to a mere “skeleton.” After he was placed inside of a large “conjuring house,” the "doctor" arrived. He “offered to swallow a large piece of board, about the size of a barrel-stave, in order to effect his recovery.” One side of the board was painted with an animal, and the other a representation of the sky. Hearne observed with astonishment and skepticism the man swallowing the board. He nonetheless offers praise: “they must be allowed a considerable share of dexterity in the performance of those tricks, and a wonderful deal of perseverance in what they do for the relief of those whom they undertake to cure.” 102 Yet Hearne's incredulity invoked scorn from some of the Cree, as “some of them laughed at my ignorance, as they were pleased to call it; and said, that the spirits in waiting swallowed, or otherwise concealed, the stick.” Hearne’s guide Matonabbee, a “Homeguard Cree” from Prince of Wales’s Fort, insisted to Hearne “in the strongest terms” that he had seen a man swallow a child’s cradle, folding it easily into his mouth, and pulling it back out again unscathed. Although not a trained fieldworker, Hearne described consciously putting aside his incredulity, becoming “very inquisitive about the spirits which appear to them on those occasions, and their form.” 103 He was informed that the spirits appeared in various shapes, with each conjurer having his own “peculiar attendant.” The spirit that attended swallowing the wood typically appeared in the shape of a cloud. Hearne thought this very “a-propos to the present

101 Samuel Hearne, A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771 and 1772. Edited by Tyrrell, J.B (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1911), 228-229.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., 230-31.
occasion,” remarking: “I must confess that I never had so thick a cloud thrown before my eyes before or since.”

Hearne describes the communal healing rituals that followed. Particularly cognizant of gender dynamics, Hearne describes how among both men and women, nakedness defined the uniform of the healer. To the original medicine-man were added the efforts of five other men and an old woman “all of whom were great professors of that art.” Stripping themselves "quite naked," Hearne describes how all of these practitioners "began to suck, blow, sing, and dance, round the poor paralytic.” They continued for a full three days straight, “without taking the least rest or refreshment, not even so much as a drop of water.” Pushing the limits of human endurance, at the end of this duration their mouths were so parched with thirst that they were black, with throats so sore that they could not speak. From Hearne's perspective their suffering seemed feigned, yet he observed that they had made themselves "almost as bad as the poor man they had been endeavouring to relieve. . . for they lay on their backs with their eyes fixed, as if in the agonies of death.”

As with other fur traders, Hearne described these scenes not merely out of an ethnographic curiosity, but because the man who was ill was a crucial member of his travelling party. Thus his health, and fate, had important implications on Hearne's livelihood. It was with apparent relief that he reported the man's remarkable transformation.

And it is truly wonderful, though the strictest truth, that when the poor sick man was taken from the conjuring-house, he had not only recovered his appetite to an amazing degree but was able to move all the fingers and toes of the side that had been so long dead. In three weeks he recovered so far as to be capable of walking, and at the end of six weeks went a hunting for his family. He was one of the persons particularly engaged to provide for me during my journey; and after his recovery from this dreadful disorder, accompanied me back to Prince of Wales's Fort in Jun one thousand seven hundred and seventy-two; and since that time he has frequently visited the Factory.

104 Ibid.
While documenting his remarkable transition, Hearne explains that the man never regained all his former characteristics, something that might be explained by his brain injury. Yet the apparent efficacy of the ritual clearly troubled Hearne. He wrote that “the apparent good effect of their labours on the sick and diseased is not so easily accounted for,” positing an explanation that resembled the placebo effect.

Perhaps the implicit confidence placed in them by the sick may, at times, leave the mind so perfectly at rest, as to cause the disorder to take a favourable turn; and a few successful cases are quite sufficient to establish the doctor's character and reputation: But how this consideration could operate in the case I have just mentioned I am at a loss to say; such, however, was the fact, and I leave it to be accounted for by others.105

David Thompson relates the story of a medicine man from the shores of Lake of the Woods in 1798-99. This account invokes the “Man Eater (a Wee te go),” otherwise known as windigo, invoked in various myths and stories of starvation and cannibalism. Thompson describes how in a council meeting, the father of the man was chastised for not contacting a “Medicine Man” when the first symptoms overcame his son. At that point, the ailment might have been dispelled: “by sweating and his Songs to the tambour and rattle might have driven away the evil spirit, before it was too late.”106 Thompson reports the band council’s decision that the man should be put to death, having admitted his strong desire to eat his sister. The evil spirit thought to create cannibalistic desires could be chased away by the medicine man’s songs with the drum and rattle. Yet once an individual was thought too far-gone this remedy was deemed insufficient.

What is perhaps most significant in the fur traders’ records is the widespread use of healing songs amongst First Nations. In Henry Marie Brackenridge’s journey to the western plains via the Missouri river in 1811, he encountered various First Nations groups such as the

105 Ibid., 232.
106 David Thompson, The Writings of David Thompson, 235.
Osages, reporting on their techniques for healing. While Brackenridge was not a fur trader by vocation, he did pursue material exchanges and reported on the extensive French Canadian influence on First Nations’ groups in the areas through which he travelled. According to his observations, if a malady was bad enough, the First Nations’ of the Missouri “resort to charms and incantations, such as singing, dancing, blowing on the sick, &c.” to Brackenridge, the methods of First Nations’ doctors “are very successful in the treatment of wounds.”

When Alexander Mackenzie encountered Athapascan speaking peoples on his journeys in the western subarctic, he was eager to determine whether they shared the cultural characteristics of plains and eastern groups. He noted their relative lack of diseases and ailments. He then summarized what he observed in the methods of their medicine-men: “binding the temples, procuring perspiration, singing, and blowing on the sick person, or affected part.”

George Keith remarked on the healing ceremonies of the “Beaver Indians:” the Athapascan speaking Dane-zaa. Writing to Roderic McKenzie from 1807 and 1817 from the Mackenzie River and Great Bear Lake departments, his description of their healing ceremonies includes music and a curiously ornamented cord.

When the men are in violent pain and fearful of dying, they generally must have a confessor or one of the jongleurs to whom (as the only means of recovery held out to the patient by the latter,) they publicly unbosom themselves without reserve and declare all their evil doing. Previous to confession, the mystical cord, ornamented with loon necks, stripes of mink and other skins, claws of the eagle and a variety of rare and elegant bird feathers, must be attached across the lodge, a little elevated from the ground; over this, the penitent occasionally throws himself upon his belly and the juggler embraces this opportunity of singing, sucking, &c, and performing his mystical gestures and incantations, and singing a gentle reprimand at each avowed offence against moral rectitude. They are remarkably humble and submissive during this ceremony and ordeal.

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This passage indicates either a proto-Christian influence of notions of “confession,” or a latent Christian interpretation by Keith. Elsewhere in his records, Keith describes how they rely exclusively on songs, either sung or hummed, alongside various actions. “They know nothing of medicinal roots or herbs, so that, except singing their sick Song, or rather humming one, biting, pulling with their Teeth and sucking the parts affected, they allow nature to take her course.” The most interesting aspect of his account is his assertion that trading posts readily offered another option for treatment. When First Nations were near “the White people's Establishment they always apply for some medicine which is always given gratis.” While it seems doubtful that medicine was “always given gratis,” Keith’s statement suggests that the medicines of the HBC men on the Bay were brought to the interior posts in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The western subarctic was navigated by Alexander Mackenzie slightly before fur traders made contact with northwest coast groups. Yet once these groups played host to traders and posts, these activities appear in the written record. Ross Cox was a trader with the American Fur Company and the North West Company in the early 1810s, residing for some time among the Chinook. He described how immediately when sickness was detected in an individual, he was laid on his back, “while a number of his friends and relations surround him, each carrying a long and a short stick, with which they beat time to a mournful air which the doctor chants, and in which they join at intervals.” This description indicates a more integrative communal approach to healing than the descriptions from the western subarctic, plains, or eastern regions.


According to Cox, efforts to affect a musical cure were taken to their greatest extent when a man would climb on the roof of the house, “which he belabours most energetically with his drumsticks, joining at the same time with a loud voice the chorus inside.” With the medicine men singing both inside and outside of the house, kneeling over the patient, pushing on his stomach and performing various maneuvers, the cries of the man were “drowned by the doctor and the bystanders, who chant loud and louder still the mighty “song of medicine.”” Cox identifies distinct stanzas in the songs, at the end of which the medicine man seized the patient’s hands, joining them together and blowing on them. While the healing song continued, the medicine man alternately pressed and blew until a small white stone was forced out of the patient’s mouth.\textsuperscript{112} This method is another that appears similar to those described in the western subarctic and plains. The use of songs and associated methodologies for healing appear to have had widespread distribution among First Nations of northern North America.

While many fur traders were skeptical about First Nations’ healing songs, a remarkable number were convinced by the medicine-men’s overall efficacy. Unlike missionaries, Indian Agents, and later professionals, fur traders did not interfere with traditional First Nations’ healing practices. In fact, their presence and material influence seems to have extended the range of First Nations’ medicinal approaches and perhaps sonic characteristics. Yet indigenous healing methods continued to be employed. The underlying logic of medicine songs, used to manipulate unseen forces and spirits, remained the foundation of First Nations’ music while fur traders were in their midst. While fur traders did not possess the trained and systematic descriptive methodologies of later fieldworkers, their descriptions occur with frequency and detail, suggesting more than a passing acquaintance or peripheral interest. Fur traders developed

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 178.
knowledge of hunting and healing songs because it affected their livelihood and because they
themselves could be seen as medicine-men. They brought simple medicines to First Nations
communities of the northwest, and were sometimes called on to treat the sick. While these
traders and the supplies of their posts provided a new source of remedies, these were employed
alongside traditional approaches to healing that prominently involved the use of music.
8 Songs of Travel

On his third journey to the Arctic in the 1570s, Martin Frobisher encountered Inuit singing as they paddled their skin kayaks out to his ships. Instead of a skirmish or violent encounter, he describes how they repeated the English rowing songs, keeping “time and stroke to any tune which you shal sing.”¹ Thus an exchange of paddling songs on the water constituted one of the first genial interactions between Europeans and First Nations in the far north. The rhythm of the song resonated across cultural boundaries, providing a framework for communication and interaction that predated interpreters. Frobisher reported that “they will rowe with our Ores in our boates, and kepe a true stroke with oure Mariners, and séeme to take great delight therein.”² At the outset of the seventeenth century Samuel de Champlain encountered a group of First Nations peoples off the shore of Nauset Harbour who "launched a canoe, and eight or nine of them came out to us singing."³ Over the following decades, the French would adopt the bark canoes and apply their own songs to the paddle, perhaps in imitation. Despite these early accounts indicating encounters with paddling songs of First Nations peoples, the publications of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists indicate that they represented only a small fraction of

¹ Martin Frobisher, A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie, for the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya, by the Northveast, Vnder the Conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall Deuided into Three Bookes. In the First Wherof Is Shewed, His First Voyage ... Also, There Are Annexed Certayne Reasons, to Proue All Partes of the Worlde Habitable, with a Generall Mappe Adioyned. In the Second, Is Set Out His Second Voyage ... In the Thirde, Is Declared the Strange Fortunes Which Hapned in the Third Voyage ... VVith a Particula Card Therevnto Adioyned of Meta Incognita (London: George Best, 1584), 62.
² Ibid.
their repertoires. Whether or not this was due to restrictions on mobility due to the reserve system would be the worthy subject of a future study.

It was the paddling songs of the French Canadians, called *chansons d'aviron* or *chanson à l'aviron*, which became most associated with the fur trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For overwintering fur traders, these songs signaled the return of spring after the long silences of winter. Ross Cox characterized springtime as when the voyageurs "again chanted forth their wild and pleasing *chansons à l'aviron." Yet despite this straightforward characterization of an expression of *joie de vivre*, the voyageurs’ songs have a contested and politicized history of representation. This is understood when the importance of the *coureurs de bois* are recognized more generally in regards to the identity of French Canada. The *coureurs de bois* adapted First Nations’ technologies and techniques for traversing interior waterways, numbering in the hundreds by the 1680s. Their extended departures from the surveillance of church and state made them a focal point of colonial anxieties about maintaining “order and authority.” The *habitants* and *coureurs de bois* have been regarded as embodying important aspects of French Canadian identity, with the latter shaking off the “constraints of the

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metropolitan plan,” and setting themselves on a path towards “freedom” and “independence.”

The image of an iconic French Canadian social type has been carefully curated, and as a result their most distinctive oral articulations have been curtailed to specific political ends.

The impression provided by most of the literature from the mid nineteenth century presents the coureurs de bois and voyageurs singing joyous folk songs that were popular in the St. Lawrence. Historian Grace Lee Nute wrote that we are "obliged in the main to hear the voyageurs of our imaginations singing the folk songs that were current among all Canadians.”

Yet this characterization is no longer correct due to surfaced primary documents and developments in the scholarship. Many of the most distinct characteristics of the chansons d’aviron, such as their military character, their bawdiness, First Nations' influence, and their methods for extension over long durations were all largely omitted from published folksong collections.

8.1 Historiography and Folksong Collections

How the nation is represented through folk material has almost always been intertwined with political agendas. As Ian McKay demonstrated with respect to Helen Creighton’s work of the mid twentieth century, the task of cultural selection and constructing the “folk” was

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inherently a “nation-building enterprise.” The first wave of French Canadian folksong collecting occurred in the 1860s. At this time, Hubert La Rue, along with Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, and Joseph-Charles Taché founded Les Soirées canadiennes, which published assorted “collection[s] of national literature.” This was a moment when the united province of Canada had long been politically dysfunctional, and political crisis and an uncertain future encouraged an intellectual atmosphere that promoted nation-building and self-conscious constructions of identity. In the preface of Ernest Gagnon’s influential 1865 Chansons Populaires du Canada, he writes about French folksongs as durable icons of Francophone identity, comparing them to monuments made of granite or bronze; like the menhirs, dolmens, and cromlechs of Bretagne, they served as present-day relics of an illustrious history. The emphasis of folklorists was in presenting French Canadian culture as a preserver of the old world, as an embodiment of an essentialized Francophone identity.

Marius Barbeau looms large in this scholarship. As an anthropologist, folklorist and musicologist who played a significant role in the development of the Canadian Museum of History, he was perhaps the most influential in shaping the presentation of French Canadian folksongs. The image that Marius Barbeau constructed was one in which folksongs were ubiquitous in the lives French speakers in North America, “as familiar as barley-bread,” he wrote, “to the home-keeping villagers of Quebec, Acadia, Detroit, and Louisiana.” Their rich singing culture manifested daily and coloured the festivities, holidays, weddings and special

12 Ernest Gagnon, Chansons Populaires Du Canada: Recueillies et Publiées Avec Annotations, Etc. 2nd ed. (1865; repr. Québec: Robert Morgan, 1880), viii.
events that characterized social life.\textsuperscript{14} According to this narrative, French Canadians spontaneously adapted their songs to North America’s distinct mode of transportation. “Picking up the paddle, the canoemen burst into song at once, the better to work in unison and keep their spirits from flagging.”\textsuperscript{15} This kind of ahistorical explanation was commonplace among folklorists who collected contemporary accounts and projected origins into the distant past. In subsequent publications Barbeau speculated on patterns of transmission, claiming as far back as the fourth and sixth centuries C.E. for certain songs in the French Canadian repertoire.\textsuperscript{16} Barbeau revealed his interpretive framework in a publication towards the end of his long career.

The language and folk traditions of ancient France followed the settlers and adventurers into the New World. Time, distance, and misfortune were not enough to blunt the racial patrimony of old; they only served to enhance its value as a solace in the wilderness. Songs, tales, and handicrafts survived the change and centuries, as if conserved under a white blanket of snow.\textsuperscript{17}

Barbeau emphasized continuity with France over North American creations. Rather than discussing First Nations’ influences, folksongs were deemed an important part of the Francophone “racial patrimony.” The presentation of this material was not designed to capture the full diversity of folksong culture, but rather to represent the characteristics most desired by folklorists. Barbeau was explicit in his hopes that his collections would inspire “composers to create “national” music.”\textsuperscript{18} His scholarship was so significant not only because he bridged the anthropological and musicological divide that plagued ethnomusicology in the twentieth

\textsuperscript{14} Marius Barbeau, \textit{Folk-Songs of Old Quebec} (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1934), 11.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} These songs are \textit{Saint Alexis} and \textit{Dame Lombarde}, respectively; See Marius Barbeau, \textit{Canadian Folklore: The French Folklore Bulletin} (New York: The French Folklore Society, 1946).
\textsuperscript{17} Marius Barbeau, \textit{Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec}, interpreted into English by Sir Harold Boulton and Sir Ernest MacMillan (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1962), vii.
century,\textsuperscript{19} but because he trained an entire generation of French Canadian folklorists, and his prolific collections and extensive publications are still cited and utilized. Many of his interpretations have been implicitly or explicitly continued.

Folkloric collections are where historians of the fur trade have turned for illustrative material. The two major English-speaking historians of the voyageurs are Grace Lee Nute in the early twentieth century and Carolyn Podruchny in the early twenty-first, and both rely on these sources. Grace Lee Nute laments that many writers wrote their impressions of these haunting songs, but few took the effort to record either their melodies or lyrics. Her chapter employs examples mentioned by fur traders such as Robert Kennicott, James Lanman, Bela Hubbard, and Nicholas Garry. She publishes songs referenced in their journals such as À La Claire Fontaine, J’ai Trop Grand Peur Des Loups, Voici le Printemps, Frit à L’Huile, Le premier jour de Mai, and J’ai Cueilli la Belle Rose from versions collected and standardized by La Rue, Gagnon, and Barbeau. That an entire chapter of Grace Lee Nute's social history was devoted to voyageur songs is recognition of their perceived centrality to their occupational existence. Self-referential songs such as Parmi les Voyageurs, according to Nute, demonstrated “the class-consciousness of the voyageurs,” although it was in ballad quatrain form and published by La Rue, rather than a paddling song collected during the fur trade.\textsuperscript{20}

Carolyn Podruchny’s \textit{Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade} uses many of the same sources, while suggesting a number of additional functions of singing based on the observations of travelers and traders. Singing was integrated into daily routines, “setting the pace of work, and providing a forum for pleasure and

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Nute, \textit{The Voyageur}, 143.
creativity."\textsuperscript{21} Podruchny interprets songs as expressing the voyageurs’ unique identity, influenced by Catholic and First Nations’ influences. Podruchny’s work suggests the centrality of song within the framework of a hegemonic order. The voyageurs determined what would be sung on the water, on the portages, and at the campsites, while the bourgeois were largely passive observers. Yet Podruchny’s classifications of the songs overlooks an in-depth consideration of form, and she represents voyageur songs with material from the vast and varied collections of folklorists such as Barbeau.

The publications of musicologist Conrad Laforte in the later twentieth century signaled a renewed scrutiny of the form of voyageur songs as well a re-appraisal of their content. His significant publication \textit{Survivances médiévales dans la chanson folklorique} focused on the lyrical structure known as the \textit{laisse}, sometimes called an "epic lay" in English. This versatile form “ont servi à de multiples usages,” in social, children’s, and marching songs. According to Laforte, the voyageurs were one of the key social groups “qui ont contribué le plus à la conservation de ces chansons.”\textsuperscript{22} The verse of these songs was characterized by a set number of syllables or "feet," with a rhyme- assonance scheme that alternated gender vowel sounds, \textit{m-f} or \textit{f-m}, around a caesura.\textsuperscript{23} Yet the final rhyme or assonance ending of each couplet, or distich, was the same, hence the "laisse" or "leashed" verse. These \textit{chansons en laisse} have been sub-categorized into \textit{chanson de métiers} (occupational songs), \textit{chansons à repons} (call and response), \textit{chanson de rondes} (songs for round dances), and others, alternating between a couplet or distich

\textsuperscript{21} Carolyn Podruchny, \textit{Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 89.
\textsuperscript{23} A caesura is a pause near the middle of a line of poetic verse. As Alan Hindley and Brian Levy explain, the \textit{laisse} possesses a single rhyme / assonance ending; "as the name implies, the lines . . are 'leashed' together by this common assonance." See Alan Hindley & Brian J. Levy, \textit{The Old French Epic: An Introduction} (Louvain, Belium: Peeters, 1983), X; Conrad Laforte, \textit{Survivances Médiévales dans la chanson folklorique}, 21-28.
that conforms to the rhyme scheme of the laisse and a chorus. While Laforte’s description of this form and its historical origins is the most exhaustive, its emphasis on “medieval” origins continues the emphasis of previous French Canadian folklorists, and has recently been scrutinized.  

Yet Laforte produced the most in-depth analysis of the voyageur paddling repertoire. His piece “Le Répertoire Authentique des Chansons D'aviron de nos Anciens Canotiers (Voyageurs, Engagés, Coureurs de Bois)” makes two important points, the first concerning form and the second content. The first is a clarification of which kinds of songs were used as paddling songs. Laforte asserts that the chansons d’aviron alternated between a group chorus and a solo verse based around the laisse. These songs were distinct from the complaints or ballads that have been associated with the voyageurs, which were sung apart from work and would not have been sung by the entire group. Both Nute and Podruchny reprint examples of complaints and chansons d’aviron without clearly delineating differences in their form or function, or discussing how they might be analyzed differently as historical evidence. All voyageurs were compelled to sing the chansons d’aviron. The complaints may only have been known to a limited number, while many of these bear the mark of literate composition. Collections such as that of Madeleine Béland in her Chansons de voyageurs, coureurs de bois et forestiers provide mostly examples of complaints or songs sung outside of the context of work. Laforte clearly distinguishes these from the chansons d’aviron. In his presentation of this material, he diverges from the image

26 Ibid., 146-149; Madeleine Béland and Lorraine Carrier-Aubin, Chansons de voyageurs, coureurs de bois et forestiers (Presses de l’Université Laval, 1982).
presented by his predecessors, giving recognition to the importance of “comiques ou grivois” [comic or bawdy] lyrics, something virtually absent in the collections of La Rue, Gagnon, Barbeau and Béland. 27 This chapter will examine the primary documents of the fur trade to provide examples of the *chansons d'aviron* and extend the analysis of their content and functionality.

8.2 Primary Sources: The Ermatinger Collection

While dozens of travelers and traders commented on the songs of the voyageurs, at least four collections of songs were transcribed directly from the canoes of the fur trade. One is mentioned by John MacTaggart in his publication about his time in Canada from 1826-8, and yet he published only small samples of lyrics and never the full collection he claimed to possess. 28 One extant collection was transcribed by Edward M. Hopkins, who lived near Lachine and documented nine French Canadian paddling songs, which like the Ermatinger collection is based around the *chanson en laisse*. 29 Yet this collection suffers from its relatively late date of 1861, taken apparently from the voyageurs of Governor George Simpson, an elite group, the self-styled “hommes choisis! Les plus beaux chanteurs du monde!,” whom J.G. Kohl the German ethnographer described as singing “the merriest songs.” 30 In other words, this collection may not

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28 MacTaggart writes “for I have all their good boat-songs, and mean to publish them with the music attached, without which they are useless.” John MacTaggart, *Three Years in Canada : An Account of the Actual State of the Country in 1826-7-8, Comprehending Its Resources, Productions, Improvements and Capabilities, and Including Sketches of the State of Society, Advice to Emigrants, &c.* Vol. 1 (London: H. Colburn, 1928), 254.
be the most representative of the common paddling repertoire employed at the height of the Montreal trade.

The two most valuable collections were compiled by prominent and musically proficient fur traders, W.F. Wentzel and Edward Ermatinger. The former survived until the late nineteenth century, when it was described by the editor L.R. Masson as “mostly obscene and unfit for publication.” This collection disappeared from Library and Archives Canada around the outset of the twentieth century, likely due to the “rubric of moral turpitude.” The most valuable extant collection is that of Edward Ermatinger, which remained in the family’s personal archives in Portland Oregon until it was lent to the Public Archives of Canada in 1943. It was published in the Journal of American Folklore as “The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830),” although it was likely transcribed in the years before Ermatinger’s retirement from service in 1828. Its eleven songs with lyrics and musical notation represent the richest collection from the fur trade era. It represents the best source available for evaluating the repertoire of the *chansons d’aviron*, and provides insights into their form and how these songs functioned on the water.

Ermatinger was a prominent surname in the fur trade. Lawrence Ermatinger was a Swiss-born merchant and partner in the firm Trye and Ermatinger of London England who arrived in Montreal soon after the British conquest. Involved in the trading of goods to Michilimackinac and Grand Portage, his son Charles Oakes worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company while another son Lawrence Edward became assistant commissary-general in the British army. Lawrence

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32 This information was gleaned from the conversation with an archivist at Library and Archives Canada in 10/2011. It may have been lost in 1904 when a number of items were sold, or it may not have been passed along when the Masson papers were divided between L.A.C. and McGill Library.
Edward’s sons Edward and Francis both entered the fur trade with the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1818, engaging until 1828 and 1853 respectively.\textsuperscript{34} Edward received an education in England in languages and music, providing him with the skills necessary for his transcriptions and vocations as a fur trader, businessman, politician, and writer.\textsuperscript{35}

In his brief presentation of the Ermatinger collection, Barbeau stresses the remarkable historic continuity of this material with that of the St. Lawrence and France. He asserts that these songs are of the “common stock of traditional folk songs” transmitted across the Atlantic from approximately 1640 to 1680, the period of intensive immigration to New France. He describes them as “alive and variable,” deviating from the “original pattern,” and constantly shaped by the “mannerisms of individual singers.” Indeed, in their form as \textit{chanson en laisse}, and in their motifs and narratives, the Ermatinger collection evidences remarkable continuity with the French folksongs of the St. Lawrence. Each of these songs has been collected, many in dozens or even hundreds of variations, by folklorists in Québec and France. Yet Barbeau neglects to study how the familiar repertoire was modified and adapted with unique choruses and extended verses. Podruchny briefly cites it, stating that they are “all old French ballads.”\textsuperscript{36} A close analysis of this collection reveals that aspects of the voyageurs’ identity is interwoven into the narratives of knights, love, pastorals, flowers, and nightingales. Many seem innocent on the surface, but contain allegorical undertones and a few explicit lyrics expressing sexual innuendo and sensory desire.

J.G. Kohl contributed the most thorough analysis of how voyageur songs functioned on the water. He not only observed but interviewed many voyageurs, learning about how they

\textsuperscript{36} Podruchny, \textit{Making the Voyageur World}, 92.
classified their own songs. Paddling songs were subdivided based on the nature of work, divided into “’chansons à l’aviron,’ ‘chansons à la rame,’ ‘chansons de canot à lége,’ and so on.” Particular songs were chosen because they functioned well at particular tempos, with lége the fastest and rame the slowest. Yet Kohl suggests that these categories were ultimately very similar, with the differences “less in the character of the song than in the time and tact of the melody.”37 Taken together, this evidence suggests that the laisse underpinned the various types of paddling songs which were further subdivided according to tempo and working context.

Podruchny suggests that the voyageurs sang three kinds of songs: “melodic French ballads, lamentations for tragedies that occurred to fellow voyageurs, and everyday work songs, composed on the spot and constantly changing.”38 This is drawn from J.G. Kohl’s distinction between the old songs from Normandy and Brittany and the novel compositions and creations of voyageurs, which Kohl sought in vain. The lyrics he and others transcribed from the mouths of voyageurs suggest instead that the paddling repertoire was based exclusively on songs whose form and core narratives were brought from France. Yet the Ermatinger collection suggests that the choruses of the old songs were variable and prone to refashioning, while there was also room for improvisation and adaptability in the verses. Well-known French chansons en laisse served as the foundation for the voyageurs’ everyday work songs.

8.3 Functioning of the Chansons d’Aviron

37 Ibid., 255.
38 Ibid, 93.
Before examining the songs themselves, it will be useful to explore how they functioned on the water. The observations of travelers and traders indicate that singing was the crucial device that coordinated the paddles. In the large *canots du maître*, with a dozen or more paddlers, the initial "call" would have to be issued more loudly than in the *canot du nord*, which typically had only four or five paddlers.⁴⁹ The brigade’s guide or leading bowsman or steersman (known as *bouts*) “called” out the first line or two of verse,⁴⁰ which set the tempo and enabled the group to commence paddling as they sang the response. This “call” established the tempo, melody and rhythm that would be mimicked by subsequent singers.⁴¹ It was crucial that the “call” began a recognizable song so that everyone, even the inexperienced *mangeurs du lard*, could participate. Singing synchronized the movements of the paddles much as marches synchronized soldiers’ legs. Each individual conformed his movements to the rhythm. If one fell out of time, it had the potential to disrupt the movements of those ahead and behind. Fur traders who travelled tens of thousands of kilometers by canoe such as George Simpson and Alexander Ross referred to this kind of travel as a “march.”⁴² One NWC employee wrote in his journal that they “could not march on the river” when it was unsuitable for canoe travel.⁴³ John McDonnell

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⁴⁹ Ibid, 24-5.
⁴⁰ The 'call' is the introduction of the verse, and five songs of the Ermatinger collection posses a single line 'call,' followed by a refrain inséré (inserted refrain) before the second line of verse. The other six possess an uninterrupted two line 'call.' Ibid; There many descriptions of brigade departures, and they indicate both the bowsman and steersmen leading the singing.
⁴¹ In five of eleven songs in the Ermatinger collection, the call is a single line of verse, after which the brigade responds with an exact repetition or with the first line of the chorus. This refrain inséré (inserted chorus) breaks up the soloists' rhymed couplet, providing for rapid alternation between individual and group. Six of the eleven songs in the collection possess a longer two-line call that alternates more slowly with the chorus.
described distances by “days march by water,” while Duncan M’Gillivray related how Athabasca men prided themselves on “expeditious marching.” This terminology served as a figure of speech, while the 2/4 time signature of musical marches characterizes most of the paddling songs recorded by Edward Ermatinger.

Songs could be led by different singers, while after the first chorus different voyageurs could cycle into the solo role. Alexander Ross describes a "particular voice being ever selected to lead the song," while Nicholas Garry noted "one man leading, the other[s] joining chorus and all paddling to Time." Each soloist began by singing the last line of the previous singer, following it with a new line to complete the rhyme and advance the narrative. This conditioned the men in the brigade to listen to those singing before them, as they were required to repeat what was sung. This effectively conditioned the voyageurs to listen and issue aural cues, with the call and response keeping the voyageurs occupied and alert. Overall their functioning was hierarchical, with the primary accounts suggesting that the initial call was issued by the guide, bowsman, or steersman. Rather than songs functioning as a mechanism to “ease the pace of the journey,” as Podruchny suggests, their hierarchical implementation suggests that they were initiated at a pace that suited the guide's wishes, rather than those of the crew. While the lower status mangeurs du lard could cycle in as soloists, they would have little opportunity to slow the pace once the song

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46 The 2/4 timing characterizes nine of eleven songs, while the faster paced 6/8 timing characterizes the other two. See Marius Barbeau, "The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830),” 153-161.
47 Ross, The Fur Hunters of the Far West, 293; Nicholas Garry, The Diary of Nicholas Garry Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company: A detailed narrative of his travels in the Northwest Territories of British North America in 1821, ed. W.J. Noxon (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1900), 34.
began. Starting the singing and issuing the 'call' was such an important management device that bouts were reported to receive more pay if they had strong voices. They could also lose their position if their throat or voice failed them during the voyage.

The Ermatinger collection reveals how the voyageurs adapted French chansons en laisse over long distances. The voyageurs customarily measured distances in pipes, or durations between work stoppages. These distances varied depending on the situation and account. It was essential to keep the paddles moving and synchronized on the water, and some accounts indicate that songs were extended as long as necessary between pipes. J.G. Kohl witnessed the songs functioning on the water, identifying aspects that would elude later folklorists. He observed that “The principal virtue of these songs appears to be their length.” They were not only "remarkably long," he wrote, arguing they were impossible to record in their entirety. He describes his transcription as akin to cutting "off half a yard as a specimen," observing that the songs "must last, if possible, for a whole river, or at least a lake." This suggests that while they

50 Edward Ermatinger, Edward Ermatinger's York Factory Express Journal being a record of journeys made between Fort Vancouver and Hudson Bay in the years 1827-1828, introduction by C.O. Ermatinger, (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1912), 106.
51 Carolyn Podruchny references the account of Jean Henry Lefroy, a scientist travelling with a Hudson's Bay Company Brigade in 1843-44 to posit that pipes were taken "on average every two hours." Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 124; Grace Lee Nute writes that three pipes covered approximately twelve miles, see Nute, The Voyageur, 58.
53 Kohl, Kitchi Gami, 257-260.
54 Ibid., 256-258.
55 Ibid.
provided mental stimulation, the great length of paddling songs, rather than “breaking the monotony,” became the monotony.\textsuperscript{56}

8.4 Lyrics

Before examining its lyrics, it may be useful to first explore whether or not the Ermatinger collection was representative more generally of voyageur songs. Edward Ermatinger did not leave an explanation as to why he recorded the songs he did. It may be that these were the most common during the 1820s when he was travelling with the York Factory express canoes from Hudson Bay to the Pacific Ocean.\textsuperscript{57} Or he may have selected these because he felt they were most representative, easy to transcribe, or perhaps they were his favourite. It is possible to cross-verify the Ermatinger collection with other primary accounts from the fur trade to get a sense of whether or not it is representative of the genre. This method suggests that the first and third song of the Ermatinger collection, J’ai trop grand peur des loups and M’envoient à la fontaine were the most popular chansons d’aviron in the collection, both referenced numerous times during the period before 1840.\textsuperscript{58} Only two other voyageur songs possess as many references: Trois Beaux Canards (also known by the choruses en roulant ma boule and v’la bon

\textsuperscript{56} Carolyn Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 123.
\textsuperscript{57} Edward Ermatinger, Edward Ermatinger’s York Factory Express Journal.
\textsuperscript{58} For J’ai trop grand peur des loups see Thomas Moore, Odes, Epistles and Other Poems, vol 2., 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (London: James Carpenter, 1807), 133-134; James Lanman, “The American Fur Trade,” in Hunt's Merchants’ Magazine, 3:189 (September, 1840); For M’envoient à la fontaine, see John MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada : An Account of the Actual State of the Country in 1826-7-8, vol. 1. (London: H. Colburn, 1928), 256-7; Bigsby, The Shoe and Canoe, 322; Garry, The Diary of Nicholas Garry, 94-95.
vent) and Rosier Blanc. This evidence suggests that the Ermatinger collection contained some of the most frequently cited chansons d’aviron.

Allegories and euphemisms provided layered meanings to folk song narratives. Animal species, birds, flowers and fountains all possessed rich symbolic significances. How these meanings changed over time and space have generated heated debates amongst scholars. Robert Darnton has stressed the “complexity and multiplicity inherent in symbolic expression,” demonstrating how European folk-motifs were nuanced and could possess a variety of meanings. Others have argued for more straightforward interpretation of symbolic vocabularies. The ecclesiastical authorities of New France complained about the “double meanings” latent in the discourse of young men and the lower orders. The narratives of the Ermatinger collection possess the same potential for dual meanings and allegorical significances. Scenarios of marriage, hunting, and family life are interwoven with knights, fountains, sheep, shirts, trees, and singing nightingales, all rich symbols in European folklore. These fall into the thematic

59 For Trois Beaux Canards, see John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 12-13; Nicholas Garry’s men sang “ye, ye ment” in place of “En roulant ma boule” in the second line of every stanza, “Tous du long de la Rivière” in the fourth, see Nicholas Garry, The Diary of Nicholas Garry, 128; George Mountain, Songs of the Wilderness : Being a Collection of Poems, Written in Some Different Parts of the Territory of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and in the Wilds of Canada, on the Route to That Territory, in the Spring and Summer of 1844 : Interspersed with Some Illustrative Notes (London: F. & J. Rivington, 1846), 51; for Rosier Blanc see Garry, The Diary of Nicholas Garry, 93-94; J.G. Kohl, Kitchi Gami, 258-260.


62 An “Episcopal order” issued by New France Bishop La Croix de Saint-Vallier in 1691 condemned not only the “diverse gatherings dances and other entertainments . . . held on Feast Day sand Sundays, and sometimes even during the hours of Divine Service,” but also “the young men and boys, [who] take the liberty to utter in all their gatherings unseemly discourse with double meanings, which causes in their behavour a corruption which cannot be sufficiently deplored.” See Cornelius Jaenen and Cecilia Morgan, eds. Material Memory: Documents in Pre-Conference History (Don Mills, On: Addison Wesley, 1998), 34-5; Original source: H. Têtu & C.O. Gagnon, eds. Mandements, letters pastorals et circulaires des Evêques des Québec, vol. 1 (Québec: Coté, 1888), 275-281.
categories of French Canadian folksongs utilized by Laforte, who suggests some of their meanings.63

The core narrative of “trois beaux canards” clearly possesses peasant origins. The basic narrative consists of the “fils du roi” [son of the king] hunting with his giant gun, shooting at the black (bad) duck but hitting the white (good) duck. He is then chastised by the group: “Le fils du roi tu est mechant!” [Son of the king you are so mean!]. To the fur traders surrounded by singing voyageurs, this song's expression of solidarity and antagonism towards the “son of the king” may have proven unnerving. On the other hand, the allegorical significance may have been overlooked. Symbolism could invoke deeper meanings, and yet these significances are ultimately impossible to assess without the personal interpretations and testimony of listeners.

The Ermatinger collection reveals that the voyageurs used three different methods to extend songs over long durations. The first was linking sequences of verse that shared the same rhyme or assonance ending. An example of this can be found in mes blancs moutons garder, which possesses eleven lines of verse before transitioning into the first four lines of c’était une vieille grand-mère.64 The verse in both cases conforms to the rhyme / assonance ending of {é}, allowing for the easy interchange of long sequences of verse. These interlinked narratives both possess a meter of fourteen syllables and depict a pastoral theme. This suggests that voyageurs sang a series of verse segments sharing a common rhyme scheme rather than distinct narratives with fixed texts. This kind of singing resembled quilt-work: it interlaced segments of verse to suit the necessary duration of the journey.

64 Barbeau, En Roulant Ma Boule, Part 2 of Répertoire de la chanson folklorique française au Canada (Ottawa: Musée National du Canada, 1982), 265.
The second method of extending songs broke the unified rhyme-scheme and introduced a new assonance ending. This method is evident in four of eleven songs in the Ermatinger collection.\(^{65}\) New rhyme schemes were introduced, while the following singer could continue or revert back to the original.\(^{66}\) Even in these examples when the laisse is broken, it is still retained in long sequences. The Ermatinger collection suggests that while this method could be used to prolong the action, the tendency was to continue the rhyme scheme established at the outset.

The final method that the voyageurs used to extend their singing over long distances was through rhyming simple and repetitive lines onto the end of the verse. This provided opportunity for customization and creativity. Podruchny alludes to "instances where voyageurs changed or customized lyrics to French ballads."\(^{67}\) In his publication of the Ermatinger collection, Barbeau stresses the songs’ “vitality,” how they were “alive and variable,” yielding slightly “to the mannerisms of individual singers and the utilities they served.”\(^{68}\) Yet neither Podruchny nor Barbeau examine these examples. Rhyming simple and repetitive lines onto the end of verse is known as "anaphora."\(^{69}\) These phrases begin similarly or identically, facilitating the enumeration of details onto an established theme. These structures are found prominently in the lyrics of four songs in the Ermatinger collection, yet are largely omitted in the published collections of Gagnon and Barbeau. This is where individual voyageurs had the greatest opportunity for creative space, fashioning lyrics that reflected their vocation.

\(^{65}\) Three of the eleven songs in the Ermatinger collection divert from the rhyme scheme established at the outset, although even in these cases most lines adhere to the original laisse. ‘mes blancs moutons garder,’ ‘c’est l’oiseau et l’alouette,’ ‘un oranger il y a,’ ‘le rossignol y chante.’ Barbeau, “The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830),” 153-161.

\(^{66}\) Reverting back to the original rhyme scheme after a new one is introduced occurs in ‘un oranger il y a.’ Ibid., 157.

\(^{67}\) Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 90.

\(^{68}\) Barbeau, “The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (CA. 1830),” 147.

Of the eleven songs in the Ermatinger collection, four contain extensions of verse beyond the core narratives presented in the collections of Gagnon and Barbeau. They include *j'ai trop grand peur des loups* and *m'envoient à la fontaine*, as well as *nous avons déserté* and *le rossignol y chante*. They represent examples of voyageur expression quite different from the "pretty" narratives of nightingales and bathing ducks. They present candid, and sometimes vulgar, fantasies of abundance and sensory gratification.

Table 1. "*j'ai trop grand peur des loups*" (I am too scared of wolves):

| *A la maison accoutumé*                  | At the accustomed house                  |
| *A la maison du boulanger*              | At the house of the baker                |
| *Ya du bon pain pour y manger*          | There's good bread to eat                |
| *Ya du bon vin pour y trinquer*         | There's good wine to toast               |
| *Et des bons lits pour nous coucher*    | And good beds for us to sleep upon       |
| *Des joli's fill's à nos côtés.*        | With beautiful girls at our sides        |

Table 2. "*nous avons déserté*" (we have deserted):

| *Que nous mangions pou's grass's et des pigeons lardés* | When we ate fat chickens and pigeons |
| *Que nous allions voir les fill's bien tard après souper* | When we went to see the girls, well after supper |
| *Que nous fumions la pip' comm' des jeun's cavalier.* | When we smoked the pipe, like young knights |

Table 3. “*m'envenant à la fontaine*” (I am going to the well):

| *On y prend de la carpe, aussi de l'éturgeon* | Catching carp, and also sturgeon |
| *Aussi des écrevisses, qui vont de reculons*   | Also crayfish, who move backwards   |
| *Tout comme ces jeun's filles qu'on leur prend les tétons* | Just like the young girls, whose breasts (or nipples) we grab |
| *Quand on sait bien s'y prendre, on les tire du fond.* | when we have a good hold, we pull them from the depths |

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70 Barbeau, "The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830)," 153.
71 Ibid., 153-4.
72 Ibid., 154.
These lyrics intertwined longings for food and sex, demonstrating a mechanism for expressing and perhaps managing hunger and loneliness. The voyageurs imagined varieties of cuisine and drink unavailable in the northwest, from baked bread, to fat chickens and pigeons, and wine. Beds for sleeping were a comfort that the voyageurs relinquished for the duration of their employment. Lyrics about sleeping opened the potential for sexual innuendo. Yet references to women are overt, ranging from chivalrous to salacious. Those expressed in *le rossignol y chante* demonstrate the voyageur’s romantic proclamations and chivalrous approach. The final lyrics of *m’envenant à la fontaine*, on the other hand, transformed the sexual innuendo into outright assault. What may have been sung playfully appears more sinister on the printed page, particularly if assessed alongside fur trade histories of violence and sexual exploitation of First Nations women.\(^\text{74}\) These fascinating endings beg the question: to what extent were they novel creations and to what extent did voyageurs draw from stock lyrics and endings popular in the folksong repertoire?

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\(^{73}\) Ibid., 160.

Fig. 8. “J’ai trop grand peur des loups.” From the collection of fur trader Edward Ermatinger, recorded ~1827-1830. Library and Archives Canada, “Folk songs, French-Canada, ca. 1830.” Series A2, Volume 4, Item 9 (MG 19, R7712-0-7-E): 1. Out of Copyright.

The variations found in the Ermatinger collection may be compared with those found elsewhere. The largest repository of French Canadian folk songs is in the Archives de Folklore at the L’Université Laval in Québec. Dozens of versions of j’ai trop grand peur des loups and m’envenant à la fontaine are catalogued. These indicate that the endings collected by Ermatinger were indeed different from those collected elsewhere.

The most common ending for j’ai trop grand peur des loups, often entitled trois cavaliers, is a misadventure whereby the protagonists sleep in a chicken-coop. One version playfully ends with: “Moi je coucherai avec la mariée, Toi, tu coucheras dans le poulailler, les
poules, les coqs riront de toi.” Various undesirable scenarios are presented in the other variations, for instance sleeping next to “une grosse mouton,” or sleeping while “Un gros coq d’Inde et à tes pieds.” Other scenarios inside the chicken coop include sleeping with “Les poules, les oies ferent sur toi.” The worst, perhaps, depicts sleeping in the chicken coop, with chickens pecking your nose, and under the stairs where rats scratch you while you sleep. The version in the Ermatinger collection inverts the trajectory of misadventure and paints an exceptionally positive ending, with the protagonists receiving beds, women, food, and drink. The final lines to *M’en Revenant de Boulanger* collected by Luc Lacourcière are as follows: “Des beaux lits bancs pour se couches, Des belles filles à nos côtés, Tu as menti, franc cavalier, Tu as couché sous l’escalier, Deux grosses négresses à tes côtés.” These types of lyrics expressing overtly racialized ideas were common in sea shanties and military marching songs of the period, but do not appear in the extant collections of voyageur songs.

75 Collection of C.M. Barbeau, “Trois cavaliers fort bien montés / M’en Revenant de L’alendrie,” recorded by Germaine L. from Mme J-Bte Leblond, from Ste-Famille, Montmorency QC, 1928, Archives de Folklore, Laval University (Ms no 167).
76 “Et des belles filles à nos côtés, Tu as menti, franc cavalier, Tu as couché dans l’poulailler, Une grosse mouton à tes côtés;” “Tu as menti gros cavalier, Tu vas coucher dans l’poulailler, Les poules les coqs à tes côtés, Un gros coq d’Inde et à tes pieds.” See Collection Anne-Marie Doyon, “Trois cavaliers fort bien montés, J’ai vu le loup, le r’nard passer,” *Archives de Folklore*, Laval University (enregistrement 16).
78 “Là nous coucherons dans le poulailler, Les poules te picocheront le nez, Là nous coucherons sous l’escalier, Les rats te grafigneront le nez.” Collection J.T. LeBlanc, “Trois cavaliers fort bien montés / Par un beau soir, m’y promenant,” *Archives de Folklore*, Laval University (ms no 591).
79 Collection of Luc Lacourcière, “Trois Cavalières fort bien montée / M’en Revenant de Boulanger,” Archives de Folklore, Laval University (ms no1).
Fig. 9. “M’envoient à la fontaine.” From the collection of fur trader Edward Ermatinger, recorded ~1827-1830. Library and Archives Canada, “Folk songs, French-Canada, ca. 1830.,” Series A2, Volume 4, Item 9 (MG 19, R7712-0-7-E): 3. Out of Copyright.
M’envoient à la fontaine, often titled fille au cresson or la fontaine est profonde by folklorists, has been collected in dozens of variations in both France and Quebec. Yet, the version captured by Ermatinger is perhaps the most grivois of all. Other endings demonstrate an alternate fishing scenario, such as “Aussi des écrevisses, Qui vont de reculons, Ah! dites-moi donc, la belle, L’écrevisse c’est-y bon? On y coupe la tête, le restant en est bon, embrassez-moi, la belle, Après ça nous en irons.”81 In other instances, the final lines do not turn to women but rather remain on the topic of food. For instance, one common variation ends with the lines “Quel poisson lui prend-on?, On y prend de la carpe, Aussi de l’eturgeon, Ah! dites-nous, la belle, Ah! quelle sauce nous l’mange-t-on?, Yon le mange a la sauce, Et faite au beurre, a l’ognon.”82 The version in the Ermatinger collection, on the other hand, represents salacious desires and explicit language.

81 Collection E.Z. Massicotte, “La fille au cresson / M’envoie t’a la fontaine,” Archives de Folklore, Laval University (MN 3023).
82 Collection of C.M. Barbeau, “La fille au cresson / M’envoie a la fontaine,” Archives de Folklore, Laval University (MN 275).
Nous avons déserté, the second song of the Ermatinger collection, appears to have been much less widespread in the French Canadian folk song repertoire. Variations do not appear in the published collections of Gagnon and Barbeau, and only one other version seems to be listed at the Archives de Folklore at the Université Laval. Its origins are insinuated by the opening line of verse: “nous étions trios soldats, du regiment d’Ongé.” This seems a curious reference, with no such location existing. In the version collected E.M. Massicotte, the lyric is “nous étions trios
soldats, du regiment dernier.’

This seems a dead-end, but the Ermatinger lyric suggests that this song may have come from the specific regiment of the colonial French army. Researching at the Bibliotheque Nationale’s Department de Musique in Paris, I discovered that this song closely resembled a marching song from the military regiments from Angers, France. “D’Ongé,” then, appears to be a corrupt transcription of “d’Angers.” Eleven versions of this song have been catalogued under the name *Le Déserteur que l’on s’apprête à pendre*, transcribed in various collections and catalogued in volume two of the exhaustive *Répertoire des Chansons Françaises de tradition orale*. Ermatinger’s version shares the same twelve-syllable laisse (6F 6M) as *Le Déserteur que l’on s’apprête à pendre*. Although many of the details differ, the core narrative consisting of deserting the army for the love of a woman remains. Yet the particular lyrics at the end of the Ermatinger version are not found in the others. The version recorded by E.M. Massicotte is devoid of the longings for food, ending with “Où est le temps passé, Où nous allions voir les filles, bien tard après souper, Il n’en faut plus parler.”

The interchangeability of marching songs and paddling songs brings to light the similarities between marching on land and paddling on the water, and suggests a deeper historical connection. The *Troupes de la Marine* and *Carignan-Salières* regiments played an important role in French Canadian history, influencing the makeup and character of New France. Many retired soldiers and their sons

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83 Collection E.M. Massicotte, “Nous étions trios soldats / Le Deserter Pendu,” *Archives de Folklore*, Laval University (BM 537).
85 Collection E.M. Massicotte, “Nous étions trios soldats / Le Deserter Pendu,” *Archives de Folklore*, Laval University (BM 537).
became *coureurs de bois* and *engagés*, providing a link with the fur trade.\(^87\) Away from home for extended periods, and subjected to an unsavory and insecure food supply in all-male company, the longings of the men in these two very different vocations appears to have been similar, while the voyageur ending again constructe an idealized scenario.

Finally, the lines of *le rossignol y chante* express a self-conscious voyageur identity. "Faudrait qu'un voyageur pour y gagner ton coeur!" reflects a masculine bravado, one obsessed with courting. In Nute’s analysis she interprets the lyrics of *Parmi les Voyageurs* as demonstrating the “class-consciousness of the voyageurs.”\(^88\) The voyageurs were on the bottom of a paternal relationship, and had their own internal ranking and ceremonies more akin to members of a guild than wage labourers. E.P. Thompson writes that "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."\(^89\) While the voyageurs' songs display some evidence of a distinct vocational identity, they do not establish an oppositional framework with owners or their overseers as found in working class songs of the nineteenth century. Thus Nute's assertion of voyageur songs representing "class-consciousness" is problematic; rather, they reveal the vocational anxieties of scarcity and separation, providing insights into the voyageur mentalité associated with travel. They reflect the insecurities of men who were required to leave family and loved ones for months or years at a time. As we saw in Chapter 5, tearful departures were commonplace. The myth of the *chasse-galerie* perhaps best reflects the *l'ennui* fostered by the fur trade, consisting of voyageurs bargaining their souls with the devil in order to fly home for a


\(^{88}\) Nute, *The Voyageur*, 143.

brief visit. Paddling songs offered an ongoing forum of expression that allowed for escapist fantasies and hopeful daydreams of love and intimacy. They envisioned sensual fulfillment during long absences from intimacy and when they were hungry for food and its variety.

On journeys northwest of Lake Superior food was a matter of continual concern. Canoe travel was predicated on a higher labour-to-cargo ratio than York Boats, meaning that there were more mouths to feed and less room aboard for provisions. The voyageurs’ physically demanding vocation produced notoriously large appetites. David Thompson estimated that his men ate at least eight pounds of meat each day. For many of the routes northwest of Lake Superior it was impossible to carry sufficient food provisions, and it was often hard to obtain the hyper-dense pemmican. Brigades relied on First Nations peoples and trading posts along the way to resupply. Food was so socially significant that it divided voyageurs between the lower status mangeurs du lard, who ate pork provisions on their roundtrip from Montreal, and the hivernants and hommes du nord who traversed from the western edge of Lake Superior to the distant northwest, often risking hunger and starvation. The era of fur trade competition before 1821 produced many accounts of extreme privation and hunger, with both the decade of the 1780s and the period from 1810-1815 representing periods of extreme scarcity for the canoe brigades. Yet

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90 Honoré Beaugrand, *La Chasse Galerie, and Other Canadian Stories* (Montréal: 1900).
91 York boats varied in length from twenty-seven to forty-two feet, with a freight capacity of three and a half or four tons (with a total capacity of six tons per boat) and a crew of six to eight oarsmen, while the canots du maître carried three or four tons freight but required a larger crew, typically eight to ten men, but sometimes as many as fourteen; See Flora Beardy and Robert Coutts, *Voices from Hudson Bay: Cree Stories from York Factory* (McGill-Queen’s Press - MQUP, 1996), 130; Richard Glover, “York Boats,” *The Beaver* (March 1949): 19-23; Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 41; Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 24-5; Nute, *The Voyageur*, 24.
94 Ibid., 118-120.
as late as the 1850s, J.G. Kohl observed that nearly all of his voyageurs had experienced extreme hunger and were "almost always in a state of want."96

Singing was interpreted by observers as having a reinvigorating effect, helping the voyageurs push through fatigue and famine and keeping their paddles moving over long durations. Kohl describes how the voyageurs “consider singing as specially necessary to give them fresh mental strength for the bodily exertion.”97 Elizabeth Simcoe described how "after a day of fatigue, where strong currents require peculiar exertion, they sing incessantly and give a more regular stroke with the oars when accompanied by the tunes.”98 Fur trader Nicholas Garry wrote that singing “appears to ease their Labours.”99 Ross Cox described how singing had an “enlivening” effect and “softens down the severity of their laborious duties.”100 As evidence he cites a brigade in "starving condition" singing the "chansons à l’aviron until day-break, to divert their hunger.”101 Alexander Ross described how singing helped voyageurs “keep for days and nights together on the water, without intermission and without repose.”102 John Howison travelled with voyageurs during the years 1818 – 1820 and wrote that they were “inured to hardship. . . after toiling at the oar during the whole day, and lightening their labour with songs…”103 While these descriptions possess a condescending naïveté, they do correspond with emerging

96 Kohl, Kitchi Gami, 72.
97 Ibid., 256.
98 Elizabeth Simcoe, Mrs. Simcoe’s Diary, edited by Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1965), 63-64.
99 Garry, The Diary of Nicholas Garry, 96.
101 Ibid., 343.
102 Ross, The Fur Hunters of the Far West, 295.
neuroscience of the brain that suggests singing can release endorphins and serotonin.\textsuperscript{104} Singing may indeed have had the physical and psychological effects described so often in the primary accounts, even as it exacerbated the conditions of fatigue by pushing the pace of paddling.

Conrad Laforte speculated that singing functioned as “une sorte d'évasion par l'imagination” [a kind of evasion for the imagination], allowing the voyageurs to overlook or ignore their condition and surroundings.\textsuperscript{105} Although embodying a kind of escapism, the Ermatinger collection suggests that the escapism tended towards scenarios of abundance. Perhaps singing merely served as a distraction, but the voyageurs catered their endings towards desired outcomes rather than misadventures. There are some similarities here with singing to "conjure" the hunt, which could include envisioning successes and feasting. As we have seen, it was not unprecedented for voyageurs to conjure with First Nations hunters. George Nelson described his voyageurs Sorel and Le Bougon conjuring, respected for their abilities and voices.\textsuperscript{106} Perhaps these encounters influenced voyageurs lyrically towards constructing scenarios of abundance. One fascinating account portrays voyageurs not only imagining, but seemingly \textit{willing} their desires into existence: in 1821 Nicholas Garry described a brigade singing about varieties of alcohol and then stopping to drink water, with "the Imagination and spirit giving to it all the Qualities they have been vaunting."\textsuperscript{107}

Travelers and bourgeois were often quick to depict utopian idyllic happy singing voyageurs as a means to eclipse the hardships of those engaged in this work. Most first hand...


\textsuperscript{105} Laforte, "Le Répertoire Authentique des Chansons D'aviron de nos Anciens Canotiers (Voyageurs, Engagés, Coureurs de Bois)," 156.


\textsuperscript{107} Garry, \textit{The Diary of Nicholas Garry Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company}, 34.
accounts describe the exciting moments of departure or arrival, rather than the arduous hours of labour in-between. There is also a broader tendency for men and women of the upper classes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to interpret the work songs of lower orders as indicators of happiness and simplicity, romantically glossing over genuine hardship and suffering. Consider Irish traveler Isaac Weld's description of voyageurs "singing merrily" after having paddled the entire night. Similar appraisals were recorded concerning the songs of slaves in the American south in the early nineteenth century. As a result, the primary accounts seem to convey an unrealistic perception of ever-happy singing voyageurs. Grace Lee Nute writes that the songs "lightened the work and were the natural expression of such an effervescent race of men as the French Canadians admittedly were." Carolyn Podruchny writes that one of the two major functions of voyageur singing was to provide "a forum for pleasure and creativity." These appraisals may be too rosy, as the apparent gaieté of their songs sometimes masked terrible suffering. Pleasure was a byproduct of songs used to manage the march, often taking the men through extended periods of privation.

8.5 The Chorus

The effect of the chorus was most often remarked by observers. Its alternation with the verse produced a dramatic "rising and falling" effect on the water. John J. Bigsby described

111 Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 89.
112 For instance, Ballantyne describes the voices "rising and falling faintly in the distance." See Robert M. Ballantyne, *Hudson’s Bay or Every-Day Life in the Wilds of North America: During Six Years Residence in the Territories of the Honourable Hudson’s Bay Company.* (1848; repr. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972), 245; Anna Jameson write that the songs were "animated... they all sing in unison, raising their voices..." See Anna Jameson,
hearing the singing of an approaching canoe brigade as far as six miles away while surveying Drummond Island in 1820. Those inside the canoes described the choruses as “powerful,” “noisy,” and “roaring.” Ballantyne describes the departure of the spring brigade from York Factory with “cheering song from the men in full chorus.” The chorus on the water tied the brigade together and enabled the group of singers to be extended. Anna Jameson describes the voyageurs in her canoe singing with “the other canoe joining in the chorus.” Colin Robertson described how his canoe met with another on Lake Bourbon near Norway House in July of 1819, forming a brigade when “the men of both canoes join[ed] in the chorus.” As the most prominent feature of their songs, the chorus served to broadcast the voyageurs' approach and synchronize their voices and movements.

The choruses of the chansons en laisse in general were simple and incredibly adaptable, with many songs possessing dozens of chorus variations. Some of the most well known, such as trois beaux canards, were recorded in over one hundred versions, with many popular chorus variations such as en roulant ma boule and v'la bon vent. Unsurprisingly, the two most widespread songs from the Ermatinger collection, j'ai trop grand peur des loups and m'envoient...

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113 Bigsby, The Shoe and Canoe, 143-144.
114 MacTaggart, Three Years in Canada, 255; George Head, Forest Scenes and Incidents, in The Wilds of North America; Being A Diary of A Winter’s Route From Halifax to the Canadas, and During Four Months’ Residence in the Woods on the Borders of Lakes Huron and Simcoe (1829; repr. Toronto: Coles Publishing Company, 1970), 343.
115 Ballantyne, Hudson’s Bay or Every-Day Life in the Wilds of North America, 72.
116 Jameson, Winter Studies and Summer Rambles, 425.
à la fontaine, have the most choruses associated with them. Thomas Moore transcribed a chorus of the former in 1804 as "A l'ombre d'un bois je m'en vais jouer, A l'ombre d'un bois je m'en vais danser."\(^{119}\) Another recorded from the lips of voyageurs is "L'on, lon, laridon daine, Lon ton, laridon dai."\(^{120}\) *M'envoient à la fontaine* possesses perhaps even more chorus variations, including that collected by Barbeau: “dondaine, don, Dondaine, dondaine.”\(^{121}\) Some of the choruses in Ermatinger’s collection explicitly reference paddling, such as *mon père a fait bâtir maison*: "Fringue, Fringue, sur la rivière, Fringue, Fringue, sur l'aviron." Another popular voyageur chorus was "C’est l’aviron qui nous mène, qui nous mène, C’est l’aviron qui nous mène en haut."\(^{122}\)

Nonsemantic syllables known as vocables were frequently employed in these choruses. Combining syllables rhythmically for sound rather than content appears in many European folk song genres, and indeed singing cultures all over the world.\(^{123}\) Ernest Gagnon quotes a sixteenth century French grammarian who describes the "infini d'interjections qui se trouvent dans les chansons populaires," such as “*tirompha, dada, etc.*”\(^{124}\) While on paper they appear curious, when sounded they are easy to learn and repeat. In the Ermatinger collection, vocables can be found in the chorus of five of eleven songs, suggesting that the voyageurs employed a distinct vocable style. Songs with a chorus consisting entirely of vocables include *la chasse au perdreau* (“Gai faluron malurette, O gai! Faluron maluré”), *le rossignol y chante* (“Beau faluron ma

\(^{119}\) Moore, *Odes, Epistles and Other Poems*, 133-134.


\(^{121}\) Collection of C.M. Barbeau, “La fille au cresson / M’envoie a la fontaine,” *Archives de Folklore*, Laval University (MN 275).

\(^{122}\) Barbeau, *Jongleur Songs of Old Quebec*, 138-141.


\(^{124}\) Gagnon, *Chansons Populaires du Canada*, 62.
dondaine, O gai! Faluron ma dondé”), and nous avons déserté (“Beau faluron dondaine, O gai Dondé!”). Songs with partial vocables include the chorus of m’envenant à la fontaine (“La violette dondén’, la violette dondé”) and mes blancs moutons garder (“Digue dondèn’, jeune fille à marier”). The frequent repetition of vocables such as “faluron” and “dondèn” suggest that these may have held special significance. J.G. Kohl observed that vocables were nearly interchangeable in voyageur paddling songs, as he heard a long song whose refrain was the first time “Ma dondon, ma dondette,” and the second time, “Ma luron, ma lurette.” Beyond merely being favoured by the voyageurs for their sound, Kohl observed that “‘Dondon” and “luron” were popular names for girls, sweethearts, &c.” The vocables found in the Ermatinger collection appear to be variations of these and perhaps conveyed similar meanings.

Nonsemantic expressions undoubtedly present a challenge to scholars. I have suggested elsewhere that this is where First Nations' influence in voyageur songs may have manifested. As we have already seen, First Nations peoples across North America prominently used vocables in their songs. This may have had an effect of “widening the circle” so to speak, allowing for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to join in. Ted Gioia suggests that it was the “constant borrowing across linguistic barriers” that explains the proliferation of vocables in sea shanties, and it is possible that a similar mechanic operated with the chansons d’aviron of the voyageurs.

The chorus presented observers with a sound of unity. At the outset of the nineteenth century most voyageurs were French Canadians from the St. Lawrence Valley, but there were

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125 Barbeau, “The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830),” 147-61.
126 Kohl, Kitchi Gami, 257-259.
127 Ibid.
increasing numbers of First Nations' peoples in their ranks. There were also significant numbers of Iroquois from Kahnewake and Kahnesatake in the NWC and HBC canoes. Alexander Ross describes Iroquois voyageurs participating in the paddling songs, although they preferred hymns. When Father Aubert travelled from Montreal to Red River in a voyageur canoe, he described his crew of two Iroquois and four French Canadians as experienced voyageurs with voices "doués de fort belles voix et sachant par coeur le répertoire de toutes les chansons canadienne." By the mid nineteenth century, according to Ross, most voyageurs were actually mixed-blood or Métis. Yet outsiders had difficulty distinguishing and delineating between the backgrounds of men aboard the canoes. Experience and employment rather than race or cultural background determined whether the French Canadian, Métis, or Aboriginal voyageurs were 'mangeurs du lard' or 'hivernants.' The NWC and HBC's rigid structure relegated all voyageurs to the status of servants, while the officers, factors, and clerks were clearly demarcated as non-labourers. Control of singing reflected hierarchy within their ranks, yet the voyageurs' participation in the communal songs presented an image of solidarity and linked them into a process of expression and group cooperation that bridged racial lines and fostered the image of a cohesive voyageur identity.

131 Ross, The Fur Hunters of the Far West, 286.
132 For instance, when Pierre Aubert journeyed to Red River in 1845, he described his crew. "Notre équipage se composait de six hommes, dont deux Iroquois et quatre Canadiens, hommes rompus aux fatigues des voyages, doués de fort belles voix et sachant par coeur le répertoire de toutes les chansons canadiennes. [Our retinue was composed of six men, two Iroquois and four Canadiens, men broken to the fatigues of voyages, gifted with strong good voices and knowing by heart the repertoire of all the Canadian songs.]" Pierre Aubert, Missions de La Congrégation Des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée (Paris: Typographie Hennuyer et Fils), 183-4.
133 Ross, The Fur Hunters of the Far West, 291.
134 Kohl, Kitchi Gami, 261; Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, xii.
135 For analyses of the NWC and HBC labour models, see Ibid., 136; Edith I. Burley, Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 245.
The socially inclusive nature of paddling songs was expressed by a retired voyageur interviewed in the late nineteenth century. In his long experience of over forty years working in the fur trade, he had developed a large musical vocabulary, claiming "Fifty songs could I sing." Yet it was musical adaptability that he most prized, with the man boasting that he “could carry, paddle, walk and sing with any man I ever saw.” Vocalizations that resulted from polyglot and culturally diverse crews singing together were labeled, in culinary terminology, as "rubbabooos."

Rubbaboo is a favorite dish with the northern voyageurs, when they can get it. It consists of pemmican made into a kind of soup by boiling in water... Any queer mixture gets that name among the voyageurs. When I try to speak French, and mix English, Slavy and Louchioux words with it, they tell me 'that's a rubbaboo.” And when the Indians attempt to sing a voyaging song, the different keys and tunes make a 'rubbaboo.'

This reference suggests that it was the melody that reflected diversity, rather than lyrical adaptation. Marguerite d’Harcourt who did the musical analysis of the Ermatinger collection suggests that there was a relatively narrow melodic range for the songs in the Ermatinger collection, with most of the songs employing six or only five notes of the scale. This narrow range may have contributed to the ease of participation, as all voyageurs, whether or not they were deemed "good" singers, were expected to contribute their voice.

At least one song reflecting the polyglot nature of the fur trade has survived. It is remarkable for its incorporation of First Nations' language, and because it is mentions a location in North America. Its final phrases contain words that have not yet been translated:

Dans l’Mississippi ya des sauvagesses, (Bis)
Des souliers brodés, Des mitassës rouges,
Des poudramiskis, Pour bacawiner.

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137 This passage was recorded in Robert Kennicott’s journal in January 1862 at La Pierre’s House. Robert Kennicott, "Robert Kennicott" Transactions of the Chicago Academy of Sciences 1(1867): 133-226.
138 Barbeau, The Ermatinger Collection of Voyageur Songs (ca. 1830), 160-161.
Barbeau states this song was originally a roundelay (danse ronde). It represents the lyrics of longing found in other voyageur songs, but this time explicitly directed towards First Nations women. The embroidered shoes and porcupine quill-work famous amongst eastern woodlands and plains First Nations peoples are here identified. The “mitassës rouges,” or red leggings, were a well-known style remarked by fur traders on their journeys to the western Great Lakes. Alexander Henry (“the Elder”) applied this fashion to himself in the 1760s, when he describes leggings constructed with red trading cloth: “my legs were covered with mitasses, a kind of hose, made, as is the favorite fashion, of scarlet cloth.”\textsuperscript{140} While fur traders and voyageurs have been portrayed as adopting native dress, they may also have familiarized themselves with the languages and descriptions of First Nations' material culture through paddling songs.

The combination of French Canadian and First Nations' influences suggests paddling songs may have offered an important forum for the early exploration and expression of Métis identity. Many mixed-race sons from around the Great Lakes and Red River worked in the canoe and boat brigades of the NWC and HBC.\textsuperscript{141} Pierre Falcon, for instance, worked as a young man in a fur trade canoe and eventually became known as the "bard of the prairies".\textsuperscript{142} His most famous song \textit{la bataille des sept chênes} commemorated the Battle of Seven Oaks of 1816. Like

\begin{footnotes}
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\item Margaret MacLeod, \textit{Songs of Old Manitoba: With Airs, French and English Words, and Introductions} (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1960), 1-2.
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the *chansons d’aviron* it employs the uniform rhyme scheme of a *laisse* (aaaa).\textsuperscript{143} The Battle of Seven Oaks has been interpreted by many scholars as the foundational event of Métis national identity, and it was Falcon’s rhymed couplets that preserved and disseminated the Métis account of the incident.\textsuperscript{144} That this song conformed to the *laisse* meant that it could be employed as a paddling song. Indeed it is sometimes claimed that this song was popular in the fur trade canoes, although it does not appear in descriptions on the water until the 1860s.\textsuperscript{145} Yet a significant number of *chansons en laisse* were maintained by the Manitoba Métis in the late 20th-century, including many of the most popular paddling songs of the voyageurs.\textsuperscript{146} While music’s contribution to Métis national identity is a vast subject outside the scope of this study, it is clear that those who worked in the canoes of the fur trade were uniquely influenced by the *chansons d’aviron*, and many of these were by the first decades of the nineteenth century Métis.

Even the English-speaking fur traders were drawn to the identity-crafting potential of these songs. In their journals, fur traders described paddling songs as signalling order, regularity, and movement. Peter Grant wrote that it was “pleasing to see them. . . singing in chorus their simple melodious strains and keeping exact time with their paddles.”\textsuperscript{147} The precision of their movements in time with the song was worthy of note. For Alexander Ross, singing was synonymous with labour. He described how they “renew their labors and their chorus.”\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{145} Ens, “The Battle of Seven Oaks,” 109.
\textsuperscript{146} Lynn Whidden ed., *Métis Songs: Visiting was the Métis Way*, (Regina: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2004).
\textsuperscript{148} Ross, *The Fur Hunters of the Far West*, 293, 295.
Voyageur singing appealed to the utilitarian and economic inclinations of fur traders as an audible signal for work.

Yet fur traders also learned these songs in order to better define themselves. They constitute a part of voyageur identity that was poached by fur traders to bolster their own cultural capital. One of the best ways to analyze the culture of the elite fur traders is to examine the annual Beaver Club meetings in Montreal. The defining feature and requirement of this men's club was that it was restricted to fur traders who had overwintered in the northwest. In operation from 1785 until 1827, the opening ceremonies began with a calumet ceremony, a speech, and the “animated song of the voyageur.” James Hughes described the gentlemen arranging themselves on the floor and imitating the motions of paddling, “shouting at full voice the inspiring boating songs.” Because of their social exclusivity, Podruchny has interpreted these rituals as representing the bourgeois “distancing themselves from their workers,” casting them as “exotic curiosities,” and serving to display their own “sense of manhood” to the other Montreal merchants. The incorporation of *chansons d'aviron* rather than English “Canadian Boat Songs” indicates a culture of connesseurship that privileged authenticity among Beaver Club members. John J. Bigsby recorded with excitement attending a dinner hosted by Mr. McGillivray, where he sang “a wild *voyageur* song.” With one hand on the piano he sang *le premier jour de Mai*. Bigsby reported that Mr. McGillivray “sang it as only a true *voyageur* can


do, imitating the action of the paddle, and in their high, resounding, and yet musical tones.” The sense of authenticity was enhanced with the song’s delivery, as his “practised voice enabled him to give the various swells and falls of sounds upon the waters, driven about by the winds, dispersed and softened in the wide expanses, or brought close again to the ear by neighbouring rocks.” McGillivray finished his performance, as the voyageurs often did, “with the piercing Indian shriek.”153 The fur traders borrowed sonically and musically from voyageurs and First Nations. In performing for audiences in Montreal, fur traders adopted and adapted what they had heard in the northwest for rituals of authenticity and identity-making.

Fur traders would often have learned voyageur songs by singing along with their crews. When Benjamin Frobisher was struggling to survive in a canoe after nearly starving, Samuel Wilcocke interpreted it as a benchmark of health that he “could soon occasionally join his men in the chorus of some voyageurs boat songs.”154 Some accounts reveal insights into what these songs meant personally to fur traders. When Thomas Verchères de Boucherville set out as a clerk with the North West Company in 1803 he was only eighteen years of age. Unlike some of the clerks hired by the Montreal merchants, he understood the French Canadian language, although he expressed difficulty with the voyageur’s particular dialect and vocabulary of “jargon.” Verchères wrote that “Our guide was called Larocque; the steersman’s name was Robillard; both were famous chanteurs de voyage.”155 Verchères appreciated how they adapted their songs to the environment and conditions of travel. Their steersman "sang from morning till night with really remarkable spirit, always giving us something new and in harmony with the occasion."

According to Verchères, "He was a model voyageur in this respect, and in many others as well." Because they had "no fear of meeting an enemy," they had an uneventful voyage, and the "music kept time with the movement of the oars and we made astonishing progress."\(^{156}\)

Yet the *chansons d'aviron* would soon have an emotional impact on Verchères. He describes their influence on him while he was in the northwest.

A youth of eighteen, and never before away from the paternal home for any long journey, I understood next to nothing of the barbaric jargon of the voyageurs nor did I know anything of their habits and manner of life. Alone with them in this frail craft, only now did I begin to reflect upon the folly which had induced me to share such an adventure. The prospect of a seven years’ engagement, with no hope of drying the tears of my poor mother, who was even now grieving over my waywardness, was almost more than I could bear, and my restless fearlessness was fast giving way to the cravings of nature, when the sonorous voice of the steersman began to intone the words of the merry song “Where are we going to sleep tonight?” and I was about join in the reply “At home as ever, laridondee,” when I found myself chasing back a flood of tears. Instead of a good bed in a warm and comfortable room there was only a tent for covering and a couch upon the bare earth. But I soon mastered my grief and at the second refrain was ready to join with the others, only in place of the usual words I sang “My dear tent as ever.” By the time we arrived at Sault Ste. Marie my homesickness was beginning to abate somewhat although I was still far from cured. For two days I had been unable to eat food of any kind, and of all the maladies I have ever experienced, this was one of the most painful.

The significant lyric for Verchères was “à la maison accoutumé,” one of the prominent lines of *j’ai trop grand peur des loups*. Why it almost brought Verchères to tears is likely a nuanced matter. Perhaps his own separation from home had increased their significance, and he may have had memories of these very lyrics from his youth in the St. Lawrence. Hearing them in a new context far away from home may have increased their emotional potency. Still, it would be nearly impossible to determine this kind of impact without a written account explaining the personal significances. That a clerk like Verchères was so moved by paddling songs, describing their effects at length and singing along himself, demonstrates how music could operate across lines of language and class.

Some English fur traders undoubtedly hated the *chansons d'aviron*, or at least their continual noise during the course of travel. James Hargrave, who spent majority of his career

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 169-70.
behind a desk at York Factory, wrote of the extreme discomfort this kind of travel posed. He wrote about the "horrors" experienced in "our Style of Marching in Express Canoes:"

"To be regularly raised from bed at 1 in the morning, and have to finish their nap in the canoe lulled by the Song of the voyageur with the dash of their paddles & washed by the spray."^{157} Aboard the canoes, there was no refuge from the singing of the voyageurs.

Singing provided an audible warning of approaching brigades. First Nations people would often have first heard the fur traders coming. According to ethnomusicologist Lynn Whidden, the northern Manitoba Cree preserved “their ancestors’ descriptions of the Frenchmen singing on the way down the Nelson.”^{158} Singing signaled arrival. John Macdonell describes an arrival at Grand Portage where “The beach was covered with spectators to see us arrive, our canoe went well and the crew sung paddling songs in a vociferous manner.”^{159} Singing assumed a friendly reception. John McLean recalled the story of Fort St. John on the Peace River in 1805, when “The men, altogether unconscious of the fate that awaited them, came paddling toward the landing-place, singing a voyageur’s song, and just as the canoe touched the shore a volley of bullets was discharged at them, which silenced them for ever. They were all killed on the spot.”^{160} Singing could be interpreted as a signal of hostility that broadcast the location of the canoes, in this instance perhaps contributing to a fatal ambush.

Singing revealed the movement of canoes not only to enemies, but to the competition. In the era of intense competition before the amalgamation of 1821, the surveillance of competitors'

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^{158} Whidden, Essential Song, 13.

^{159} John MacDonell, in Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John MacDonell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faires, and Thomas Connor (Minnesota: Society of the Colonial Dames of America: The University of Minnesota Press, 1933), 92.

^{160} John McLean, Notes of a Twenty-five Year’s Service in the Hudson’s Bay Territories, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1932), 142.
activities was commonplace. Mathew Cocking, a York Factory employee and inland English trader, describes the maneuverings of himself and Bay man Robert Davey vis a vis “the Pedlars” (the Montreal traders). His journal conveys a careful observation of their movements. He describes when the competition was “taking their Canoes out of the Water,” and “when they perceived a Pedlers Canoe coming across.” These examples indicate that singing on the water could reveal information that may have been valued during the era of competition before 1821.

After the amalgamation, the canoe brigades diminished in size. R.M. Ballantyne, writing in the 1840s, projected his imagination back on the era of the North West Company:

No less than ten brigades (each numbering twenty canoes) used to pass through these scenes during the summer months. No one who has not experienced it can form an adequate idea of the thrilling effect the passing of these brigades must have had upon a stranger. I have seen four canoes sweep round a promontory suddenly, and burst upon my view; while at the same moment, the wild, romantic song of the voyageurs, as they plied their brisk paddles, struck upon my ear, and I have felt the thrilling enthusiasm caused by such a scene: what, then, must have been the feelings of those who had spent a long, dreary winter in the wild North-West, far removed from the bustle and excitement of the civilised world, when thirty or forty of these picturesque canoes burst unexpectedly upon them, half in shrouded in the spray that flew from the bright, vermilion paddles, while the men, who had overcome difficulties and dangers innumerable during a long voyage through the wilderness, urged their light craft over the troubled water with the speed of reindeer, and with joyful hearts at the happy termination of their trials and privations, sang with all the force of three hundred manly voices, one of their lively airs, which, rising and falling faintly in the distance as it was borne, first lightly on the breeze, and then more steadily as they approached, swelled out in the rich tones of many a mellow voice, and burst into a long enthusiastic shout of joy!162

After 1821, York boats increasingly replaced the canoe. The “retrenchment” reforms of the HBC in the 1820s saw more than half of the French Canadian voyageurs laid off. The total number of servants was reduced from 1983 to 827 between the years 1821 and 1825.163 While

162 Ballantyne, Hudson’s Bay or Every-day life in the Wilds of North America, 245-46.
York Boats had been introduced in the mid eighteenth century, they became the standard vessel of the HBC during the decades that followed amalgamation. While they possessed oars, there does not appear to be any references to the *chansons à rame* used in the York Boats. This was undoubtedly due in part to the fact that the HBC typically employed more English speakers, and in particular men from the Orkney Islands to guide their boats. Yet singing in general does not appear to have been institutionalized as the mechanism for synchronizing oars on the York Boats. Rather than songs, it was sometimes the sounds of the oars themselves commented on by observers. An early colonist at Red River recalled traveling through Rupert's Land and stopping for a meal, hearing “the regular sound of oars approaching from up the river, and soon the Portage la Loche brigade of four York boats in Indian file came up at great speed.” By the 1840s psalms may have been sung regularly aboard the York Boats, although they do not seem to have been transformed into a work chorus. Isobel Finlayson’s journal from 1840 provides us with a description of approaching York Boats on a voyage from York Factory to Red River: “the only sounds to be heard were the dash of the oars on the water, and the low soft voice of the steersman chanting the hundredth Psalm.” The boatmen in this instance were First Nations’ men from Norway House, which by 1840 was hosting the energetic Methodist missionary James Evans. This evidence suggests that the customary sounds of travel had undergone a radical transformation. York boats were replacing canoes, increasing numbers of non-French were paddling the vessels, and missionaries introduced a new repertoire that was used aboard the watercraft.

164 After experimenting with men from the Shetlands and Norway, the HBC hired especially from the Orkney Islands by the turn of the nineteenth century; See Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company*, 2, 84, 103.
While the institutional necessity of the *chansons d’aviron* declined after 1821, they had for more than half a century been the most ubiquitous songs of the fur trade. Singing was an essential component of canoe travel, setting the march, controlling the pace, and synchronizing the strokes. The voyageurs extended their singing over long durations by stitching together well-known segments of verse and improvising additional lines. Within the context of inescapable work songs, the Ermatinger collection indicates that there was room for creativity, improvisation, and expression of voyageur identity within the framework of well-known *chansons en laisse*. Subject to an uncertain food supply and extended periods away from loved ones, the voyageurs sang about scenarios of abundance and comfort, characterized by feasting and intimacy with women. Superficially they may have evidenced an unfailing voyageur *gaité*, but they also revealed deep anxieties and insecurities. Paddling songs expressed a unique voyageur vocational identity while having the ability to transcend divisions of language, race, and class. Their origins may have been the *chansons en laisse* brought from France in the seventeenth century, but they were adapted by voyageurs with novel extensions and new choruses. Folklorists sculpted them into sterilized yet lively relics of medieval France, while their manifestations in the fur trade canoes served as a platform for the development and expression of a distinct voyageur identity.
9 The Musical Culture of the Trading Posts

Today, the decaying trading posts across northern North America convey a profound sense of silence. In this they appear to match the prevailing image of the Canadian north, established by the Group of Seven painters and others, of a barren landscape largely devoid of human presence.¹ Yet scholarship over the past few decades indicates that music was central to the culture of the fur trade that straddled the northern regions of North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The north was anything but silent. Historians have begun to depict secular instrumental dance music as central to “fur trade society.” Ethnomusicologists have conducted fieldwork in Métis and First Nations’ communities across northern and western Canada, revealing a widespread instrumental dance culture based around the music of the violin or “fiddle.” This tradition has now been thoroughly described, while its origins have only been ascribed in general terms to the fur trade era. A close examination of the primary accounts indicates that European musical instruments were heavily trafficked by the Montreal trade especially before the amalgamation of 1821, fuelling a vigorous dance culture that operated throughout the trading posts of the northwest. This musical tradition blossomed during the period of competition, playing an important role in bridging divisions of race, class, gender, and even company allegiances. After the amalgamation of 1821, this secular dance music tradition was increasingly restricted by the reforms of the HBC and an increased missionary presence in the northwest. Yet a distinct fur trade musical culture and syncretic musical style had already taken root.

¹ John O’Brien and Peter White eds., Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 14
9.1 Historiography

Fur trade histories before the 1970s are virtually silent on the sounds and songs of the trading posts. Harold Innis traced the economic extension of mercantile operations into the northwest, emphasizing increasing transportation costs over social experiences. E.E. Rich delved deeper into the discussions of the London committee about establishing inland posts in the early 1770s, citing Ferdinand Jacobs at York Fort who suggested inland posts would serve as a place “to live in quietly and Encourage the Indians to come to Trade.” Reproduced uncritically, this depiction represented a historiographic trajectory concerned with economy and politics over society and culture. Historian Sylvia Van Kirk first shed light on the music and dance culture of the trading posts, especially the implications on gender-relations. Sylvia Van Kirk’s *Many Tender Ties* transformed the field by emphasizing the relationships that constituted the very core of “fur trade society” in the northwest. Marriages *à la façon du pays* (according to the custom of the country) were the accepted institution of union and combined smoking ceremonies with vigorous dancing. Van Kirk suggests that the “country marriages” that had developed were challenged during the period of the 1820s-1840s, when European styled wedding parties became more common in the northwest and more formal dances accompanied celebrations of union. From her close analysis of fur traders’ personal correspondences and

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6 Ibid., 115-9.
journals, Van Kirk states unequivocally that “dancing was the favourite pastime of the fur traders.” It served not only to commemorate marriages but as “a welcome break from the monotony of the daily routine;” as a result, “any excuse for having a ball was seized upon, be it a wedding or the arrival of the annual brigade.”

Revealing dance as a crucial location for socialization, and as integral to the fur trade society that connected fur traders with their servants and local First Nations, Van Kirk opened the door to further study.

Carolyn Podruchny’s comprehensive account of voyageur culture pushed the analysis even further. Interpreting dance within the rubric of “play,” Podruchny describes the “annual cycle of carnival” at trading posts as characterized by holidays, festivities, games, and dancing. According to Podruchny, these occasions generated feelings of “home away from home,” while also serving to create new experiences, memories, and a distinct fur trade society in the northwest. Holidays structured the passage of time and helped relieve the “long, dreary, and often lonely months at the interior posts.” Celebrations “helped to generate camaraderie and fellow feeling with one another, their masters, and Aboriginal peoples.” The emphasis here is not only on social boundaries being temporarily dropped, as Van Kirk suggested, but on a routine that provided opportunities for intimate relations and social bonds to be forged across divisions of race, class, and gender. Yet at the same time, the gentlemen’s “ball” held during the rendezvous at Fort William served to reinforce class divisions and hierarchy.

Canadian music history books have neglected to account for Métis and First Nations’ fiddling until very recently. The subject is absent from Timothy McGee’s The Music of Canada

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7 Ibid., 128.
9 Ibid., 174.
10 Ibid.
as well as Kallman’s *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*.\textsuperscript{11} Elaine Keillor has recently included some analysis of this tradition in her *Music in Canada*. She traces the many dancing styles that took root in Canada in the eighteen and nineteenth century. Slower styles such as minuets, with their emphasis on complex and elegant step patterns, were favoured at formal occasions of the upper classes, and served to differentiate an “assembly” from a “ball.”\textsuperscript{12} Others such as Scotch Reels, Cotillions, Quadrilles, Hornpipes, Jigs, Strathspeys and Clog Dances found themselves in fashion amongst the elite during certain periods, yet were also were enjoyed as popular dances at many levels of society. Identifying the Handkerchief Dance, Reel for Four, Drops of Brandy, and the Rabbit Dance as particularly popular amongst the Métis, Keillor writes that they learned these “from their Scottish and French forebears, sometimes with an Aboriginal touch.”\textsuperscript{13} She traces the Rabbit dance to a variation of the English “longways dance,” while the Red River jig is similar to the Quebecois *La grande gigue simple*, the Red River Jig has various suggested European origins, taken to be perhaps a variation of a European hornpipe, or variation of William Marshall’s 1781 Scottish fiddle tune *The Illumination*.\textsuperscript{14} A recent publication surveying the fiddle and accordion traditions of Canada includes a considerable amount on Métis and First Nations fiddling, with these instruments having served at times “as a common “language” binding the nation’s diverse populations.”\textsuperscript{15}

Anne Lederman was among the first in the 1980s to extensively study First Nations’

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Ibid., 74-77.
\item[14] Ibid., 77, 155.
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fiddling traditions in northern Manitoba. She conducted fieldwork in the Métis and Saulteaux communities of Camperville and Ebb and Flow respectively on the west end of Lake Winnipeg. Lederman determined that the fiddling traditions in these communities represented musical “syncretism,” blending qualities of European and First Nations’ music in form, melody, rhythm. She speculated that fiddles and fiddle music were introduced to this area by Scottish and French-Canadian fur traders in the early 1800’s, demonstrating that the repertoire, percussive “clogging,” short bow strokes, syncopated rhythmic figures, and asymmetric phrasing shared traits with Scottish and American fiddling traditions, but most of all with French Canada. Lederman compares the qualities of Anishinaabeg vocal songs as recorded by Densmore to the fiddle tunes she recorded, arguing that eight qualities of form that characterize the former are also found in the latter, particularly regarding phrasing and structure.

Craig Mishler performed similar fieldwork for Athapaskan fiddling, among the Gwich’in and Koyukon First Nations of the Yukon territories. Like Lederman, Mishler argues that this musical tradition evidences musical syncretism. He outlines a model of musical change starting with “cross-cultural diffusion (intrusion and close copying),” followed by “juxtaposition (symbiosis),” and in some cases “culminating in fusion (dynamic synthesizing and invention – a synergism).” Mishler detected three layers of European influence on the fiddling traditions of the Gwich’in, the oldest being the fur trade, followed by the gold rush and then twentieth century popular music. Within the oldest layer, Mishler discovered much of the same repertoire and many of the musical characteristics as Lederman, such as clogging and altered tunings. The

18 Ibid., 209-211.
repertoire was connected to many of the same dances that Lederman had discovered in
Manitoba, for instance the *Jig Ahtsii Ch’aadzaa* (Red River Jig), *Varandii* (Drops of Brandy),
the Rabbit, Duck, and Handkerchief Dance.\(^{20}\) Identifying strong French Canadian and Orkney
influences, Mishler traces the onset of the fiddling tradition to the pre-1867 operations of the
HBC.\(^{21}\) Some dances such as the Double Jig were particularly resonant in Gwich’in culture
because it “symbolically defined the two-couple/two-family reciprocity and sharing of space so
integral to Gwich’in social structure during the nineteenth century.”\(^{22}\)

Lynn Whidden studied the music of the Cree and Métis in northern Manitoba for
decades. With the Cree she discovered fiddle tunes played in the rhythm of hunting songs.\(^{23}\) She
describes how the tunes and dances were an “amalgam of Native and non-Native,” combining
“the British square patterns with the traditional Indian steps.”\(^{24}\) Attributing the origins of Métis
fiddling to the “Scots-Irish and French Canadian fur traders,” Whidden emphasizes that fiddle
music was “influenced by Native song. . . adopted and adapted by the Aboriginal population.”\(^{25}\)
Most of her observations are taken from Lederman, including the stylistic features of a one-beat
pulse created by short bow strokes (usually one per note), repetitions with ornamentation, and
descending melodic contours. She identifies the five main dances of the Métis as the rabbit
dance, the duck dance, drops of brandy, the quadrille and the Red River jig, emphasizing that
both the music and dance represented a synthesis of “Scottish, Irish, French and Indian

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 66-96.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 18-19.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 71-72.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 43.
Whidden provides a different account of the origins of the Red River Jig, suggesting that it emerged from the Desjarlais family and the fiddling traditions at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. This locates its origins at the hub of the fur trade in the early nineteenth century, though such attributes of origin are contested.

Scottish ethnomusicologist Frances Wilkins has recently conducted fieldwork in the fiddling traditions of the James Bay Cree. She examines how songs were "re-formed through indigenization and incorporated into Cree performative traditions," transforming European fiddle music into "a distinct James Bay fiddle repertoire and performance style." Wilkins claims the instruments and repertoire were established in Hudson Bay as early as 1749, when a dance with fiddles was observed at Moose Factory. According to the testimony of fiddler James Cheechoo, it was the children of mixed marriages that tended to pursue fiddling, providing a "cross cultural bridge" between European traders and Cree hunters. Animal movements were a key feature of many dances. To accompany the fiddle tunes, a two-sided taawahekun drum was developed as a Cree replication of the type of drum brought by the HBC. Wilkins discovered that the Cree used the fiddle to accompany hunting songs, and which may be why in Moose Factory some people “still speak of the fiddle, its music and dancing, as having spiritual connections.”

Wilkins traces dances overseas, for instance, the Oojetsumuuhugen or “kissing dance,” a variation of one previously found in northern Scotland and the Orkney Islands. Wilkins claims that dances at the trading posts involved “square dancing, step dancing, breakdowns and dances

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26 Ibid., 170.
28 Ibid., 70.
29 Ibid., 64.
30 Ibid., 65.
31 Ibid., 71.
32 Ibid., 76-77.
which appear to be specific to the James Bay Cree.” Anne Lederman has recently re-emphasized that while First Nations and Métis fiddling tunes across the north have Scottish influences, many tunes seem to have arrived via French Canada.

9.2 Music at the HBC and NWC Trading Posts

Within the documentary record, references to music, social dance, and revelry are few and far between. The first recorded bowed instrument in Hudson Bay seems to have arrived with Charles Bayley, the first governor of the HBC, who had a “violl and shell and strings” sent to him from London in 1678. The earliest known description of a dance from Hudson Bay is a 1749 account from Moose Factory. “Having three Fidlers in the Factory, viz. Geo. Millar, Willm. Murray and James Short, our people celebrated the Evening with Dancing and Signing, and all were very merry.” Rather than this example indicating that by this time the tradition was “firmly established” at the HBC posts, as Wilkins suggests, it may have been a subject for remark due to the rarity of having three fiddlers together at the same post. No similar descriptions are found in the posts around Hudson Bay in the eighteenth century. This suggests that at this early date some instruments were passing through the posts, and that instruments and instrumentalists were working within the company’s ranks. Yet there is a large gap between this

33 Ibid., 71.
and the next description of a dance at an HBC post. Lederman and Mishler cite an example from York Factory in 1843, while Wilkins cites a dance at Moose Factory in 1911.37

Yet what of the period from the 1760s – 1840s? This crucial time encompassed the conquest of New France, the expansion of the fur trade and trading posts throughout the northwest, competition, the “fur trade wars,” the amalgamation of 1821, and finally the arrival of missionaries. Indeed, in many of the primary documents, it seems as if references to dances were overtly omitted by the employees of the trading companies. Many fur traders presented an image of sober industry and piety in their journals and correspondence. Mathew Cocking on September 29th, 1776 related that he “Read Divine Service for the Day.”38 The HBC’s Joseph Hansom described the “heavey claps of Thunder till Noon,” and added that he “Read divine Service” on Sunday July 26th of 1778.39 In the daily “Journal of Occurences” maintained at each trading post, descriptions of pastimes are limited or nonexistent. In the Journal of Occurrences at York Factory from 1818 to 1819, the only entries that suggest ceremonies or rituals are Sunday’s “read prayers.”40 In the journal for Edmonton House from 1819 to 1820, the cultural activities employed on January 1st, 1819 are only suggested with the terse description that “People passed the day in Amusement. Mild Weather, Wind West.”41 The following year, the journal entry describing New Year’s Day celebrations reads “The people passed the day in Conviviality,” yet

no details are given, and there is no indication about music or dance.\textsuperscript{42} Joseph Hansom’s inventory of York Factory in 1776 reveals no indication of musical instruments.\textsuperscript{43}

Due to the busy work schedule at the posts on the Bay, some accounts indicate that there was little time for leisure pursuits, especially in the summer months. James Hargrave described in letters working at York Factory from the 1820s to the 1840s. He alleges that from five in the morning until eleven at night throughout the summer he was busily employed in duties that required “the utmost stretch of thought and exertion of body.”\textsuperscript{44} The nights provided only a few hours of rest, “all too little for repose.” During the winter, deskwork occupied the hours from daylight until bedtime. Saturday was passed in hunting or walking, and Sundays were “sacred days,” reserved for quiet contemplation and perusal of the bible. During the winter the gentlemen of the post described as enjoying quiet games and reading.\textsuperscript{45}

Our short days are whiled away in easy employment at the desk, - and we beguile the tedium of the long winter evenings by a Game at Backgammon, Chess or Whist - enlivened by a bottle of wine, or should the pensive mood prevail a well stocked library furnishes food for the mind in profusion besides which I have annually a chest full of Books Newspapers & Reviews from London, containing every thing most attractive in the literary world.

In comparison, there are many more references to musical instruments and dances in the St. Lawrence. The evidence of bowed stringed instruments there dates back further. The earliest description is of “two violins, for the first time” appearing at the wedding of the daughter of the

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 372.
\textsuperscript{44} James Hargrave, Letters from Rupert’s Land, 1826-1840: James Hargrave of the Hudson’s Bay Company, edited with intro by Helen E. Ross (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 180.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 97.
seigneur of Espinay, M. Couillard in 1645.\textsuperscript{46} The first “ball” was documented at the home of Louis Théandré Chartier de Lotbinière in 1667 by the Jesuits, who stated “may God grant that it do not become a precedent.”\textsuperscript{47} Musical instruments such as violins, viols, lutes, guitars, flutes, spinets, organs, and even harpsichords made their way to New France, with most imported into the homes of the elite. For instance, intendants Jacques Raudot and Antoine-Denis Raudot were known for concerts at their residence from 1705 to 1711. Intendant Claude-Thomas Dupuy from 1725-1728 owned two bass viols, a portable spinet, and a twelve-stop organ.\textsuperscript{48} All were not imported, as viols and violins were made in the colony, as well as possibly guitars.\textsuperscript{49} With relatively few references to musical instruments and dances beyond those of the balls held by officials, it is difficult to assess the degree to which this musical culture influenced those outside of the elite and the cities. Yet New France’s heavy reliance on the fur trade had produced long-term relationships with eastern First Nations peoples. There must have been exchanges of instruments and music. As early as 1760-1, Warren Johnson reported hearing a First Nations musician: “I heard an Indian playing many European Tunes, & pretty well on the Fidle.”\textsuperscript{50}

The fur trade that developed out of Montreal evidenced musical life that varied seasonally and differed between the large and small posts. Relatively isolated small-scale posts throughout the interior hosted small dances; these served to punctuate the long winter months with a cycle of holidays and special occasions such as weddings. These celebrations were markedly different from the grand rendezvous of the summer around the large trading posts of

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\textsuperscript{46} Reuben Gold Thwaites ed., \textit{The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791}, vol. 27 (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers), 12. \textless \url{http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations_27.html} \textgreater, accessed 15 March 2013.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., vol. 50, 14-15. \textless \url{http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations_50.html} \textgreater, accessed 15 March 2013.
\textsuperscript{48} Keillor, \textit{Music in Canada}, 63.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
the western Great Lakes. Michilimackinac and Grand Portage served as the hubs for the southwestern and northwestern trades respectively in the late eighteenth century. In 1803 the North West Company had to relocate its northwestern post on Lake Superior to Fort William, which served as the northwestern hub until the amalgamation with the HBC in 1821. Financial and logistical decisions were made during the annual meetings, requiring the presence of the partners, attracting fur traders from the furthest reaches of the continent to the western Great Lakes. This was the most important part of the North West Company’s annual business cycle, when the partners assembled for their annual business meeting. Peter Pond as early as the 1760s describes a critical mass of gentlemen at Michilimackinac, consisting of "Good Company" amusing themselves at billiards while the "vulgar" were off fighting. Pond’s description of "Dansing at Nite with Respectabel Parsons" suggests that there were social restrictions at the dances.51

“Holding a formal ball was an importation from French Canada,” Carolyn Podruchny writes, and although they occurred on holidays and frequently year round, those at “Grand Portage during the rendezvous, however, were genteel affairs for the benefit of the bourgeois.”52 Her main evidence is Daniel Harmon’s description of the dance on July 04, 1800 at Grand Portage:

the gentlemen of the place dressed, and we had a famous ball, in the dining room. For musick, we had the bag-pipe, the violin and the flute, which added much to the interest of the occasion. At the ball, there was a number of the ladies of this country; and I was surprised to find that they could conduct with so much propriety, and dance so well.53

51 Peter Pond, in Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Being the Narrative of Peter Pond and the Diaries of John MacDonell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faires, and Thomas Connor, edited by Charles M. Gates with an introduction by Grace Lee Nute (St. Paul: The University of Minnesota Press, 1933), 47.
52 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 181.
53 Daniel Williams Harmon, A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America: Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Lat., Extending from Montreal Nearly to the Pacific, a Distance of about 5,000 Miles: Including an Account of the Principal Occurrences During a Residence of Nineteen Years in Different Parts of the Country (Toronto: George N. Morang & Company, 1904), 14-17.
The "ladies of the country" were presumably the local First Nations women, who amazed Harmon by conducting themselves with "with so much propriety," demonstrating their abilities and familiarity with European dances. That the instruments were noted may have meant that such variety was a surprise and a rarity rather than the norm. Bagpipes would not have found their way into the sophisticated balls of the St. Lawrence, and it is unlikely that this event featured minuets. Nonetheless he labels it a “famous ball,” and the impressive dancing of the women indicates that their inclusion had likely been a custom in the western Great Lakes for some time. First Nations men were only permitted to dance inside the fort separately during the day. "The Natives were permitted to dance in the fort,” Harmon wrote, after which the company gave them a gift of “thirty six gallons of shrub,” after which they departed for outside of the gates.

At the large posts, fur traders could interact with each other at formal dances reminiscent of those held in the St. Lawrence or Europe. Providing a privileged and regulated social space, dances provided amusement, entertainment and especially the opportunity for networking. The exclusive “balls” were held in the largest and most important rooms of the fort, the great hall that served for both dining and after-dinner dancing. Dining rooms have been examined by scholars as cultural spaces particularly significant in distinguishing and affirming social hierarchies. Dining manners and etiquette served as displays of class and social standing. The great halls of the trading posts served the dual purposes of dining and dancing, both enacting a privileged social space that was reserved for the gentlemen and their guests. Except for special occasions, servants, voyageurs and First Nations men were not invited.

54 Ibid., 14-15.
Yet as historians have observed, there were surprisingly cordial and familiar relations between servants and masters in the companies of the fur trade. According to Podruchny, voyageur resistance often took the form of “play” or “theatre.” Voyageurs may have “crashed” the formal dances of the bourgeois, yet these were not occasions often written about. Of the nearly four decades of the North West Company’s predominance, the gathering minutes of only fourteen meetings have survived. In 1815, Simon McGillivray wrote a "Fort William Memoranda," which is probably the only extant diary recorded by a North West Company shareholder during an annual rendezvous. During this significant year, tensions with the Hudson's Bay Company and the Selkirk settlers on the crucial trading route through Red River had flared into violence, ignited by the “Pemmican Proclamation” issued by the HBC’s Miles MacDonell in 1814. Some of the Red River settlers had travelled to Fort William, and a dance was "given in the evening to the Colonists, the Ladies of the Fort & ca. and all is fun & good humour. Our officers appear in uniform for the first time and dancing kept up till daylight." The gentlemen's best dress consisted of their "uniform," displayed on this occasion triumphantly by the NWC’s gentlemen while their competitor was under "house arrest" in an adjacent bedroom. From his confinement, Miles MacDonell recorded in his own words how

there was a ball to which all the Settlers from Red R. & their women were asked. The Servants of the N.W. Co. thought that they had a good a right to be at the ball as the Settlers, went there in a body & continued to the end. There was not much drinking but they danced reels incessantly & made a dreadful noise. I could not get a wink of sleep.

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57 Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World, 134-164.
Lord Selkirk's "Plan of Fort William:"

Fig. 11. “Plan of Fort William.” Sketch drawn by Lord Selkirk, 1816. Archives of Ontario, F 481, MU3279.

Making note about the servants of the North West Company attending the dance, MacDonell could only imagine the scenes of revelry occurring on the other side of the wall. He recorded that they danced reels loudly and until daybreak. These were likely of the “Scotch Reel” tradition, with the two main types being in longways form with a partner, or a variation focusing on individual solo steps. Reels remain very popular in both French Canadian and Métis traditions. The jigs and minuets mentioned by John Lambert as equally popular with fiddlers in the St. Lawrence are here not mentioned, nor are the distinctive strathspeys and

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hornpipes that might be expected from Scottish fiddlers. French Canadian reels were classified by some English gentlemen such as Lambert as “discordant scrapings,” “rudely performed” by “vile fiddlers,” yet this was the music that seemed to be favoured by fur traders in the northwest.

In MacDonell’s description, we are told that only reels were danced. They may have been noted to demonstrate the crudeness of the NWC, or perhaps they were merely mentioned because they were predominant and prevented MacDonell from sleeping. His description emphasizes not only the type of dance, but the large number of French Canadians that attended. This he attributes to the presence of the women, although the servants of the NWC may have found their way in to the gentlemen’s dances more regularly than MacDonell supposed. McGillivray’s brief entry for the following day includes the detail that the evening passed off “jovially - songs & ca.,” despite the fact that the previous night's dance had lasted until daybreak. Perhaps it was due to their visitors, yet an inclusive and vibrant musical culture is here represented, with the NWC bourgeois dancing reels on a nightly basis, often with their servants in the ballroom of Fort William.

As the North West Company expanded its operations, they required provisioning depots to the northwest of Lake Superior. One of which was established at Lac la Pluie [Rainy Lake]. When Ross Cox passed through on his way out of the country in 1817, he encountered “a number of gentlemen, guides, interpreters, and engagés, some outward-bound, and others belonging to various departments destined for the interior.” At this hub Cox stayed for seven days waiting on an arrival from Fort William and for the men to be deployed to their various

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65 Ibid.
overwintering posts. During this time, Cox consumed luxuries such as cakes, tea, and coffee, rare delicacies appreciated after years of employment in the smaller posts of the northwest. Not only was there plentiful food, but there was music. 67

We had two excellent fiddlers; and as several of the gentlemen had wives, we got up three or four balls, in which the exhilarating amusement of the “light fantastic toe” was kept up to a late hour in the morning. We walked through no lazy minuets; we had no simpering quadrilles; no languishing half-dying waltzes; no, ours was the exercise of health; the light lively reel, or the rattling good old-fashioned country dance, in which the graceful though untutored movements of the North-West females would have put to the blush many of the more refined votaries of Terpsichore.

While labeling the dances as “balls,” Cox explicitly rejects the “lazy minuets,” “simpering quadrilles,” and “languishing half-dying waltzes,” associated with more civilized company. Insinuating these genres were effeminate and aristocratic, they were bypassed for the rigorous “exercise of health,” characterized by the “light lively reel” and the “rattling good old-fashioned country dance.” These were partner dances characterized by chain, round, and figure eight floor patterns, while the Scotch reels allowed for solo performances and opportunities to “dazzle onlookers with a number of fancy steps more or less in place.” 68 Race, class, and gender are invoked as Cox describes the “graceful though untutored movements” of the First Nations women, paying them a compliment while also suggesting that their conduct and etiquette would yet offend refined (and implicitly white) women. In this prominent forum of interaction, dancing reels brought the gentlemen, servants and First Nations women surrounding the fort together in recreation and socialization.

The musical interactions that occurred outside the gates may be more elusive in the written record, but are no less significant. Jean-Baptiste Perrault worked as a voyageur for over

68 Keillor, Music in Canada, 72.
three decades. He described the scene outside the gates of Mackinac upon his arrival in mid July 1787 as marked by “cris de joie” [cries of joy] and cannon fire, followed by the sounds of First Nations instruments: “tambours, flûtes, chichéigiven, joints aux chants de la voix, rendoient un son mélodieux…” [drums, flutes, rattles, joined in the singing voice, rendered a melodious sound…]. A group of British soldiers led by Captain John Dease and Capt. Robinson marched to the council house, “la troupe sous les armes au son du tambour” [the troops under arms to the sound of the tambour], in a military display outside of the fort’s walls. In this poly-musical soundscape, the tambours of the British beat near the drums of First Nations, while the fifes and flutes together formed a kind of rough music.

Ross Cox described the summertime gathering outside of Fort William, and was struck by the incredible diversity of those assembled.

Most part of the voyageurs, soldiers, Indians, half-breeds, &c., were encamped outside the fort in tents, leathern lodges, mat covered huts, or wigwams. On inquiry, I ascertained that the aggregate number of the persons in and about the establishment was composed of natives of the following countries: viz. England, Ireland, Scotland, United States of America, the Gold Coast of Africa, the Sandwich Islands, Bengal, Canada, with various tribes of Indians, and a mixed progeny of Creoles, or half-breeds. What a strange medley! Here were assembled, on the shores of this inland sea, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Sunworshippers, men from all parts of the world, and whose creeds were “wide as the poles asunder”…

The years after 1812 witnessed a diversification in the personnel of the fur trade, with the inclusion of Hawaiian (Sandwich) Islanders and Irish-American personnel from the American Fur Company such as Cox. Rather than segregating into groups based on ethnicity, language, or religion, the diverse parties seem to have engaged in lively interactions outside the fort. Cox describes how “immediately around the fort the scene was enlivened by animating groups of women, soldiers, voyageurs, and Indians, dancing, singing, drinking, and gambling; in their

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70 Ibid.
71 Cox, *The Columbia River*, 333.
features comprising all the shades of the human species, and in their dress, all the varied hues of the rainbow.\footnote{72} Outside of the gates, the activities of dancing, singing, and gambling provided arenas of leisure and interaction among soldiers, voyageurs, and First Nations men and women alike. We are not granted details as to what the singing and dancing comprised or which instruments were employed, yet this is one of the best first hand descriptions of the large gatherings that took place outside of the forts’ gates during the summer rendezvous.

9.3 Overwintering

Music and dance served as a bulwark against the isolation and loneliness of overwintering at interior trading posts. Smaller posts and winter camps brought the traders closer not only to First Nations bands, but to each other. Song and dance served as a survival mechanism for fur traders in combating loneliness, dislocation, and long durations of inactivity. It served as the centerpiece of the celebration of seasonal holidays, as well as weddings, birthdays and baptisms. The celebrations at the smaller posts tended to bridge rather than affirm social distinctions, as the gentlemen danced with servants and sometimes their rivals.

Overwintering was described as arduous due to climate and isolation, whether around the Great Lakes or further northwest. In a letter to John Hay of Detroit written in April 27th, 1778, John Askin writes of the importance of music and dance during the previous months at Michilimackinac: "We have passed Our Winter as agreeably as the place would admit of a Dance every week..."\footnote{73} John McDonald of Garth recalled many years later overwintering near Rocky

\footnote{72} Ibid.
Mountain House and spending "... all winter hunting, dancing, singing and gambling, night and day."  

Yet some accounts reveal more information about the deeper emotional motivations and anxieties that motivated fur traders’ decisions. Overwintering presented a particular emotional burden. Daniel Harmon wrote in his journal about his own struggles and difficulties coping in a “solitary place,” camping for weeks away from the trading post in 1803 with a small assortment of goods. He desperately missed his old acquaintances, expressing “almost regret” at becoming a fur trader and leaving them behind. He hoped to “one day enjoy, with increased satisfaction, the society of those friends, from whom I have for a season banished myself.”  

Reluctant at first, he wrote that it was preferable, “in this part of the world,” “to have a female companion, with whom [to] pass ... time more socially and agreeably, than to live a lonely life.” While Harmon did not report playing musical instruments, he did report that his companion Mr. Goedlike “plays the violin, and will occasionally cheer our spirits, with an air.” Without his presence, Harmon’s experiences would have been much different. He writes that “most of our leisure time, which is at least five sixths of the whole” was spent on “reading, and in meditating and conversing upon what we read.” Possessing a musician in the fort with an instrument was a luxury, worthy of note and well appreciated for its enlivening effect. 

So precious, it seems, was dancing, that fierce commercial rivalries were put aside routinely during the winter months. Daniel Harmon reports of a situation at Riviere à la Souris, 

74 "Autobiographical Notes of John McDonald of Garth a Partner in the North West Company 1791-1816," Library and Archives Canada, (MGI9 A17 to A20), 25.
75 Daniel Williams Harmon, A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America: Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of N. Lat., Extending from Montreal Nearly to the Pacific, a Distance of About 5,000 Miles: Including an Account of the Principal Occurrences During a Residence of Nineteen Years in Different Parts of the Country (Toronto: George N. Morang & Company, 1904), 76.
76 Ibid., 118.
77 Ibid., 94.
or Mouse-River near the Qu’appelle valley in what is now Saskatchewan, where three establishments of the North West, X.Y., and Hudson’s Bay Companies existed within close proximity. Sunday was the customary day for dancing. Harmon reported on Monday May 27th:

“Last evening, Mr. Chaboillez invited the people of the other two forts to a dance; and we had a real North West country ball.” Harmon was something of a teetotaler, more concerned with commenting on the insobriety than the specifics of the music or dance, describing how “three fourths of the people had drunk so much, as to be incapable of walking straighly, the other fourth thought it time to put an end to the ball, or rather bawl.” Dances were not restricted to Sundays. Even after such a long night, the very next morning, Harmon was invited to breakfast at the HBC house with Mr. McKay, and that evening invited “to a dance.” This one “ended more decently, than the one of the preceding evening.”

Post-masters were pressured to provide provisions for dances on special occasions and holidays. Often, they were implicitly threatened by the servants in a similar manner to the ritual “baptisms” of canoe voyages. Holidays included All Saints and St. Andrew’s Day at the beginning and end of November respectively, which were commemorated by the ceremonialism of erecting maypoles and raising flags. Sir George Simpson remarked in his first season how on “All Saints Day” “the people have made a close holyday of it.” Daniel Harmon relates how on St. Andrew’s Day in 1800 at Fort Alexandria, the servants appeared at the master’s door early in the morning, presenting him with a cross. Meanwhile “a number of others, who were at his

78 Ibid., 107-8.
door, discharged a volley or two of muskets.” With this announcement Mr. McLeod invited them into the hall where they “received a reasonable dram, after which, Mr. McLeod made them a present of a sufficiency of spirits” which were expected to last the rest of the day, to be consumed in men’s own quarters. In the evening,

they were invited to dance in the hall; and during it, they received several flagons of spirits. They behaved with considerable propriety, until about eleven o’clock, when their heads had become heated, by the great quantity of spiritous liquor which they had drunk, during the course of the day and evening. Some of them became quarrelsome, as the Canadians generally are, when intoxicated, and to high words, blows soon succeeded; and finally, two battles were fought, which put an end to this truly genteel, North Western ball.

The men pressed their superiors for the holiday, symbolically beginning with the presentation of a cross and the volley of firearms outside of the bourgeois’ room in the early morning. Mr. McLeod in this case was expected to present not only a dram and spirits to the men for the day, but invite the men to “dance in the hall” with the gentlemen, which they did with “considerable propriety” until the alcohol turned the scene unruly. With obvious tongue-in-cheek, Harmon labels the event a “truly genteel, North Western ball,” as the servants who had attended could not manage their alcohol or refrain from fighting and cursing – failing to uphold the modes of gentility. Archibald McLeod omits the account of firearms, while emphasizing the ceremonial gift of the cross, summarizing his gifts of alcohol (first in the morning and then 2 quarts of High Wines in the evening mixed with water and sugar) that were consumed by the men “as they danced, till three oClock in the morning to Frisés singing.”

The major holiday of the winter was undoubtedly the period encompassing Christmas and New Years. Tremendous effort was made to celebrate this season, often involving cooperation

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82 Ibid., 36-7.
and goodwill between rival fur traders. Overwintering at the southern end of lake Winnipeg in 1810, George Nelson arrived a couple of days before Christmas at fellow NWC partner Duncan Cameron’s fort. He was the first to arrive: "Satur 22 Sund 23rd. I arrive this evening at Fort Aleaxr [Alexander] where I find Mr. Cameron with all his family in the best of health + spirits - No one is yet arrived here except myself - therefore no news."

The following day bore witness to very bad weather, perhaps delaying the arrival of company. Two days after Christmas on Thursday December 27th 1810, “while all hands were busy dancing Mr Dougald Cameron arrived with two men Bousquet from Lac du Huard about 10’Oclock last night.” Arriving midway into the dance, the new arrivals immediately joined the celebrations. That these men would be celebrating at all is remarkable, considering Nelson’s dry comment: “no news of any Consequence unless I remark the old predominant Complaint of this Department – “Starvation.”

At trading posts throughout the prairies enormous effort was undertaken to congregate for the holidays. Archibald McLeod hosted a New Years party at Fort Alexandria in 1801, attracting traders and hunters from as far as Red River and Fort des Prairies, near modern day Winnipeg and Edmonton respectively. It is clear from McLeod’s account that the dance was extremely diverse, not only comprising servants of the company and voyageurs, but also retired voyageurs and Iroquois.

Hoole &. La Couture arrived from Swan River, &. Le Mire with them . . . people from Fort des Prairies, Red River, Swan River, Free Men, &. Iroquois, in all 38 Men including my own men I likewise gave them ½ Foot Tobacco each man, they danced & sang all day &. night, but had no quarrels, one of ye G.P. kegs of H.W. contained only 20 Qts.

84 This fort was recently re-named from Bas-de-la-Rivière. See “Duncan, Cameron,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=3288>, accessed 5 March 2013.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 McLeod, Five Fur Traders of the Northwest, 148.
The thirty-eight men listed received tobacco from McLeod and danced and sang all day and night. It is representative of the sources more generally that McLeod is more concerned with accounting for the alcohol rather than the details of the singing. Yet McLeod’s comments on both the extent of distance travelled as well as diversity of people involved strongly demonstrates the attraction of the holiday celebrations and the centrality of dance as a meaningful cross-cultural activity. This incredibly diverse and polyglot group “danced & sang all day & night,” indicating that song and dance were the main framework of interaction. Fur traders would undertake long journeys to attend such functions. To celebrate the New Year in 1810 George Nelson and Ausgé travelled to the Riviere Cassé post, passing “all the day with my reverend friend in a much more plentiful manner than I thought this poor post of riviere Cassé could afford. Everything was made agreeable to a degree.”\textsuperscript{89} The very next day, Wednesday January 2\textsuperscript{nd} Nelson and Ausgé set off at sunrise to return to their fort “pretty well loaded with goods +c. which obliges me to walk all the way home.”\textsuperscript{90}

Dancing culture was so engrained in trading post life that it occurred even when musical instruments were unavailable. George Nelson describes New Years Day in 1809: “Mr. McDonell gives a genteel feast to all hands. And for the first day of the year we have beautiful weather. We dance at night, and Ausgé sings for us as a mean substitute for the fiddle.”\textsuperscript{91} The voyageur who accompanied Nelson applied his vocal cords to the task, singing dance tunes here unnamed. They

\begin{footnotes}
\item[90] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
were perhaps the *chanson en laisse* used for dances in French Canadian communities. Similar descriptions are recorded elsewhere, for instance by Edward Ermatinger at Carlton House in 1826. “To make up a deficiency in the Musical dep’t,” Ermatinger wrote, “Madamne Husprenant and G. Poivez were kind enough to write their voice, which the latter accompanied by beating on a Tin Pan, and the dancing went on until a late hour.”

Archibald McLeod describes the dance held the day after Easter Sunday on April 6th 1801. It is unclear if the dance was to commemorate the holiday or the fact that one of the men from the Shell River Fort brought his violin. Yet the men’s condition was unenviable: “Cold &. blowing hard, the people are some cutting fire wood others hauling, some for Gum &. others working at the Batteau. Several of the people are ill with severe Colds. One of the Shell river men having brought his Violin with him the people danced all night.” While the accounts of dances indicate finishing at a very late hour or even daybreak, occasionally the exhaustion of the men quickly overcame them and they chose instead to sleep. George Nelson’s entry for June 18th 1808 reveals his frustration with the men’s dancing, which continued despite their tight schedule.

Satur 18th. June 1808. The weather is such as to entirely prevent the departure of the Gentlemen: the wind was very high; + many heavy showers. -- We idled away our time uselessly though we had a great necessity of making good use of it. We had a dance last night, but soon left it over as all hands were tired + very sleepy.

No matter the exhaustion of the crews, special efforts were made to hold dances for departing brigades the night before their departure, or hosting newcomers on the night of their arrival. The aborted dance referenced above was held to honour the “departure of the Gentlemen.” At other times dances ended at a more moderate hour, allowing the men time to rest.

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94 McLeod, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 170.
before an early departure. At the arrival of an unnamed NWC partner at Fort Dunvegan in 1806, "the Men of Mr. McLeod's Canoe began to drink this evening, and danced till 10 O'clock."  

Nelson reports on a Sunday in 1808, when “At about 10 A.M. M Donald [M Donell?] sets off after having spent the night with us dancing.”

The North West Company inherited the French regime's practice of marrying in to First Nations communities, which was generally encouraged as part of official company policy. This stood in contrast with the Hudson’s Bay Company, who early on implemented regulations against intermarriages. Yet such prohibitions were deemed unrealistic by many inland traders. Some who were at first reluctant to take wives such as George Nelson and Daniel Harmon eventually did so anyways. Nelson’s journal entry for this momentous occasion is rather brief, but suggests that the marriage was reason enough for a dance: "A ball was given on the occasion by W. C. (W. Cameron).” Nelson insinuates in his journals that, from his perspective, wedding ceremonies were often celebrated to excess in the northwest. He mentions that Mr. Seraphin had at least three dances to celebrate his wedding. Perhaps the third was due to the availability of musical instruments: “We were obliged to leave off and prepare for a dance (which is now the third) in honour to Mr. Seraphins wedding. Mr M Donald played the violin for us + Mr. Seraphin played the Flute alternately.”

The First Nations peoples who frequented the trading posts had plenty of opportunities to observe European customs of dance. While few accounts convey their impressions, some fur

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98 Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 29; Brown, Strangers in Blood, 51-110.
traders observed how the Europeans seemed to influence First Nations’ musical culture. It was the perceptive eyes and ears of George Nelson that provides the evidence. While serving his first years in the fur trade, Nelson describes how he encountered local Anishinaabeg who “frequently gave feasts, & 2 or 3 dances. I was much surprised at this last, seeing it was near an imitation of us white people.”101 This passage does not provide enough detail to determine which styles were being imitated. That Nelson’s Anishinaabeg hosts were imitating the dances of white people during the period from 1802 to 1804 indicates that the cross-cultural influences of dance had already a long history, introduced through the encounters of the fur trade.

Some fur traders gained reputations as exceptional musicians. An early long-term overwintering partner of the NWC in the Athabasca region, Willard-Ferdinand Wentzel, gained a reputation as a talented violinist. He had lived for twenty years in the north and subarctic, and his knowledge of First Nations’ manners, customs, and language led him to consult with John Franklin’s 1820s northern expedition. Few of his recommendations or warnings were heeded on the ensuing disastrous journey. Wentzel’s journal and letters reveal anguish at his perceived banishment from civilization. Suffering emotional privations and starvation during his long tenure in the most distant posts of the northwest, in his letter to McKenzie on April 30th 1811, he writes: “I am quite alone at the Fort, not even an animal to keep me company. Such are the vicissitudes of fickle fortune! a place where I had never great cause to complain! But, to use an Indian phrase, Cooloo,* I am still alive, why should I complain.”102 In the next statement

Wentzel hints that his main coping mechanism was music, and he was desperate for new tunes to play on his fiddle.\textsuperscript{103}

Could I persuade myself that my little friend Johnny* would recollect me, I should request a few new tunes of him for which I would make any return in my power. I have some music to which he is welcome by only sending a note, for I have entirely given up the flute and only scrape, now and then, on the fiddle. I beg you will please remember me to him . . .

John Franklin was hosted by Wentzel around 1820, describing him as “an excellent musician!”\textsuperscript{104}

When George Simpson arrived from London as new governor of the HBC he faced the task of appraising the methods of his rivals. He would be forced to adapt to the customs of the Montreal fur trade, including supporting its dance culture, something he felt was an extraordinary encumbrance on business. In 1820 Simpson engaged canoemen around Montreal, including Iroquois guides. His journal entry for August 1820 reveals his reservations about engaging a few men, writing that “Their terms are most extravagant.” Yet adapting quickly (or pressed) into the customs of the trade, Simpson records how he “Gave the people a dance in the Evening.”\textsuperscript{105} “Giving a dance” can be seen throughout Simpson’s journal as a stratagem employed at strategic moments. It could divert the men from their dissatisfaction and hunger, foster their enlistment in new contracts of employment, or be part of the ploy to sell them liquor at inflated prices. For instance, on Sunday October 1\textsuperscript{st}, Simpson noted in his journal “our provisions are very scarce,” and perhaps for this reason he “Gave the people a dance in the evening.”\textsuperscript{106} Yet this tactic had unforeseen consequences, with Simpson recording the next day

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 107-108.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 71-2.
“The debauch of last night has rendered some of the men unfit for service to day.”\textsuperscript{107} This encumbrance on productivity seems to have been counterbalanced, from Simpson’s calculating perspective, by his strategy regarding liquor sales. He stated that if they had “a good stock of spirits it would work down their extravagant wages, the small quantity sold last night amounts to £43”\textsuperscript{108}

Simpson wrote candidly about promising his men a dram and dance in order to convince them to do things they were not otherwise inclined to do. On October 28\textsuperscript{th} of 1820, with their stock of provisions reduced to four bags of flour, Simpson wrote that “if the Lake does not soon set fast, I fear we shall be exposed to serious privations.”\textsuperscript{109} Yet in his efforts to better compete with the NWC, Simpson determined that a new structure had to be constructed on a rock outcropping near the water behind their fort. He wrote that “it is a difficult undertaking for the people in their present half famished state, I however pointed out the necessity of the measure, and promised them a Dance when finished if they would commence operations tomorrow, (Sunday) which after a dram they cheerfully agreed to do.”\textsuperscript{110} Promising a dance and a shot of alcohol served to entice his malnourished servants to continue working. Perhaps even more valuable during the era of competition were dances’ ability to generate gossip and information, as well as provide a forum for the easy re-engagement of servants. Simpson wrote to another trader: “Pray gain all the information you can about the movements of the enemy, and what their strength, intentions and prospects are. If it is absolutely necessary to be at the expense of giving the people a dance & drink, it may be a good opportunity of re-engaging them.” The costs associated with hosting dances was deemed worthy, as there was always the danger that the most

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 72-3.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
skilled and valuable employees could be lured by rival companies. Alcohol lowered inhibitions, with men more liable to reveal sensitive information and re-engage.

Simpson relates how his men awakened him on New Years with the customary ritual. Being in a dangerous and volatile confrontation with the NWC and William McGillivray, he needed the full allegiance and commitment of his men. He obliged with the customs of the day, recording the proceedings in his journal:

The Festivities of the New Year commenced at four O’Clock this morning when the people honoured me with a salute of Fire arms, and in half an hour afterwards the whole Inmates of our Garrison assembled in the hall dressed out in their best clothes, and were regaled in a suitable manner with a few flaggon’s Rum and some Cakes; a full allowance of Buffaloe meat was served out to them and pint of Spirits for each man; the Women were also entertained to the utmost of our ability. In the course of the day St. Picquè & Rondeau contrary to Mr. Keith’s instructions paid us a visit . . . the people have been enjoying themselves with a dance and seem much gratified by the attentions paid them.111

The following day Simpson reports with evident frustration that “our people have been in a state of intoxication all day and very troublesome.” It was necessary to “humour them at present,” he wrote, “as I am anxious to renew their engagements without delay.” While productivity may have declined due to the festivities, it was necessary for Simpson to conform to the customs of the trade in order to secure the men’s allegiance. From a business viewpoint, alcohol worked for the benefit and detriment of the company, as it contributed to inefficiency but could be used to recuperate servant’s wages. As the supply of rum depleted, Simpson expressed regret at the lost profits, as the servants seemed “inclined to part with a considerable proportion of their superfluous money” at dances on holidays.112 Simpson was willing to host, but concerns of profit were from the outset on the forefront of his mind.

111 Ibid., 204-5.
112 Ibid., 205.
9.4 Instruments

Musical instruments made their way to the western posts primarily as the personal belongings of fur traders, rather than as possessions of the company’s servants or shipped in the company’s inventories. In the 1770s, Todd & McGill, one of the early Montreal partnerships that would be subsumed into the North West Company, trafficked violins on special order. In a letter from Michilimackinac dated June 22nd 1778, the trader John Askin complained that the newly arrived shipment from Montreal had omitted the violins he had ordered:

The things from England are really well choose & please me much, however a fiddle which I had mentioned in that memoir is left out, & tho' such an omission can be of no consequence to persons who can supply the want at the next Shop, it is so different here, that I would not for ten Guineas it had not come, please purchase one for me at Montreal without fail let the price be about £6 Halifax, I sent you a memord. this Spring in which a fiddle was mentioned, that one is also to come, its for an other person, please do not forget a quantity of strings with the fiddles.¹¹³

Elaine Keillor’s *Music in Canada* describes how in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the French imported and traded large numbers of *bombardes* (small double-reed woodwinds) with First Nations peoples through the fur trade.¹¹⁴ The archaeological record suggests that jaw harps, known at the time as “Jew’s Harps,” were even more durable and prolifically traded than the *bombard*. These have been frequently uncovered at excavation sites around the trading posts. A jaw harp is oldest instrument to be excavated near Fort Edmonton at the Rossdale site, and is described in the excavation summary as the “first evidence of European recreational activities on the site during fur trade times.”¹¹⁵

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¹¹⁵ “Summary of Excavation Block 00-07,” Royal Alberta Museum, (Borden: F;Pi-63; Catalogue #2127).
Incredibly popular folk instruments throughout Europe and the world, the industrial revolution dramatically increased the manufacture of jaw harps. A deserter from the Prussian army in the late eighteenth century brought German Saxon manufacturing techniques to England, establishing the Troman firm, and helping Birmingham England emerge as the top world producer of these instruments in the nineteenth century. \(^{116}\) Rarely described by fur traders in their accounts, and seemingly unassociated with the gentlemen’s dancing traditions, jaw harps were relegated for trade with servants and First Nations peoples. John Howison described his journey beyond Montreal towards the Great Lakes, where he encountered an unnamed Iroquois man who had fought with the British in the war of 1812. This man first got their attention with “war whoops,” performed “in great style.” Having gained their attention, the man “seemed anxious to exert his powers still further, and accordingly took two Jews harps from a little bag,

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playing upon each alternately.”117 This passage indicates that jaw harps were added to the personal possessions of some First Nations and employed in cross-cultural encounters.

To get a sense of distribution and pricing of these instruments, the best sources available are the comprehensive inventory lists available from the NWC’s final two years before amalgamation with the HBC. They provide the most complete snapshot of instrument prices and distributions under the Montreal trade. Some entries list iron and brass harps separately. The Lake of Two Mountains inventory lists “2 Gross” (288) Iron Jew’s Harps worth 13s 6p and four dozen (48) Brass Jew’s Harps worth 6s.118 The unit price of the Iron Harps in this district works out to be 0.56 p while the brass harps were nearly triple that value, at 1.5 p each. Most of the inventories do not indicate which kind of harp is for sale, although the standard variety seems to be iron. At Fort William, Lake Winnipeg and Athabasca, the harps are valued at 1.16 and 1.17p each, more than twice their value at Lake of Two Mountains near Montreal. The relatively low Columbia price of 1p may be due to the large numbers in that inventory.

Table 5. Jaw harps for sale, 1821.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Number of harps:</th>
<th>Total value: (£)</th>
<th>Price per unit: (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake of Two Mountains119</td>
<td>iron: 288 (24 doz) brass: 48 (4 doz)</td>
<td>iron: “/13/6” brass: “/6/”</td>
<td>iron: “/”/0.56 brass: “/”/1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia Dept.120</td>
<td>323 (26 11/12 doz)</td>
<td>1/6/11</td>
<td>“/”/1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

118 “Lake 2 Mountains Inv. Cont.,” *North West Company Account Book 1821*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M12 (F4 54), 132.
119 “Lake 2 Mountains Inv. Cont.,” *North West Company Account Book 1821*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M12 (F4 54), 132.
120 “Columbia River Inventory Continued,” *North West Company Account Book 1821*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M12 (F4 54), 12.
“Violin” or “Fiddle” strings are listed in a few inventories of the North West Company during the years 1820 – 1821. There was a large supply at Fort William, from where they would have resupplied the further posts.

Table 6. Violin strings for sale, 1820-1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of sets</th>
<th>Total value (£)</th>
<th>Price per set (£)</th>
<th>Price per string (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort William (1820)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3/11/6</td>
<td>“/2/2”</td>
<td>“/”/6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 1/2</td>
<td>5/2/”</td>
<td>“/4/”</td>
<td>“/”/6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4/”/”</td>
<td>“/1/”</td>
<td>“/”/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athabasca (1820)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“/4/4”</td>
<td>“/2/2”</td>
<td>“/”/6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“/6/6”</td>
<td>“/2/2”</td>
<td>“/”/6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The prices for violin strings in 1820 at Fort William varied from 6.5 p to 1s per string, indicating that two differently priced strings seem to have been available. Their fluctuation in price is demonstrated the following year when listed at Fort William for 3p. In the Athabasca department, the price per string remained steady at 6.5p. The class implication of musical materials becomes apparent when considering the average price of a single violin string was around 6p, while a jaw harp was around 1p. Jaw harps would have been readily available and affordable, while violin strings were rarer and might have proven prohibitively expensive to almost everyone except the partners and clerks.

Two violins turn up in the NWC inventories, suggesting that the company traded them in limited numbers. One is listed for one pound at the English River (or Churchill River), while the other is listed together with a bow for two pounds in the Columbia department. Two tambourines are listed at the Lake of Two Mountains post in 1821 for 1s apiece.

The most comprehensive account of musical materials held at any particular trading post before 1840 is Edward Ermatinger’s list of instruments and sheet music contained inside a “parcel” at Fort Vancouver in 1826. It lists a duet for the flute, six duets for the violin, one duet

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129 “Athabasca Inventory Continued,” *North West Company Account Book 1820-1821*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M9 (F4 39), 50.
130 “Amount Bt Forw,” *North West Company Account Book 1820*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M6, (F4 30), 261.
132 “Columbia Inventory Cont,” *North West Company Account Book 1821*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M12 (F4 54), 50.
133 “Amount Brot Forw,” *North West Company Account Book 1821*, HBCA, Microfilm Reel 5M12, (F4 54), 133.
of an overture, an instruction books for the violin, and two songbooks of “Scotch Reels.” There was also a bugle and a violin bow.\textsuperscript{134}

After the amalgamation of 1821, violins and musical supplies continued to enter the northwest largely through the personal arrangements of fur traders. In the Memorandum Book of Edward Ermatinger from 1821-2 he reminds himself to “send home for . . goulding & co. Pegs & violin.”\textsuperscript{135} In his book “Memorandums for 1823,” Ermatinger makes more notes to “send home” for musical instruments, this time for “a Fife and a Third Flute or G. Flute.”\textsuperscript{136} By 1826 Ermatinger seems to have been communicating with his brother Francis and assisting other fur traders order musical supplies from Montreal. He made a note “To write my Brother about Mr. McLeads [McLeans?] Violin.”\textsuperscript{137} Edward continued supplying musical materials into the fur trade networks after he retired in 1828. The following year in 1829 Thomas Dears wrote to Edward from Thompsons River, indicating that he would like to “make a small purchase of some of your Music.”\textsuperscript{138} Writing from New Caledonia in 1830, John Tod mentions receiving some of Edwards’ sheet music from his brother Francis.\textsuperscript{139} Ermatinger ordered flute springs for Tod, in addition to violin strings, pegs and bridges.\textsuperscript{140} It is clear that although the trading companies supplied some musical materials, perhaps more significant were these informal networks of acquisition, arranged between fur traders and merchants in the St. Lawrence.

\textsuperscript{134} This list includes “1 Duet for two Flutes – Laubersolerz, 6 Duet for violins Viotte, 1 Duet Overture to Lodoiska, 1 Instruction for Violin, 2 Old Books Scotch Reels- Sundry Sheets Psalms, my air Kind Deaice, 1 Small Bugle no mouth piece . . . 1 violin bow.” Edward Ermatinger, “Memoranda 1826,” Library and Archives Canada, (MGI9, A2), 29-30.
\textsuperscript{135} Edward Ermatinger, “1821/1822 Memorandum Book,” Library and Archives Canada, (MGI9, A2), 3.
\textsuperscript{136} Edward Ermatinger, “ 1823 Memoranda for 1823,” Library and Archives Canada, (MGI9, A2), 1.
\textsuperscript{137} Edward Ermatinger, “Memoranda 1826,” Library and Archives Canada, (MGI9, A2), 1.
The enormous expense and difficulty in obtaining violins and parts inspired handicraft production at the trading posts. Some fur traders such as John Dease made their own, carving them from wood surrounding their forts. Writing from Connoley’s Lake in 1833, Thomas Dears describes singing with his three-year-old daughter, who he accompanies on the “violin I have made.” First Nations’ men associated with the trading posts may also have been among the first to carve their own violins in the northwest. At the Christmas ball at York Factory in 1843, Ballantyne described “a young good-looking Indian, with a fiddle of his own making beside him.” Fiddlers were in demand at the trading posts of the northwest not only because of the popularity of the violin in this period as a folk-instrument, but because of the scarcity of instruments more generally in the northwest. When Paul Kane was at Fort Edmonton in 1847-8 there was only one fiddler: “The sole musician of the establishment, a fiddler, is now in great requisition amongst the French part of the inmates, who give full vent to their national vivacity.”

The evidence of sheet music is extremely fragmentary. Fur traders seem to have kept music in their personal possessions just as they did their instruments. While the larger trading posts developed libraries, most of their contents before the 1840s are unknown. In the lists of books that are extant, music books are absent. Rather it is only in the personal correspondences that evidence exists. John Askin in the 1770s reveals that he was not only

143 Paul Kane, Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America: From Canada to Vancouver’s Island and Oregon Through the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Territory and Back Again (Toronto: The Radisson Society of Canada Limited, 1925), 261.
purchasing violins from Montreal, but shipping printed music around the western Great Lakes. In 1778 he mentioned in a letter to Sampson Fleming of Detroit, “many thanks for your Country Dance Book.” In the 1810s Ross Cox revealed in his memoir that his NWC brigade travelled with a small library, including a book of hymns and two unnamed song-books.

Edward Ermatinger’s private notebooks again shed light on this subject and provide further evidence of his active role trafficking in musical materials, including sheet music. In the Memorandum Book from 1821-2 he writes to “Send home for M.R. King’s general treatises on Music & c.” An important part of his order for flutes and fifes in 1823 were “Instruction Books for the Flutes.” These books of sheet music came at a considerable cost. “Music Book Borin” is listed at four shillings. In Ermatinger’s order from 1829 he lists “the Paid Dance for Music” as costing twelve shillings, while “5th music 4 Songs” is listed for six shillings.

Some sheet music arrived directly from Europe. In the fall of 1819 a ship of Swiss and German immigrants landed at York Factory en route to the Red River Settlement. Though he had been working with the HBC since 1811, this event was noteworthy for John Tod. It produced a musical encounter and memorable dance on the “rough hewn floor of that old Colony Store,” which he recalled in vivid detail decades later.

It was the first time in my life that I had witnessed a Waltz dance - what with the heart stirring strains of Your violin [Edward Ermatinger] - the agile, but graceful movements of the Swiss peasant girls, in their neat modest dresses, and the beautiful time they all Kept to Your music, on the rough hewn floor of that old Colony Store - My whole Soul became fascinated in the novelty of the Scene - novel it certainly was to me,

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146 Cox, The Columbia River, 222-3.
147 Edward Ermatinger, ““Memorandums for 1823,” Library and Archives Canada, (MGI9, A2), 1.
148 The figure in the column for pence is unclear: it could be a 6 or 5 or 0, although 0 was customarily marked as “.
who had never seen such a sight before - in all this excess of admiration however, young as i was, mind you there was nothing approaching in the slightest degree to any thing iminimal to a virtuous feeling –

it is unclear if john tod was more overwhelmed with ermatinger’s waltz on the violin, the swiss girls, or the combination of their movements with the music. an unusual event at york factory, this occasion arose spontaneously with the arrival of the red river colonists and the presence at the fort of a young edward ermatinger, who was an avid musician and violinist. rather than a proper ball room, the floor of the store sufficed, while the next day ermatinger, tod and the german father played music together in the old guard room. the old gentleman would leave a bound collection of waltzes for the fur traders, which influenced musical life in the northwest over the following decades: 152

undoubtedly for the first time in the historical records of the eternally frozen regions of h bay, that had appeared on its bleak, ice-bound coast - on the evening succeeding that of the dance, having discover'd that the father of the amiable louisa whom probably you still remember, was an amateur on the flute, we all three played together in the old guard room, and at parting for the night the old gentleman presented me with a half bound music book, containing a large collection of german waltzes - nearly one third of the said book however, had been merely cross lined - a considerable part of which you, afterwards, filled up with your own compositions, and copies from other music, that had been sent to you by your own father - amongst the former is the much admired "h bay march." these, and many others, in your own hand writing, have all been sacredly preserved, and in my possession to this day, and, should my successors obey my injunctions, will be found in my coffin when dead.

this is the first known description of the waltz in rupert’s land, occurring at york factory in 1819. it arose from the unusual circumstances of arriving colonists, providing a dramatic break from the monotony of trading post life. the swiss and german immigrants had not only provided partners for dancing and inspiration for the occasion, but a direct transmission of the popular dance form that had gained popularity in europe since the 1770s, and had originated with the landler of southern germany, austria, and the alpine regions. 153 the german immigrants introduced through their song-book the waltz, moving as it did through

152 ibid.
various trading posts in the possession of first Edward Ermatinger and then John Tod. As it moved around the Northern Department to New Caledonia, its pages accumulated more musical notations and compositions including Edward Ermatinger’s own Hudson Bay Company March. It is unfortunately absent from the Tod family fonds at the Archives of British Columbia. Perhaps, as according to his wishes, John Tod was indeed buried with it when he died in 1882.

9.5 “Used to be Considered no Crime”

After the amalgamation of 1821, there is evidence that the customs and musical culture of the fur trade faced increasing adversity. The occasions for instrumental dance music were increasingly restricted. A dual-pronged assault was led by economically and morally driven reforms. From the 1820s to 1840s there was an increasing intolerance towards secular music and dance in the northwest. Despite the mounting pressure, the personal writings of fur traders reveal that music continued to play a role after 1821, especially during winter holidays and in smaller and more informal settings. Many fur traders continued to carry their personal instruments with them between the trading posts, providing recreation during the long and isolating winters.

For instance, John Tod’s letters to Ermatinger reveal that he kept his flute and sheet music close when travelling and working at various posts. Yet solitary music was not enough:

155 Tod carefully guarded the music book: “Sacredly preserved, and in my possession to this day, and, should my successors obey my injunctions, will be found in my coffin when dead.” John Tod, “John Tod to Edward Ermatinger,” Vancouver Island 21 July 1865, in “Ermatinger, Edward. Papers of Edward Ermatinger,” British Columbia Archives, (A-B-40-Er62.3.), 125.
he sought connection, writing fondly of making music with a “fellow labourer in the vineyard” at McLeods Lake in 1826.

If I am condemned to lead a few more Years of solitude here I may probably commence practicing again on the violin - my fellow labourer in the vineyard is possessed of an excellent ear for music & never fails to accompany me on the Flute with her voice when I take up the instrument - I shall not trouble You with any order at this time.\textsuperscript{157}

That an unnamed Sekani woman provided the musical accompaniment for Tod is not surprising considering the musical interactions that took place at the trading posts. Yet this relationship appears to have held a special significance for Tod. When Edward replied to Tod’s letter and further inquired “what is become of the girl who used to sing at McLeods Lake,” Tod responded that “in plain language she still continues the only companion of my solitude - without her, or some other substitute, life, in such a wretched place as this, would be altogether insupportable.”\textsuperscript{158}

One of the major changes after the amalgamation of the 1820s is that dances tended to be held on a smaller scale. For instance, Ballantyne reported that when he visited Norway House in the 1840s, it was the clerk’s house that was customarily taken over by music. Describing “many a happy hour” spent on the clerk’s bed’s listening to songs and stories, this house had scared away those who would “fret at its noisy occupants,” while “the loud laugh, uproarious song, and sound of the screeching flute or scraping fiddle, issued from the open doors and windows.”\textsuperscript{159}

John Tod emphasized that it was a small room at Oxford House that sounded most excellent with

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\textsuperscript{159} Robert Ballantyne, \textit{Hudson’s Bay or Every-day Life in the Wilds of North America: During Six Years’ Residence in the Territories of the Honourable Hudson’s Bay Company} (1848; repr. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972), 125.
the flute and violin, rather than the main hall: “one of the rooms here is so admirably adapted for
the sound of a violin and Flute, (both on which I still continue to make a noise occasionally) that
I have frequently been tempted to make use of them in course of this last winter.”160

Large dances still occurred on special occasions and holidays. Although Fort William’s
importance declined dramatically after 1821, it remained an important fort and was visited by fur
trader Robert Ballantyne in the 1840s. The post-master “turned out to be an impressive player of
Scottish reels on the violin.”161 Mentioning that both his companion and the post-master were
“genuine Highlanders,” Ballantyne recognized the music of the incredibly influential eighteenth
century Scottish fiddler Niel Gow, identifying some of his distinctive melodic ornaments, such
as trills, as well as the quick dance styles of the reel and strathspey. Yet remarkably, the post-
master is described as self-taught, presumably having spent much of his leisure time at the forts
practicing.

This post-master turned out to be a first-rate player of Scottish reels on the violin. He was self-taught, and
true the sweetness and precision with which he played every note and trill of the rapid reel and strathspey,
would have made Niel Gow himself envious. So beautiful and inspiring were they, that Mr B--- and our
host, who were both genuine Highlanders, jumped simultaneously from their seats, in an ecstasy of
enthusiasm, and danced to the lively music till the very walls shook, much to the amusement of the two
ladies, who having been both born in Canada, could not so well appreciate the music. Indeed, the musician
himself looked a little astonished, being quite ignorant of the endearing recollections and associations
recalled to the memory of the two Highlanders by the rapid notes of his violin.

Due to the powerful effect of the music and its emotional associations for the
Highlanders, more tunes were demanded, and the musician had no choice but to continue.
Women as dancing partners were considered extremely desirable when dancing reels, and the
gentlemen “sent over to the men’s houses” for the French Canadian wife of Pierre Lattinville and

161 Ballantyne, Hudson’s Bay or Every-Day life in the Wilds of North America, 253-4.
her two daughters, who were known to reside close-by.\textsuperscript{162} They arrived shortly at the ball room, “and after much coyness, blushing, and hesitation, at last stood up, and under the inspiring influence of the violin, we

\begin{quote}
Danced till we were like to fa’
The reel o’Tullochgorum!”
\end{quote}

And did not cease till the lateness of the hour, and the exhaustion of our musician, compelled us to give in.”\textsuperscript{163} Musically talented post-masters became something of a legend in the north. When John Henry Lefroy set out on his journey to find the Magnetic North in 1843, he reported in a letter from Fort Simpson on Mackenzie River that in the north, music “is rather a favourite pursuit: but still less so than I should have expected.”\textsuperscript{164} In a subsequent letter he is more generous, writing that “Mr. McLean is a good flute player.” Due to the extreme isolation he had endured for years “he had need of some resource.” “There have been and are,” Lefroy reported, “some excellent and even first rate musicians in the country.”\textsuperscript{165} The fur trade institutionalized a musical presence in the north that continued in the 1840s.

Yet counterveiling forces were introduced in the 1820s that operated to suppress the musical and dancing traditions of the trading posts. When George Simpson became Governor of an amalgamated company in 1821, he worked to reduce wasteful spending and unnecessary customs through a restructuring program known as “retrenchment.”\textsuperscript{166} Not only did he lay-off

\begin{footnotes}
\item[162] Ibid, 254.
\item[163] Ibid.
\item[165] Ibid., 115.
\end{footnotes}
much of the French Canadian and Métis workforce,\textsuperscript{167} he specifically took a series of steps to limit what he considered the excessive expenditures associated with dances. Jennifer Brown examined the Council Minutes of the HBC from 1822 – 1824 which laid the ground work for “trimming personnel rolls” and regulated the retirement of servants and families. The council insisted with “vigour” that “education and religion be integrated into post family life,” not only for its own sake but because trading posts were increasingly being visited by members of the clergy.\textsuperscript{168} In his journal from 1824-5, Simpson complains that all the gentlemen, in passing Norway and Cumberland House, were in the habit of “indulging themselves in taking a few holydays at the Establishments.”\textsuperscript{169} He condemns the “heavy expence” that attended these amusements, and laments the prolonged work stoppages that ensued. Precious hours were wasted and “extra provisions are consumed” when “Balls are given and the business frequently neglected.”\textsuperscript{170}

Norway House at the north end of Lake Winnipeg became a depot and somewhat similar to the old hubs on the western Great Lakes, serving as a rendezvous during the summer months. Yet once the customary fur trade dances began transpiring, Norway House was aggressively targeted by Simpson. “The Establishment of Norway House alone has occasioned more expence,” Simpson wrote, “in this way since the Coalition than the profits of its Trade would defray.”\textsuperscript{171} It was not just the material cost, but the precious travel time that concerned Simpson. He oversaw the implementation of policies restricting dances. In a letter from Simpson to John

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{168} Brown, 	extit{Strangers in Blood}, 202-203.  
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
McLeod on July 7th, 1826, he affirmed that “no supplies of any kind be delivered” except from
the orders of Mr. McTavish in an attempt to address the “irregularity in the affairs” that had
occurred “for several years past.” Simpson re-iterated that although it now served as a depot, “it
is perfectly understood that none of the expenses usually connected with Depot such as public
messes, balls, etc, etc. are to be incurred there and that Craft make no longer stay there than
sufficient to arrange their baggage or cargoes.” 172

The council minutes of the Northern Department in 1825 demonstrate a move towards
policies that promoted Christianity and “proper” moral conduct by servants and First Nations
peoples involved in the fur trade. Minute 107 concerns goods allotted to First Nations children
who had left their parents to join the HBC’s Missionary Society school. Minute 108 commits
more generally to invoke positive values in First Nations peoples, with “industry encouraged,
vice repressed, and morality inculcated. Spirituous Liquors gradually discontinued.” 173 The final
ten minutes were designed to inculcate “religious improvement” throughout Rupert’s Land,
including provisions stating “Immoral habits checked – opposites encouraged,” and a re-
affirmation that “divine service [is] to be read Sundays.” 174

The HBC after 1821 reduced the number of dances held at interior posts for the arrivals
and departures of boats, and curtailed celebrations on holidays. Writing from Fort Garry in 1827,
J.G. McTavish wrote that Christmas celebrations were considerably restrained compared to the
previous era:

the days are gone by when such assemblies were enlivened by the song and the dance, the soul drenched in
wine, or the carcass snugly consigned to oblivion below the board. Wonderful indeed are the conquests of
psalm singing and amazing its power in giving an edge to the blunted conscience.

172 “Geo Simpson to John McLeod,” York Factory July 7th 1826, in John McLeod Sr, “Journals and Correspondence
173 “Minutes of Council of Northern Department, 1825,” in John McLeod Sr, “Journals and Correspondence of John
174 Ibid., 37-8.
Evangelical zeal transformed the celebrations from their previous character. With evident sarcasm, McTavish describes the zealous “dotards” who celebrated Christmas with him at Fort Garry that year who “will tell you gravely that the high-way to hell runs through the mazes of a Highland Reel.”\textsuperscript{175} Indicative of the reaction against dances and the perceived corrupting effects of music, reels were identified specifically as dangerous for the soul. The vigorous dances that had served to unite fur traders and at times to bridge divisions of race, class, and gender, were now being actively censured.

In John Tod’s very first letter to Edward Ermatinger after the latter had retired from the service in 1828, he complained about the changes being wrought on the culture of the fur trade. In particular he bemoaned the restrictions placed on music. He reminisced on younger days with Ermatinger, “when we could indulge in our favourite and delightful amusement - music - and when the pleasing sound of a Violin & Flute used to be considered no crime nor looked upon with digree of severity we have sometimes witness'd since our separation.”\textsuperscript{176} The restrictions on dances set an official tone of disapporoval, and fur traders who desired promotion may have become wary about publicizing these activities at their posts, or perhaps having them altogether. The expanding influence of Methodist missionaries such as James Evans at Norway House and of Catholic Oblate missionaries in this era seem to have also played a role in this transformation.

By the 1820s and especially by the 1840s, there is considerable evidence of missionary activity in the northwest. Red River in particular became a hub of Christian missionary activity. The Church Missionary Society (CMS), founded in 1799 by the Clapham Sect of the Church of

\textsuperscript{175} James Hargrave, Fort Garry, 20th January 1827, \textit{Letters from Rupert’s Land}, 78-9.

England, established itself at Red River with the Reverend John West at its helm. This presence seems to have rapidly transformed the soundscape of Red River. While travelling along the river on a Sunday in 1825-1826, Rev. Jones reported seeing “on a stage, not 18 inches from the water, a party of Half Breed young women singing “Walls’s Hymns.” Reverend J. Smithurst reported First Nations girls singing near Red River on June 26th, 1840: the “tune was the hundredth, Shirland, and Auburn, the girls alone singing the soft parts, in the latter tune which had a fine effect. All was managed with the utmost exactness not a note wrong and sung in very correct time.” Similarly Mr. John Roberts reported hearing “Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah,” coming from the “Indian Church” at Red River on July 19, 1842. The Red River school imported a number of music books, for instance Watt’s Divine and Moral Songs, Nursery Rhymes, Hymns for the Infant Mind, and others. The singers associated with trading posts at Red River sometimes joined the choirs of the missionaries. For instance, on November 1st, 1846, “There were eight of the singers from the Fort here to join with my singers...I am also wishing my singers to chant the 95th and 100th Psalms in the morning service, and the 67th in the evening service. I shall be able to teach them this the better now they have heard the Fort singers Chant.” On December 28th of that same year, Smirthurst hosted singers from the Indian Church and from the Fort, passing the evening “singing over a variety of sacred Music, consisting of Psalm tunes, Chants and Anthems.” Yet it was not just at Red River that these

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180 John Roberts, “Journal of Mr John Roberts,” Church Missionary Society Fonds, CMS C (C1/055/9)
181 “Book order,” by A. Cowley, 1842, Church Missionary Society Fonds, CMS (C C1/019/4B.)
183 Ibid., Dec. 28th.
influences were experienced, as Methodist missionaries such as James Evans at Norway House, and of Catholic Oblate missionaries throughout the northwest posts was undoubtedly felt.

The secular dance tradition that had germinated during the fur trade prior to 1821 was now confronted with the hostility of an energetic missionary presence. Perhaps the best case study to assess the interplay between the fur trade’s lingering musical culture and missionaries in this period is the story of Peter Erasmus. Born in Red River in 1833, he was the son of a Dane named Peter Erasmus who fought in the battle of Waterloo and came to Red River with the HBC, taking a Métis wife. Erasmus reminisced about growing up and playing the fiddle at Red River as a teenager in the 1840s. Obtaining an instrument of his own, he practiced whenever he had the chance away from work, playing at dances, he said, less for the sake of the music and more with the hopes of being accepted. Erasmus recalled that at that time in Red River, “there were many French Métis people who were wonderful violinists.”

Taking a job freighting goods for the HBC, Erasmus commented that while there was “little idle time for me that winter for dancing and parties… I managed to squeeze in a few.” He recounts that while staying with his aunt and uncle at The Pas, he restricted himself to playing “church music” on the fiddle. When he was twenty years old, Peter enrolled for the ministry at Red River, and although he was prohibited from attending dances, he found ways to bypass the rules and again perform on his fiddle at dances. Yet he was always worried he would be discovered. While in his third term, he received a letter from the chief factor of the HBC offering him a job with Rev. Mr. Woolsey at Fort Edmonton, as guide and interpreter. Erasmus described the soundscape on arriving at Fort Edmonton in the 1850s. It was characterized by “people singing hymns and praying.” He had

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185 Ibid., 7.
encountered the “Pigeon Lake Indians,” who had been instructed in music by Reverend Rundle.

Yet evidence of the fur trade dances surfaced over the winter holidays. Erasmus describes how everything transformed on Christmas Eve in 1856. Visitors and dog sleds arrived from great distances. Although Mr. Woolsey held “strong views against dancing,” Erasmus was granted permission to attend if he promised not to partake in liquor. Although Erasmus heard of “unrestricted convivial times at these Christmas gatherings,” he reported that “there was no evidence of excess that day.” Erasmus reports that the musicians had little time for rest between songs that night, and that his services were requested even though “there were plenty of fiddlers among the French Metis people from Lac Ste. Anne.” The dance lasted until daybreak. Many were faced with a tough situation: “after dancing all night they had to run behind dogs for another forty miles before they would have any rest or sleep.” The holiday celebrations at Fort Edmonton seem to have retained much of the flavour of earlier fur trade celebrations, while the presence and oversight of Methodist and Catholic missionaries presented active discouragement. Outside of the official auspices of the trading posts, Métis traders such as Johnny Grant described the great social pressure to dance, especially to celebrate weddings, often in homes. He describes encounters with musicians and mentions he “loved to dance.” Yet he stopped dancing in his older years. Indeed, dancing plays a relatively minor role in his narrative.

The fur trade prior to 1840 produced a vigorous dance culture based around the fiddle. During the height of the Montreal trade prior to 1821, dances had commemorated holidays and special occasions in the lives of those working at or near the trading posts, especially the arrival

186 Ibid., 41.
187 Ibid., 41-43.
188 Johnny Grant, A Son of the Fur Trade, edited by Gerhard J. Ens (Edmonton: The University of Alberta, 2008), 215, 271.
and departure of people and cargo. What had begun as a pastime for fur traders overwintering at the trading posts developed into a culture of music and dance that was shared by the gentlemen, servants, local First Nations peoples, and Métis alike. The strong demand for musical instruments and sheet music was largely supplied by informal networks and personal arrangements made by the fur traders. Certain merchants, such as Todd, McGill, & Co., and fur traders such as Edward Ermatinger, played a particularly influential role. Yet before the amalgamation, the North West Company had supplied musical instruments such as jaw harps, violins, and strings to posts throughout northern North America. This facilitated the establishment of the instrumental music and dance culture that in the twentieth century would come mostly to be associated with First Nations and Métis fiddling. By the 1820s these forms increasingly developed outside of the official auspices of the trading posts. While the winter holidays remained a time of festivity and dancing, the elaborate dancing culture that had developed in the previous decades to celebrate weddings, holidays, arrivals, and departures had been curtailed. Yet traditions sprouted during the fur trade took root in homes and community halls, growing into fiddling traditions maintained in communities throughout western Canada and the north.


10 Conclusion

Sound, music, and dance figured prominently in the fur trade in northern North America during the period from 1760-1840. Permeating nearly every aspect of its operations, from travel and transportation, cross-cultural encounters, establishing and strengthening relationships, exchanging material goods, and celebrating special occasions and holidays, the fur trade produced a distinct soundscape and musical culture. Imperial aspirations and mercantile competition drove traders into the northwestern reaches of the continent by the final decades the eighteenth century; First Nations peoples would have first heard the fur traders coming. While the impact of European materials such as guns and trade metals extended far beyond the reaches of Hudson Bay and the St. Lawrence in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, by the 1760s and 1770s fur traders and large crews of men were personally transporting these items to First Nations communities. They brought their own soundways and musical cultures, yet they also had to navigate the ceremonial obligations of First Nations peoples with whom they traded with and resided near, observing a wide variety of music and dance in the process.

The soundscape was perhaps most fundamentally transformed by gunpowder. Cannons produced loud booms that the Omushkego Cree initially believed was thunder, yet the arrival of annual ships and large quantities of gunpowder augmented this auditory association. As powerful sound making devices, cannons and muskets were institutionalized as saluting mechanisms for arrivals and departures, as well as signaling systems. The conduits of the fur trade served as the mechanism by which arms and ammunition were supplied to the northwest. The auditory reports that travelled vast distances were useful tools of communication, used not only by the bourgeois but also by the servants of the companies. Gunshots signaled the presence of fur traders whether
they went, accompanying ritual baptisms en route and holiday celebrations at the trading posts. In the hands of First Nations peoples, gunshots developed into distinct auditory customs that in turn influenced those of fur traders.

Music and dance figured prominently in encounters. First Nations peoples initially sang and danced with the intent to welcome and entertain, or occasionally to frighten, fur traders who were passing through or staying to overwinter. On encountering the diversity of First Nations cultures, fur traders described music’s prominent role in establishing peaceful relations, alliance and trade. They wrote long passages describing the dances they observed, perhaps fuelled by curiosity, but also seemingly fuelled by pragmatism. They recognized that ceremonies, songs, and dances were significant to the diplomatic procedures of the First Nations with whom they were establishing alliances and relationships. Fur traders analyzed dances as revealing not only aspects of musical culture but also societal structure and gender dynamics, at the same time revealing their own attitudes and prejudices.

While fur traders were not trained as fieldworkers, their vocation took them through the heart of First Nations communities and required them to navigate ceremonial forms over the course of many years. Calumet pipe ceremonies proved a crucial mechanism for establishing peaceful relations and trading relationships throughout the northwest. Whether or not the ceremony was associated merely with smoking rituals, as it was for some groups in the northern plains and western subarctic, or whether it was accompanied by elaborate songs and dances with ritualized roles of “Father” and “Son” enacting peace-making and renewal, the calumet was central to the establishment of the fur trade in northern North America. The eastern Iroquois and Anishinaabeg brought not only their calumet dance traditions with them into the northwest, but also their war dance traditions. These were widespread but subject to variations among First
Nations peoples in northern North America. In the context of the fur trade, both calumet and war dances served to strengthen alliances and trading relationships.

European military instruments arrived near First Nations communities with the fur trade. Drums, bugles and bagpipes gradually lost their disciplinary associations and were repurposed to accentuate arrivals, provide music for dances, and serve as objects of curiosity during cross-cultural encounters. While they may have been imported into northern North America in greatest number during the period of intensive warfare from the Seven Years’ War until the War of 1812, they also served a conspicuous role in Governor George Simpson’s encounters and interactions with First Nations peoples. While serving as signals and tools during wartime, military instruments were repurposed for ceremonies and recreation in and around the trading posts. Yet drums were the type of instrument that provided the most potent conduit for cross-cultural musical interactions, seemingly because they were shared by European and First Nations cultures. Cultural interactions around musical instruments served as a major pattern in the fur trade, predicated on stimulating the senses of hearing and touch.

Rituals of sound punctuated the route between Montreal and the western Great Lakes. Significant locations were greeted with sounded responses that served to bond crews, conveying histories, myths, and cultural significances of the encountered sites. Soundmoments helped provide meaning and structure on the journey between Montreal and the western Great Lakes. The gravesite of Jean Cadieux at Grand Calumet Island on the Ottawa River was perhaps the most significant, revealing the voyageurs’ magico-religious beliefs. The associated story and song stressed vulnerability and deep-seated anxieties about being left behind.

Overwintering at trading posts and trading en déroine brought fur traders into intimate contact with First Nations peoples. It allowed them opportunity to observe musical culture in the daily life of the community. While many fur traders were skeptical about First Nations’ hunting
and healing songs, a remarkable number became convinced of their efficacy. The fur trade extended cultural contacts and expanded the availability of sound-making materials, spawning new methods of sound and music making. While fur traders did not possess the systematic descriptive methodologies of trained fieldworkers, their descriptions are valuable because of their early date and detail. Unlike missionaries or Indian Agents of the later nineteenth century, they did not actively attempt to prohibit First Nations’ musical culture. Instead, they were often observers or even participants. Yet it was not usually mere curiosity that spurned their interest, as they realized these practices had an influence their profits as well as livelihoods in the northwest. They observed traditions such as the *wabanowiwin* developing and moving between nations and culture areas, discrediting later depictions of monolithic and unchanging “Indian” culture as well as the divisions and categorizations erected by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists. The written record of the fur trade presents an alternate ethnographic archive, contradicting later descriptions that naturalized the influence of missionaries, apparent for instance in the writings of Frances Densmore concerning the *midéwiwin*.

Canoe travel was most characterized by the *chansons d’aviron*. Singing was an essential component, setting the march, controlling the pace, and synchronizing the paddles. The voyageurs extended their songs over long durations by stitching together well-known segments of verse and improvising additional lyrics around the *laisse* form. Within the framework of inescapable work songs, the Ermatinger collection indicates that there was room for creativity, improvisation, and expression of voyageur identity. Subject to an uncertain food supply and extended periods away from loved ones, the voyageurs sang about scenarios of abundance and comfort, characterized by feasting and intimacy with women. Superficially they conveyed an unfailing *joie de vivre*, but they also revealed deep anxieties and insecurities. They had the ability to transcend divisions of language, race, and class. Their origins may have been with the
chansons en laisse that arrived from France in the seventeenth century, yet they were adapted with novel extensions and new choruses.

The fur trade before the 1840s produced a vigorous dance culture based around the music of the fiddle. Before the amalgamation of 1821, dances had commemorated holidays and special occasions in the lives of those working at or near the trading posts. Music and dance were not merely pastimes, but survival mechanisms for many fur traders overwintering in the north. They formed a core social activity that functioned to strengthen relationships and reciprocal bonds. Music and dance characterized cross-cultural interactions between the fur trade’s diverse peoples. During the summer rendezvous at the large hubs of the western Great Lakes, dances served to reaffirm social hierarchies. At the smaller posts throughout the year, they provided important opportunities to bridge the divisions of race, class, gender, and employer.

The demand for musical instruments and to a lesser extent sheet music in the northwest was supplied largely through informal networks and personal arrangements. Certain suppliers, such as Todd, McGill, & Co., and certain fur traders, such as Edward Ermatinger, figured prominently in this process. Before the amalgamation in 1821 the North West Company had supplied musical materials - to a lesser extent violins and drums and to a greater extent jaw harps and violin strings - to posts throughout northern North America. Both the cultural and material dynamic of the fur trade spawned the development of a music and dance culture that was characterized mostly by fast paced reels on the fiddle. It is in the period before 1821 that the Red River Jig likely germinated. That it developed with an emphasis on individual solo displays of step-dancing should perhaps come as no surprise, resembling closely one of the two main approaches to dancing “Scotch reels” in the late eighteenth century. Yet the frequent inclusion of hops and other steps that strongly resemble First Nations’ dancing indicates that this is a style
produced through cross-cultural interactions, representing a truly hybridized form of music and dance.

The field of fur trade studies has transformed enormously since Harold Innis wrote the economic history of Canada. His near exclusive concern for tracing economic and material exchanges has become the exception in the historiography. The social and cultural turn in the 1970s combined with ethnohistory and shifted the focus away from the fur traders and towards their servants and First Nations peoples. The backgrounded and simplistic portrayals of First Nations peoples that had previously been employed have been reconsidered, and their crucial and nuanced roles finally examined. There has been an emphasis in the last few decades on tracing the development of a unique “fur trade society” as well as the forces behind Métis ethnogenesis. Brenda Macdougall has recently suggested that in Métis studies generally, too much emphasis has been placed on discussions of race and not enough on culture.\(^1\)

Another recent collection of essays on the fur trade begins with the assertion that “material objects have always been central to the fur trade,” with exchanges of felt hats, furs, blankets and kettles constituting the “raisons d’être of centuries of trade between Europeans and indigenous peoples in northern North America.”\(^2\) Yet as the chapters in this collection indicate, material exchanges were accompanied by cultural interactions, both of which served as forces of change. This dissertation attempts to fill a lacuna in the social and cultural investigation of the fur trade by listening to the past. It consciously sheds the anachronistic national framework employed by Innis and others, heeding the call of Bethel Saler and Carolyn Podruchny to

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“shatter the glass-curtain” that divides the Canadian and American historiographies. This dissertation examines the influence and encounters of fur traders operating from Hudson Bay and Montreal, the two major conduits of the fur trade into northern North America. From the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, these provided the main commercial and social links between eastern North America and the northern plains, western subarctic, northwest coast, and plateau & basin regions. Its presence and influence registered across regions that now straddle the United States - Canadian border. The distinct music and dance culture that developed during the fur trade has lingered variously in communities, preserving an echo of the shocking reverberations that once sounded across this enormous landscape.

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Figure 1. Rudolf Steiger, "Deputation of Indians from the Chippewa Tribes to the President of Upper Canada, Sir Frederic Ph. Robinson, K.C.B., Major General, etc. in 1815," National Gallery of Canada (no. #30237). Used with Permission.