



THE GREAT HALL is the only building completed thus far in the reconstruction of Grand Portage. A replica of a 34-foot Montreal canoe and one of a fur press are in the foreground.

GRAND PORTAGE in the Revolutionary War

Nancy L. Woolworth

NOW THAT the bicentennial of the American Revolution is officially under way, *Minnesota History* presents this special issue as its contribution to the observance. Since Minnesota was largely a wilderness domain of Indian tribes and fur traders in 1775 and the years following, it had very modest direct connections with the war. Such as it had, however, are covered in this issue — a small military expedition to Grand Portage in 1778, northern boundary difficulties that stemmed from geographical ignorance of peace negotiators at the end of the war, and burial of one lone Revolutionary War veteran in Minnesota. Also treated in this issue are Minnesota Historical Society holdings from the period of the American Revolution and ramifications of the bicentennial observance in Minnesota and the nation. — Ed.

¹During the French regime, the trade was tightly controlled by means of royal licenses, limited in number. For a useful survey, see Rhoda R. Gilman, "The Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1630–1850," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 58:3–8 (Autumn, 1974). On the British, see Marjorie G. Jackson, "The Beginning of British Trade at Michilimackinac," in *Minnesota History*, 11:239 (September, 1930) and Wayne E. Stevens, *The Northwest Fur Trade 1763–1800*, 14–41 (Urbana, Illinois, 1928).

Mrs. Woolworth holds a master's degree in history from the University of Michigan. She is author of *The White Bear Lake Story*, "The Grand Portage Mission, 1731–1965," published in the Winter, 1965, issue of *Minnesota History*, and of other articles for historical and archaeological publications.

DURING THE American Revolution the only military activity in what is now Minnesota occurred at Grand Portage on the North Shore of Lake Superior. For a few months in 1778 this remote fur trade post in the northeastern corner of the state served as the western terminus for the British military on the northern Great Lakes. How did this come about? Why were Lieutenant Thomas Bennett, Sergeant A. Langdown, and five soldiers of the King's Eighth Regiment of Foot sent to Grand Portage in the summer of 1778?

The answer must be sought in British fur trade activity, which began at Grand Portage shortly after the surrender of Montreal ended the French and Indian War in 1760. With the British victory, English traders in Albany, New York, and Montreal, Quebec, hoping to take over the French trade of the Northwest, were delighted when British Generals Jeffrey Amherst and James Murray declared in the fall of 1760 that the trade would henceforth be open to both French and British subjects.¹

One of the *avant-garde* of British traders attracted to the Lake Superior area was Alexander Henry, the elder, a merchant working with the commissariat of General Amherst's army. On August 3, 1761, Henry received a personal pass from General Thomas Gage, governor of Montreal, that permitted him to engage in the fur trade. Following the Ottawa River route, Henry made his way westward in the fall of 1761 to Fort Michilimackinac, the post at the Straits of Mackinac which the British that year took over from the French and which was to serve,



THE ONLY MILITARY activity during the Revolutionary War in what is now Minnesota was prompted by the importance of the fur trade and of Grand Portage as a rendezvous. Men and supplies were shipped from Fort Michilimackinac and Detroit for this brief engagement in the summer of 1778.

for more than thirty years as the British military and administrative headquarters in the northern Great Lakes. There he combined English capital with French-Canadian knowledge of the trade routes, sending French-Canadian clerks and interpreters "into Lake Superior, among the Chipeways, and to the Grand Portage, for the north-west." Henry's voyageurs gathered furs from the Indians on Lake Superior and began the advancement of British mercantilism into the *pays d'en haut*, the vast wilderness of the Northwest.²

By 1767 eighteen canoes went from Michilimackinac to Lake Superior carrying trade goods worth 7,481 pounds, 17 shillings, and fourteen canoes went beyond Superior to the Northwest with cargoes worth 5,117 pounds, 10 shillings. In October, 1767, three companies of traders who listed destinations beyond Lake Superior sent back to Michilimackinac 4,293 beaver pelts alone. Jonathan Carver, who visited Grand Portage in July, 1767, says nothing about any buildings there, but he does record his meeting with a large party of Indians who "were come to this place in order to meet the traders from Michilimackinac, who make this their road to the north-west."³

By 1775 ten British licenses were given out for as many companies to send thirty-eight canoes of merchandise to Grand Portage. Henry, arriving at the portage on June 28, 1775, commented that he "found the traders in

a state of extreme reciprocal hostility, each pursuing his interests in such a manner as might most injure his neighbour. The consequences," Henry added, "were very hurtful to the morals of the Indians."⁴

In 1775 Henry, Peter Pond, and the Frobisher brothers, Joseph and Thomas, pushed westward until they reached the Saskatchewan River. Three years later Pond extended his activities still farther by opening the trade in the profitable Athabasca region of what is now Alberta. As the lines of trade were stretched from Montreal to this far northwestern area, the need for a

²James Bain, ed., *Travels & Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776 by Alexander Henry*, 12, 16-38, 48 (Boston, 1901); Jackson, in *Minnesota History*, 11:236, 241; Brian L. Dunnigan, *King's Men At Mackinac: The British Garrisons, 1780-1796*, 13, 32 (*Reports in Mackinac History and Archaeology*, no. 3 — Mackinac, 1973).

³Charles E. Lart, ed., "Fur-Trade Returns, 1767," in *Canadian Historical Review*, 3:352-58 (December, 1922); "Abstract of Indian Trade Licenses, 1768-76," in Governor General of Canada Papers, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, typewritten copy in the Minnesota Historical Society; Jonathan Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768*, 107-13 (reprint edition, Minneapolis, 1956).

⁴Bain, ed., *Travels & Adventures*, 235; "Abstract of Indian Trade Licenses, 1768-76," in Governor General of Canada Papers.

base midway along the route was apparent. Grand Portage, at the gateway of the best water route from the Great Lakes to the West, became that supply base as well as the annual rendezvous point for the Montreal partners and the winterers.⁵

From the time — perhaps about 1768 — when John Askin, a Mackinac trader, built the first cabin in a cleared opening overlooking Grand Portage Bay, to the outbreak of the American Revolution, four palisaded log cabins or “forts” had been constructed by competing groups of British traders upon a glacial beach level sur-

⁵Harold A. Innis, “Peter Pond and the influence of Capt. James Cook on exploration in the interior of North America,” in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 3, 22:135–37 (May, 1938); Charles M. Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 12 (St. Paul, 1965).

⁶On the cabin built by Askin (sometimes spelled Erskine), see Grace Lee Nute, ed., “A British Legal Case at Old Grand Portage,” in *Minnesota History*, 21:134 (June, 1940). Askin was sending his sailing sloops to Grand Portage at least by 1778; see note 15, below. Four buildings are indicated on Patrick McNiff’s map of the North Shore of Lake Superior, 1794, in Ontario Provincial Archives, Toronto, discussed on p. 207, below. The fact that they were stockaded is mentioned in “Trade in the Lake Superior Country in 1778,” an unsigned memorandum to Sir Guy Carleton, January 20, 1778, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 19:337 (1891). The companies trading there in this period included Montreal merchants Isaac Todd and Richard McNeill (1769); Lawrence Ermatinger (1769, 1772, 1775); Charles Patterson, James McGill, and Benjamin Frobisher (1774); and Maurice Blondeau (1769, 1770, 1772, 1775). See “Abstract of Indian Trade Licenses, 1768–76,” Governor General of Canada Papers.

For later descriptions of Grand Portage, see Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Lawrence . . . 1789 and 1793*, xliii–xlvii (London, 1801); Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders*, 92–95; and Solon J. Buck, “The Story of Grand Portage,” in *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 5:14–27 (February, 1923).

⁷Bain, ed., *Travels & Adventures*, 236. The rendezvous is described by Buck, in *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 5:31 and Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur*, 64 (reprint edition, St. Paul, 1966). On varieties of furs shipped to England from the colonies, see Murray G. Lawson, *A Study of English Mercantilism, 1770–1775*, 87–102 (*University of Toronto History and Economics Series*, vol. 9 — Toronto, 1943); on trade goods, see Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal*, xxv; Robert C. Wheeler et al., *Voices from the Rapids: An Underwater Search for Fur Trade Artifacts, 1960–73*, 55–93 (St. Paul, 1975).

⁸For a lucid, brief account of the formative period of the North West Company and the importance of Grand Portage, see Edwin E. Rich, *Montreal and the Fur Trade, 72–78* (Montreal, 1966); Stevens, *Northwest Fur Trade*, 51, 58, 61.

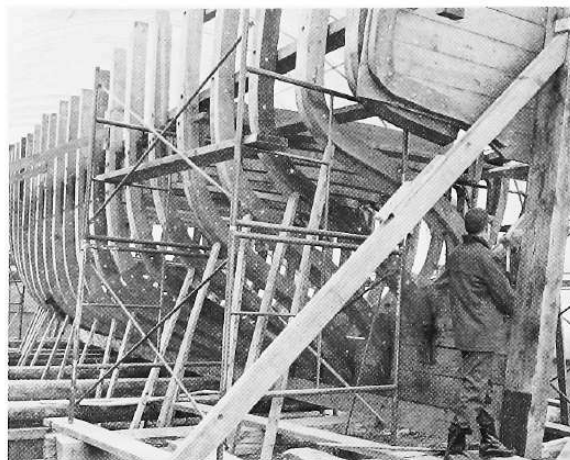
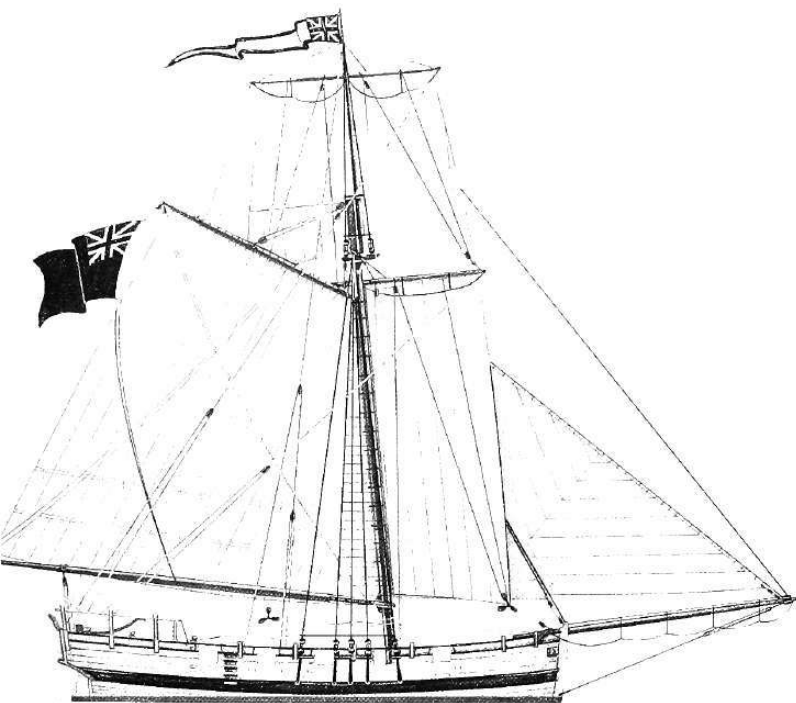
⁹Foy’s note appears at the bottom of a letter from Carleton to Bolton, September 24, 1777, in Frederick Haldimand Papers, 99:180, Public Archives of Canada, copy in Marie Gerin-Lejoie Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. The Carleton letter as well as the unsigned order to De Peyster, October 6, 1777, is printed in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 10:280 (1888). See also Foy to William Knox, British undersecretary of state for American affairs, March 10, 1778, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 12:48 (1892).

rounded by the forests that stretched up the slopes of nearby Mount Rose and Mount Josephine. Large Montreal canoes and small sailing vessels arrived at the bay each June bearing company partners to inspect the furs collected from the Indian hunters over the year. Inside the dwellings each clerk probably had a store on the ground floor and beds in the loft for himself, his interpreter, and his canoemen. Northeast of Grand Portage Creek were scattered the white tents of independent traders and winterers.⁶

Each June men like Henry, who had wintered in the *pays d’en haut*, also headed for Grand Portage. They traveled eastward in small birch-bark North canoes, descended the Pigeon River to Fort Charlotte, and carried their furs across the nine-mile trail to the rendezvous on Grand Portage Bay. There, amid much feasting and revelry the ninety-pound packs of muskrat, raccoon, bear, fox, marten, mink, fisher, otter, and the much-prized beaver brought by the winterers were counted by one of the company partners. About a month later the winterers would begin their return journeys to assigned posts in the interior, carrying with them canoe loads of such trade goods as tools, trinkets, kettles, liquors, blankets, cloth, flintlock muskets, gunpowder, and shot.⁷

By 1778 Grand Portage had become the keystone of the Montreal fur trade and the evolving group that was soon to emerge as the North West Company. The city’s merchants who belonged to the shifting coalition of traders in the formative North West organization apparently became alarmed at the increasingly violent competition among companies that used Grand Portage. They were also fearful of American influence among the Indians and the loss of pelts to “rebel” traders. Major Arent S. De Peyster, commandant of the small British garrison at Michilimackinac, urged the Indians not to deal with “rebel” traders and threatened not to allow traders to reach those who did so. The British did not wish to encourage another Pontiac conspiracy like that of 1763.⁸

It was against this background that the Montreal merchants successfully pressured the British military to send a small detachment of soldiers to Grand Portage in the summer of 1778. On October 6, 1777, Captain Edward Foy, adjutant to Sir Guy Carleton, the British governor of Quebec, wrote the following brief note to Lieutenant Colonel Mason Bolton, commander of the King’s Eighth Regiment of Foot: “I am commanded to acquaint you that upon an application from the Merchants concern’d in the trade at the Grand Portage, orders are Sent to Major De Peyster to furnish an Officer and twelve men to remain there every year during the time which the Merchants take to transact their business at that place, for the purpose of preserving order and regularity among the people who resort there.” Orders bearing the same date were transmitted to Major De Peyster at Michilimackinac.⁹



JOHN ASKIN built the armed sloop "Welcome" (left) in 1775 to transport furs and goods. Major De Peyster bought it in 1778. It was 55 feet long, 16 feet wide, and carried up to 45 tons. In 1781 it was lost in a storm. The "Welcome" is under reconstruction (above) at Fort Michilimackinac.

But the merchants were not yet through with Governor Carleton, and on January 20, 1778, they sent him a lengthy memorandum spelling out just what they wished the military to do at Grand Portage. The financiers called attention to the importance of the portage with its annual returns of just under 40,000 pounds sterling and stated that nearly 500 persons were employed who met for "about a month in the summer" during a "general rendezvous" there. They went on to say that the traders had built "tolerable Houses; and in order to cover them from any insult from the numerous savage Tribes, who resort there during that time, have made stockades around them." The memorandum stated that "Amongst so great a number of people not the most moral or enlightened . . . there must infallibly be Jarring & disputes, as many separate interests are to be served." Its writers then got down to business, listing seven ways they hoped the military officer sent to the portage would be authorized to restore order and "prevent the evil from increasing."¹⁰

1. By "insisting strongly with the Savages that they do not attempt to stop any Traders from passing on their lands."

2. By publishing "before the Traders & their servants that the latter must strictly conform to their agreements which should absolutely be in writing . . . as many disputes arise from want of order in this particular."

3. That "it has ever been customary that a canoe man who falls indebted to his master" must work out his debt to the trader by "further service with the same

master" or "pay the debt in furs or money."

4. That the "infamous custom of engaging the men of other Trade[r]s before their time was out should be declared null and void and any credit given on such faith be lost to the Trader."

5. That the "invariable custom . . . that the last out fitter should be the first paid and any writt from the Courts of Justice should be enforced by the officer commanding — which will prevent absconding Debtors (who are seldom the best of men) from becoming a nuisance in that Country."

6. That in "disputes between the Trader and Canoe man the officer ought to be the sole Judge" or at least cast the deciding vote.

7. That because the Indians "were formerly used to a commanding officer" making "some show and parade such as hoisting colors & firing guns at their arrival at the Posts" and giving "colours and other marks of distinction," the traders "have acted a similar part; but now such practice ought to cease, and presenting medals above all other things to be at an end," although a "few from the commanding officer will be of service."

The memorandum went on to suggest that only "a very few soldiers would be wanted" for the trip, and that they should leave Michilimackinac by June 10 at the latest and return in August. When the officer had fixed upon "a proper place for erecting a little Fort, the Trad-

¹⁰ Unsigned memorandum to Carleton, January 20, 1778, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 19:337-39 (1891).

ers ought to furnish each his part of the Wood for building," or the trader remaining at the portage to winter could build it and the others pay for their shares.

Perhaps at least in part in preparation for his stay at Grand Portage, Lieutenant Thomas Bennett, post adjutant of the garrison at Fort Michilimackinac, sailed to Detroit and back in late April and early May, 1778, carrying letters and a quantity of wine and tea which he delivered to John Askin. Askin's sloop "Welcome" made frequent trips between Detroit and Michilimackinac in 1778, but it seems likely that Bennett made the trip in a smaller boat in an effort to procure supplies for the garrison. In those days soldiers at Mackinac might get a daily ration of one pound of flour, a half pound of pork, some corn, and $\frac{3}{8}$ pint of rum, when these articles were available. About the same time, on April 15, 1778, Sergeant Langdown drew from His Majesty's stores at Michilimackinac 38 pounds of 24-penny nails and 44 pounds of 10-penny nails "for use of the King's Works Carrying on here and at the Grand Portage."¹¹

On May 18, 1778, John Askin wrote to Jean Baptiste Barthe, his partner at Sault Ste. Marie at the eastern end of Lake Superior, reminding him to forward to Grand Portage the supplies that had been ordered by the traders rendezvousing there and to send along Bennett's tools on board Askin's sailing ship "De Peyster." Included were one crosscut saw, one handsaw, one adz, one spade, two shovels, one auger, one pick ax, two "Hand Bills" (pruning hooks), one trowel, two "Gimblets" (hand drills), and one "Clawed Hammer."¹²

On May 24 Askin also wrote to Joseph M. Beausoleil, clerk for the North West coalition at Grand Portage,

outlining the provisions he was to make for the soldiers' arrival. Askin informed the clerk that "An officer and some soldiers are to pass the summer at Grand Portage. Please try to have a house ready for them which they can use until able to provide for themselves. It should have a chimney. Also be so good as to have your men prepare 200 pickets, 14 feet in length, and have them put on the beach [as a barrier?] between the old fort and yours. That will be the North West Company's share of preparation for the officer and his men." In the same letter Askin asked the clerk to have Bennett secure for him two pretty Indian slave girls between 9 and 16 years old as household servants.¹³

Askin wrote again to Barthe at the Sault on May 29: "I have engaged Big Charlie [an Indian?] to go as guide with Mr. Bennett to the Grand Portage. After that he is to sail . . . in the *De Peyster* until Mr. Bennett is ready to return, about the end of August. I shall pay him 200 livres for going with Mr. Bennett to the Grand Portage and back as guide. . . . If it happens that Mr. Bennett needs 4 or 5 barrels of rum let him have it and I shall return it to you from here [Michilimackinac]."¹⁴

Lieutenant Bennett probably left Jean Baptiste Barthe's fur-trading establishment at the Sault near the end of May, 1778, with Sergeant Langdown, five soldiers of the regiment, and seven canoemen furnished by the traders "to Conduct them to the Portage and back" to Michilimackinac. Major De Peyster later reported: "I took upon me to supply the officer with Two bales of Dry Goods, a bale of Tobacco, one Hundred gallons of Rum and some pork and flour, to enable him to receive the visits from the Indians. I also sent Two Swivels [half-

¹¹Milo M. Quaife, ed., *The John Askin Papers*, 1:80, 81, 83, 90, 163 (Detroit, 1928). On Langdown, see *Michigan Historical Collections*, 10:284. See also David A. Armour, "Askin's WELCOME will sail again," in *Telescope*, 139 (September-October, 1973); Dunnigan, *King's Men At Mackinac*, 11. Bennett was later officially appointed general adjutant of the Eighth Regiment of Foot on December 2, 1778. See Haldimand to Bennett, British Museum, Add. Mss. 21745, copy in the Public Archives of Canada.

¹²Quaife, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:93 (French translation); "Return of Engineer's Stores," Haldimand Papers, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 19:358 (1892).

¹³Quaife, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:9 (French translation). A slightly different translation appears in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 19:239 (1910), and in Erwin N. Thompson, *Grand Portage: A History of the Sites, People, and Fur Trade*, 30, a report issued by the National Park Service, Division of History, in June, 1969. Thompson chooses to read the French phrase "sur La grève" as "erected a barrier," while Quaife interprets it as "on the beach." Thompson also speculates that the "old fort" perhaps refers to Askin's early cabin, and the other structure may have been that built later by the North West traders.

¹⁴Quaife, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:103 (French translation). Bennett did get the rum. See *Askin Papers*, 1:118, 126.



MAJOR ARENT
S. DE PEYSTER



WATER-COLOR PAINTINGS by an F. Milner, entitled "8th Regiment of Foot, 1768-1785," provide details of the uniforms worn by officers and enlisted men. The coats were red with dark blue and white facings. Enlisted men wore fur caps; officers wore red sashes and tricorne hats.

pounders] mounted upon Carriages with two Barrels of powder for Saluting, and Tools for erecting a Fort." The supplies may have been carried aboard Askin's two small sailing ships, the "De Peyster" and the "Mackinac," which were plying Lake Superior at that time.¹⁵

In any case, following the North Shore on the way to Grand Portage, "they were cast on the rocks on Lake Superior but lost nothing but ammunition and provisions." Major De Peyster secured more corn and supplies from Askin. On June 27, 1778, Askin wrote that the "Mackinac" was sent straight through to the portage on its second trip, presumably to replace the soldiers' supplies. Thirteen days earlier Askin had written cryptically to his Montreal associates, Todd and McGill: "Before Lieut Bennett left [Michilimackinac] I did what I thought necessary in order that your Co[mpany] at the Portage should still pass for what it actually is, the most respectable both as to proprietors & amount." A month later he told Todd and McGill that Lieutenant Bennett's account should be charged to Askin.¹⁶

One can imagine Lieutenant Bennett arriving at Grand Portage in his scarlet coat with its blue facings and gold lace, red sash, white waistcoat and breeches, and

black tricorne hat. Perhaps he fired his half-pounders in salute from the sailing vessel. The next day the men probably fastened the "swivels" to their carriages on an improvised parade ground. That afternoon with a roll of drums, the troops may have raised the British ensign on a wooden flagpole. The drums would roll as Bennett gave a King George III medal to the chief of the Chipewewa band at Grand Portage. Perhaps he also gave silver gorgets to the headmen of the Reindeer (or Caribou) and

¹⁵ De Peyster to Deputy Adjutant General, December 16, 1778, in Haldimand Papers, microfilm copy in the Minnesota Historical Society; this letter is printed in part in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:371. On the ships, which were decked vessels reportedly weighing perhaps 12 and 15 tons, see Quaife, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:93, 97, 151; Grace Lee Nute, *Lake Superior*, 117 (Indianapolis, 1944); Erwin N. Thompson, *Grand Portage National Monument Great Hall*, 24, a report issued by the National Park Service, Office of History and Historic Architecture, in May, 1970. The number of soldiers is reported in De Peyster to Haldimand, September 16, 1778, Haldimand Papers, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:370.

¹⁶ De Peyster to Carleton, June 29, 1778, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:367, and in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 11:112 (1888); Quaife, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:127, 151.

Pike totem families of Chippewa living there. Bennett's soldiers would then again have fired their cannons in salute.¹⁷

Next the Indians probably did a dance for the soldiers to the beat of Indian drums. As Thomas L. McKenney described such an occasion in 1826, the Chippewa men danced in a crude circle, jumping, and leaping on their feet. Some were painted, some had braided hair, and some wore feathers in their hair. Some wore animal skins on their legs and others wore beaded buckskin or woolen leggings tied to leather belts over which lay woolen or buckskin breechcloths. Most of them wore decorated deerskin moccasins with puckered toes. After the ceremonial dance, the soldiers may have handed out a few trade goods as presents.¹⁸

The lieutenant probably lost no time in putting his canoemen to work building a little fort. It was constructed ten feet from the sandy beach and 300 yards from the older palisaded cabins. Before they left in August, the canoemen had partially built a barracks or little fort for the soldiers, approximately 18 by 58 feet in size in the post-on-sill style of architecture. The building was about half completed when the troops departed.¹⁹

During the two months' stay at Grand Portage, Bennett also kept the soldiers of the King's Eighth Regiment of Foot busy laying out and building a public road from the sandy beach to the ford of Grand Portage Creek north of the Grand Portage Trail. The uniforms of the



A STRIKING VARIETY of buttons was worn on the uniforms of the King's Eighth Regiment. Archaeologists found these at Fort Michilimackinac. Some have the identification, "K:s 8," and two portray galloping horses—an oddity for an infantry unit. Enlisted men wore pewter buttons; officers wore gold.

enlisted men of this regiment would not have been ideal clothing for such work. Like the officers, the men wore red coats faced in dark blue and white and trimmed in lace and white breeches held up by suspenders with iron or steel buckles. Their legs were covered by black linen gaiters over stockings, and on their feet they wore leather shoes or buckskin moccasins. Privates also sported a pair of cross belts supporting a cartridge box on the right side and a bayonet on the left. Sergeants were supposed to carry a sword and a halberd. The pewter buttons on the enlisted men's uniforms as well as their fur caps bore the "K:s 8" insignia of the King's Eighth Regiment of Foot.²⁰

Wearing all this clothing and using the tools sent up on the "De Peyster," the soldiers must have cut down trees, pulled out stumps, roots, and rocks, and filled in muddy spots with wood. While they were widening and leveling the road, they may have also built a small wooden bridge over the ford of the creek using the hand drills, auger, hammer, and nails in their supplies.

Bennett and his men were back at Michilimackinac by August 21, 1778. The only military expedition to Minnesota during the Revolutionary War cost Askin and the other fur traders 9,000 livres in supplies. It is clear that the expedition's principal purpose was economic rather than military. Indeed, General Frederick Haldimand, who replaced Carleton as governor of Quebec, said as much in a Christmas letter to Major De Peyster: "The party at the grand portage was ordered at the instruction of the Merchants for their benefit," he wrote, "and it is unreasonable in them to expect Government to bear any part of the Expense attending it."²¹

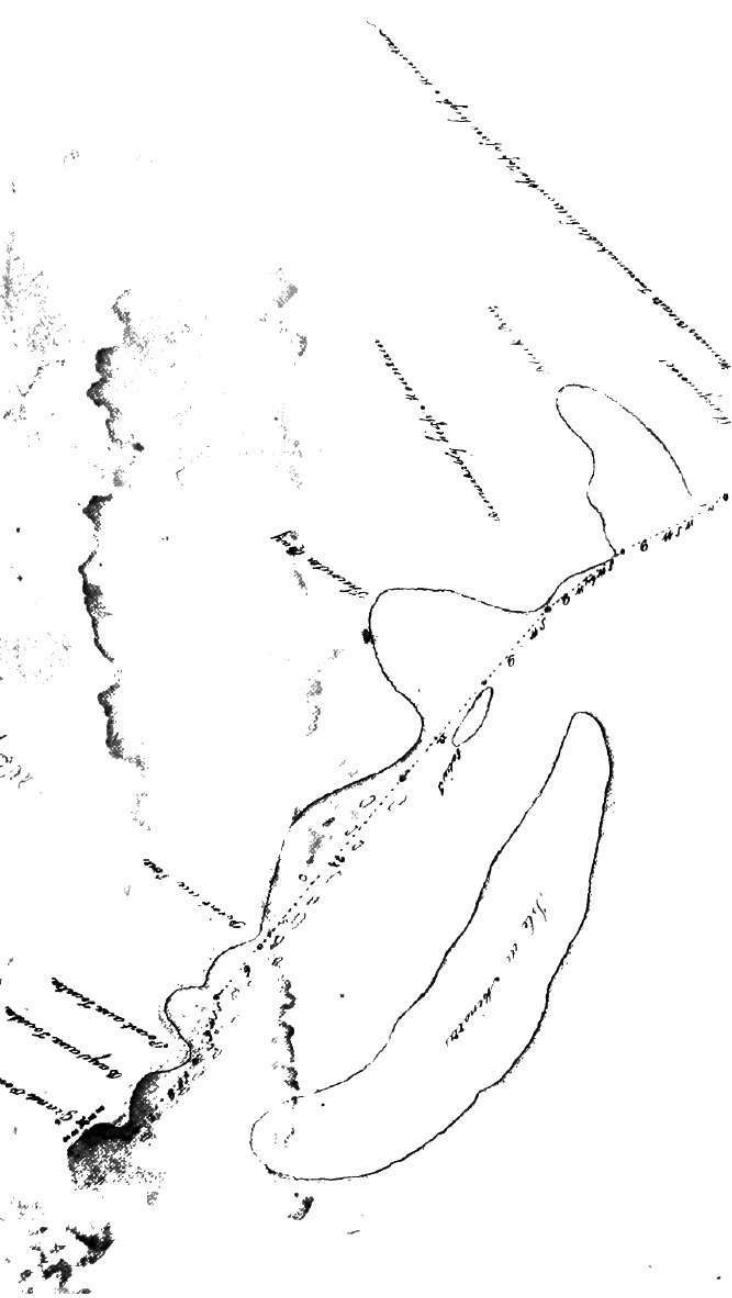
¹⁷Dunnigan, *King's Men At Mackinac*, 13, 20; William Warren, *History of the Ojibway Nation* (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, 5:52, 84—St. Paul, 1885). Such a medal has been handed down in the Flatte family at Grand Portage, and John Flatte has it today. See p. 208, below.

¹⁸Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes*, 285 (reprint edition, Minneapolis, 1959).

¹⁹De Peyster to Haldimand, September 16, 1778, and "Inventories, Bills of Accounts, and Returns," Haldimand Papers, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:371, 652, list the amount of wood cut. From these figures, Alan R. Woolworth, Minnesota Historical Society chief of archaeology, who conducted excavations at Grand Portage for the National Park Service, calculated that a building of this size could have been erected. The site of this fort, which was later occupied by the XY Company and referred to as "Boucher's Fort," was discovered by a national park ranger in the trees north of Grand Portage Creek. See Nute, in *Minnesota History*, 21:119.

²⁰De Peyster to Haldimand, January 29, 1779, Haldimand Papers, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:378, and *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 11:123, inquires if "your Excellency will please to allow the officer any [extra?] pay for his laying out and directing the route at the Portage." On uniforms, see Dunnigan, *King's Men At Mackinac*, 9, 10, 13.

²¹Haldimand to De Peyster, December 25, 1778, and "Return of Engineer's Stores, April 1–September 30, 1778," both in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:355, 651. The latter indicates the August date for Sergeant Langdown who was then apparently back at Michilimackinac "repairing the King's Bat-teaus." For the cost to the traders, see De Peyster to Deputy Adjutant General, December 16, 1778, in Haldimand Papers.



A SMALL SECTION of the McNiff map of the North Shore of Lake Superior shows Grand Portage, bottom, far left. North is at the top, so this part must be turned upside down to read. The dotted line traces a ship's route with directions, distances, and locations. The island McNiff calls "Isle de Minotte" is probably Isle Royale.

How successful Bennett was in controlling "Jarring & disputes" and restoring law and order among the traders is not known. The lieutenant was under orders to have the traders enter into a *debit* or agreement and to have them sign a bond of forfeiture not to enlist any canoe man without a regular discharge in writing from his former master. Exactly how Bennett carried out these orders is not recorded, but on September 16, 1778, Major De Peyster reported to Haldimand that Bennett had "con-

ducted himself to the general satisfaction of all present."²²

It was expected that the troops would return to Grand Portage during the summer of 1779. Bennett hired voyageurs Louis Chandonnet and Pierre La Vasseur to cut and prepare timber during the winter of 1778–79 in anticipation of another year's visit. To do the work, the voyageurs were provided with four large axes, one covered kettle, one large auger, two whitefish nets, two cod lines, fourteen bushels of hulled Indian corn, seven barrels of flour, and 340 pounds of Montreal pork. They cut, sawed, or squared 2,300 pieces of timber and planks at Grand Portage, perhaps intended for use in the partially completed barracks. For the winter's work and the voyageurs' supplies, the British army paid Charles Patterson and Company of Montreal 521 pounds, 13 shillings, and 4 pence in New York currency.²³

Early in 1779 the merchants of Montreal petitioned General Haldimand to return Lieutenant Bennett to Grand Portage that summer. On April 8, 1779, the governor informed Major De Peyster that he had told the petitioners the major would send Bennett if he could spare him. Haldimand noted that the proposed second expedition was to be empowered "to settle the little differences" that arose among the traders "as well as to confine and send down any ill-effected or suspected persons resorting there." The expedition, however, was to be carried out, he said, without "any additional expence to the Crown."²⁴

But Bennett and the men of the King's Eighth Regiment never returned to the great carrying place, for the Americans had taken a hand in the war in the Mississippi Valley, and Colonel George Rogers Clark captured British Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton early in 1779. This development created a sense of caution in the British garrisons on the Great Lakes, and Major De Peyster, who was to succeed Hamilton as commander of Fort Lernoult in Detroit, instead dispatched Bennett to Fort St. Joseph near what is now Niles, Michigan, in July, 1779, to intercept a rebel fur trader sent out by the Americans at Vincennes in the Illinois country.²⁵

In 1780 Captain Patrick Sinclair, now commandant at Michilimackinac, noted that the king's tools were still at Grand Portage. Sinclair complained that "The North

²²See De Peyster to Haldimand, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:370.

²³"Inventories, Bills of Accounts, and Returns," Haldimand Papers, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:652.

²⁴Haldimand to De Peyster, April 8, 1779, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:356.

²⁵De Peyster to Haldimand, May 2, 1779, Haldimand Papers, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:379. On Bennett's assignment, see *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:382, 389–97, 10:348–53, 19:455, or *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 18:376–401 (1908).

West society are not better than they ought to be," and asked that no passes be given to the Nor'-westers to trade on the Great Lakes that year until the king's stores were returned. Furthermore, Sinclair wrote, Lieutenant Bennett would be able to inform General Haldimand about the "Disposition of the Indians" at the great carrying place.²⁶

From late April, 1781, until mid-June, 1782, Bennett was apparently in Detroit, where he was present at various Indian councils held there. In August, 1782, Bennett was briefly back at Mackinac for about a month while the Eighth Regiment of Foot was engaged in finishing the construction of the new fort on Mackinac Island. Two years later it is known that Bennett, now a captain, was again stationed at Detroit. Having served in America since 1768, the Eighth Regiment to which Bennett belonged was transported back to England in September, 1785. Five years later Bennett retired from the army, sold his commission in England for 2,000 pounds, and returned to the United States, where he and John Askin appar-

ently became involved in land speculation in Ohio and Michigan. When the Americans occupied Detroit in 1796, Askin and Bennett lost their land. Askin returned to Windsor, Ontario, Canada, and Bennett settled in the United States.²⁷

Bennett's expedition to Grand Portage in 1778 was to have one more rather unexpected result. In 1794 the British military decided that it would be desirable to draw a map of the remote parts of Lake Superior. Since actual surveys had "not as yet been made," Deputy Crown Surveyor Patrick McNiff, who received the assignment, based his map on "the journal remarks of a Lieut Bennet[t] of 8th Regt. in his Route from the Sault Ste Mary's to the Grand Portage." Bennett's journal has not been located, but McNiff's map, delineating a portion of the Canadian shore of Lake Superior between the Sault and the Pic River, has survived.²⁸

Although the British military expedition to Grand Portage in 1778 did not provide any long-term solutions to the trading problems at the western end of Lake Superior, indirectly the American Revolution did. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the war in 1783, placed Grand Portage in American territory. The treaty, however, had no immediate effect on the operations of the North West Company there, and the firm continued to grow and flourish until it monopolized the trade on the upper Great Lakes in the 1780s and 1790s. That situation began to change after the ratification of Jay's Treaty of 1794 under the terms of which the British at long last agreed to withdraw from posts in the United States by 1796. To speed the process, American customs officers began to levy large duties on British goods using the Great Lakes, and the American Congress on March 30, 1802, passed an act which seemed to say that trading permits would not be issued to British citizens. About the same time the Americans threatened to levy a tax on everything that went up the Grand Portage Trail.²⁹

The North West Company, seeing the handwriting on the wall, decided to abandon Grand Portage. Sometime between 1801 and 1803 the company — in part to avoid the financial problems American independence had created for it — began building across the border in Canada the fur trade depot that was to become Fort William on Thunder Bay. The firm probably carried off to Thunder Bay on its sailing vessels windows, doors, locks, and hardware from the Great Hall at Grand Portage and demolished the rest of the buildings there, perhaps about 1805.³⁰

Attempts by Paul Hervieux to trade at Grand Portage under an American license in 1802 led to the destruction or loss of his supplies and goods. In a successful legal case before the Court of the King's Bench in Montreal in 1804, Dominique Rousseau, Hervieux's employer, recovered part of his losses from the North West Company. Rousseau again challenged the company in 1806 in

²⁶ Sinclair to D. Brehm, May 29, 1780, in *Michigan Historical Collections*, 9:552.

²⁷ On Bennett's movements, see *Michigan Historical Collections*, 10:472, 543, 587; 11:423; 20:44, 237, 259; Dunnigan, *King's Men At Mackinac*, 17-19, 33; Charles H. Steward, comp., *The Service of British Regiments in Canada and North America: A Resume*, 99 (Ottawa, 1964); [Thomas Hughes], *A Journal by Thos. Hughes*, 141 (Cambridge, England, 1947); David Mercer to Askin, April 29, 1790, in Quaipe, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:364. British Army, *British Army Lists and Records*, 1790, p. 84, in William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, dates Bennett's commission as captain on September 13, 1783.

²⁸ Dated October, 1794, McNiff's map is in the Ontario Provincial Archives. See also McNiff to D.W. Smith, October 19, 1794, Surveyors Letters, vol. 3, no. 99, in Ontario Provincial Archives. A smaller version of McNiff's map is printed in Bain, ed., *Travels & Adventures*, facing page 232.

²⁹ For Jay's Treaty, see United States, *Statutes at Large*, 8:80-88. On the levying of custom duties and the financial effects of American control on the North West Company, see [William McGillivray], "Note," in Public Archives of Canada, *Report for the Year 1928*, 71; testimony of David Thompson, McGillivray, and others, in 22 Congress, 2 session, *House Documents*, no. 451, p. 119, 123, 128, 129, 131 (serial 331); David Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 42, 43 (New York, 1964).

³⁰ Edwin E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857*, 189-93 (Toronto, 1967); Gabriel Franchère, "Narrative of a Voyage," in Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, 6:386 (Cleveland, 1904). Detailed archaeological excavations were begun at the site of the Great Hall in 1970 by Alan R. Woolworth and the author. Very little evidence of building hardware or window glass was found. The absence of such materials suggests that reusable building components were removed for reuse at Fort William, a procedure known to have occurred at other fur posts. In the late eighteenth century, many manufactured items were expensive. This was particularly true on the frontier, where the cost of transportation further increased the prices of these objects.

a second case which was settled out of court. This one involved a trader named De Lorme, who with an American license wanted to cross the great carrying place in 1806, but Alexander McKay and North West Company men came down from Fort William and “proceeded to fell trees across the road, at the portages, and on all the narrow creeks” so that De Lorme could not use the Grand Portage.³¹

A merger of the North West Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1821 at last brought an end to the fierce rivalries among British traders of the period. When David Thompson visited Grand Portage in 1822 to survey the boundary, he found “red clover blooming over depressions in the soil” that marked the sites of buildings. But competition between British and American firms continued. Even as late as 1824 the Hudson’s Bay Company still controlled the Indian hunters living at Grand Portage. Henry R. Schoolcraft reported that when John Johnston, an American customs officer and fur trader, went to Grand Portage to trade in 1824, he found the Chippewa being “carried off in trains” to Fort William by British traders who wished to “prevent their furs from being sold to American traders.”³²

A copy of Patrick McNiff’s map of 1794, a few paintings of the Revolutionary War period, and some artifacts recovered in archaeological excavations at Grand Portage and Fort Michilmackinac are all that remain to remind us of the colorful pageantry that unfolded almost 200 years ago during the only British military expedition

to Minnesota in the American Revolution. Today Grand Portage is a national monument, and the North West Company’s buildings of its heyday are being reconstructed by the National Park Service. Both Forts Michilimackinac (at Mackinaw City) and Mackinac, the later island post where Lieutenant Bennett served briefly during its construction, have also been restored and are now Michigan state parks open to the public during the summer months.

³¹Earl of Selkirk, *A Sketch of the British Fur Trade in North America*, 56–61 (London, 1816); Nute, in *Minnesota History*, 21:118–20.

³²Nute, *Lake Superior*, 308; Schoolcraft, in 22 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 90, p. 43 (serial 213).

THE PHOTOGRAPH on page 198 is by Kenneth Carley. The drawing of the “Welcome,” the photograph of its reconstruction on page 202, and photographs of buttons on page 205 are all published through the courtesy of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission. Reproduction of the paintings on page 204 is through the courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada. The McNiff map on page 206 is published through the courtesy of the Ontario Archives, Toronto. The portrait of Major De Peyster on page 203 is from Arent Schuyler De Peyster, *Miscellanies by an Officer*, frontispiece (1888). Photographs of John Flatte’s medals on page 208 are by Nancy D. Korf, National Park Service, Grand Marais. The photograph of Mike Flatte, John’s father, on page 208 is from the society’s collection. Map on page 200 is by Alan Ominsky.

A FADED Union Jack is held up by Mike Flatte, chief of the Grand Portage Indians, in the 1920s when this photograph was taken. The flag and the medals around his neck were given to his ancestors and passed down from one chief to the next.



SILVER PEACE medals with the likeness of King George III now belong to John Flatte, chief of the Grand Portage Indians. The medal shown

at right has the date 1814 on its reverse side. It was probably given to the Indians by the British after the War of 1812. A much younger King George appears on the other medal, and it may be much older. Both have the royal coat of arms, in slightly different versions, on the reverse sides.



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