

3. **Indigenous Knowledge, Literacy and Research on Métissage and Métis Origins on the Saskatchewan River: The Case of the Jerome Family (2004)**

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The difficulties of tracing the origins of a hybrid group where one expects only oral traditions can often be mitigated by researching written archives. The archives of the Jerome family extend over some 200 years: from the French middlemen of the Northwest and the Hudson's Bay Companies to the cultural brokers who in about three generations developed a separate identity as they moved from the Great Lakes to the Northwest to the Red River.

In order to trace the origins of the Red River Valley Métis, the authors used the genealogy of Edward A. Jerome, of Hallock, Minnesota, members of whose family have lived on their farm for over a century and have been in the Red River Valley since the late 1790s. Hallock is 20 miles from Pembina and the farm is located on the Two Rivers, a tributary of the Red River. The Jerome family can trace their paternal roots through the Canadian fur trade in Rupert's Land, although the ethnic designation of "Métis" has no legal status in the United States. Edward Jerome wanted to trace his ancestry, and various lines led him backwards to Jeromes who were the earliest ancestors from Quebec. Jerome discovered that he is a descendant of The Buffaloe, a Pembina Ojibwe hunter, and of his daughter who was the country wife of Alexander Henry the Younger; she was later baptized as "Magdeleine Saulteaux."² We researched these ancestors to determine at what point they arrived in Red River, but also to trace Métis family lines as far back in time as possible to determine their origins in New France as well as their Aboriginal connections. What we discovered is that Jerome's father's line had been "Métis" for nearly 200 years.

Stereotypes of Native people take various forms, but often subtly suggest that Aboriginal history is based on oral history rather than archival research. The implicit message is that Native history is difficult to document and unreliable, so oral history is not as valid as written history; many historians privilege the written text over oral sources and ignore the problems of unreliable texts. The other problem is that not all families possess an oral tradition. While an oral tradition might be possible in some families, it does not work in many cases where family and community history has been ignored. Cultural memory is often repressed in the face of racism, where people are made to feel ashamed of their Aboriginal background and are taught to forget about their Native ancestors while promoting immigrant (European or Canadian) relatives who are acceptable in the dominant society because they are “white.” This is particularly true in cases like Métis history in the United States, where the Métis descendants of the fur trade are not even recognized as Aboriginal. If they do not have Indian status with a particular band, they are not “Indian”; yet they often experience racism in local communities, especially if they look different from other people who are the descendants of immigrants. How do they offset the shame engendered from the cruelty of racism?

Edward Jerome encountered this repression of Métis history when he asked his father, Edward Jerome, Sr., about his background: His father told him to “forget it because it will never do you any good.” When interviewed by a local historian in the 1980s, Jerome Sr. was reluctant to talk.³ Edward Jr. had been curious when his cousin Frank Jerome wrote to the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (HBCA) in London, UK, and found references in HBCA journals to Jeromes who were Cree interpreters along the North Saskatchewan River. Another cousin, Dorothy Jerome Kalka of Pembina, North Dakota, also researched family history in the Saint Boniface and Pembina Church records. Edward Jr. undertook genealogy research on various fronts and then in the 1980s and 1990s carried on the research into the HBCA in Winnipeg. Swan started to collaborate with him in 1991, and we have published several articles on ancestors from the Saskatchewan and Lake Superior areas, and produced Swan’s doctoral dissertation: “The Crucible: Pembina and the Origins of the Red River Valley Métis.”⁴

The intention of this article is to demonstrate that Métis genealogies can be followed up with archival research to produce historical family studies. This is an option for Aboriginal and Métis families where the oral tradition and stories have been lost or culturally repressed, or as a complement to existing oral histories. This methodology is also a challenge to the stereotype that Aboriginal history is only based on the oral tradition. Ethnohistorians

using insights from anthropology and history have demonstrated that indigenous knowledge can also be based on the expertise gained from archival research. Jerome personally felt that it was important for him to document from written sources information about his ancestors; using his family insights into language and other cultural issues rounded out the picture. We feel this approach has been remarkably successful, partly because the Hudson's Bay Company in Winnipeg provides extensive documentation of the fur trade through documentary sources such as post journals, account books, district reports, correspondence and maps. This type of research can answer historical controversies about such questions as the origins of the Métis outside of the Red River Valley. Although this ethnic identity was first articulated during the Fur Trade War in 1815–16, we wanted to document how the Jerome family moved to Red River, from where, and when? Who were these Métis ancestors and who were in the formative generation of French Canadian voyageurs and Native women? Can they be named?

Edward Jerome identified François Jerome as the earliest voyageur from Quebec who was in the North West during the French regime and made the transition to the new fur trade in the British regime as a trader after 1763. There were several generations of Jeromes on the Saskatchewan River before they moved south in the 1820s. While it is difficult to identify exactly who was the first Métis in this family, our research showed that it is possible to trace the family and their movements through the generations and to show how they developed as voyageurs, traders, interpreters, buffalo hunters, and later as Red River Valley settlers.

French Canadian voyageurs did not always move directly from Quebec to the North West. As Jacqueline Peterson pointed out, communities of mixed ancestry people grew up in the Great Lakes region, especially at major trading centres like Detroit, Michilimackinac and La Baye (Green Bay, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan).⁵ As the Great Lakes trade was developing in the 1700s, fur traders from Quebec also penetrated the Western Plains, looking for the North West Passage to the Orient, and more specifically the *mer de l'ouest*. Indian reports suggested a large, inland body of water which French explorers hoped would lead them to a river running west to the Pacific Ocean and an easy sailing route to China.⁶ The La Vérendrye men found that there was much confusion over the geography of the interior of North America.⁷

The family of Pierre Gaultier, Sieur de la Vérendrye, led and organized these early French explorations of the interior of North America, opening up the area west of Lake Superior, called the *pays d'en haut* (the upper country, or, in English, the North West).⁸ The goals of the fur trade and exploration

sometimes conflicted. The French government and colonial administrators in New France wanted to know the potential of the western side of the continent for economic development, but did not want the expense of subsidizing the expeditions. To finance their explorations, the colonial administrations of New France encouraged Pierre Gaultier, his sons and their *engagés* (voyageurs), to trade with the local Indians. The Sieur de la Vérendrye undertook the fur trade cautiously, but had the genius to establish a string of posts along the interior waterways which could provide food and support for his explorations because it was too far to return to Quebec each fall. He thus pioneered the system of wintering in the interior which made the Montreal-based fur trade possible. The posts they built included Kaministiquia at Thunder Bay, Fort St. Charles on Lake of the Woods in 1732, Fort Maurepas on the southern edge of Lake Winnipeg in 1734,⁹ Fort Rouge at the Forks of the Red and Assiniboine in 1737, and Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine near present-day Portage la Prairie in 1738. After the father Pierre retired in 1742, his sons continued his work by establishing Fort Bourbon on Cedar Lake, at the entrance to the Saskatchewan River west of Lake Winnipeg, and Fort St. Louis (Fort à la Corne), near the forks of the Saskatchewan River, several years before the fall of New France (1763). As Gerald Friesen noted:

This chain of posts was designed not only to control the highways of the fur trade and to protect the most effective route to the Rockies and the western sea, but also to cut directly across the flow of furs to the English on the shores of Hudson Bay. Thus, the competitions between French and English intensified once again. As was the case at the close of the preceding century, the French won the lion's share of the trade.¹⁰

As a result of these interior posts, the French were able to intercept Cree and Assiniboine middlemen before they took their furs to Hudson's Bay, and traded with them along the fringe of plains and parkland, so that the transportation of furs and goods was undertaken by the French rather than the Indians. Through loss of furs, the Hudson's Bay Company traders in their bayside posts realized that Canadian competition was cutting into their business, and they began sending young men westward with their Indians to gather intelligence about the competition and to recommend new methods of dealing with the Canadian "pedlars," as they called them.

The fur trade was a lucrative business, but it also became dangerous when the French allied themselves with the Cree, Ojibwe and Assiniboine against the Dakota/Sioux. The newcomers were drawn into traditional

tribal alliances and Indian warfare, which often prevented the easy flow of goods. Eldest son Jean-Baptiste La Vérendrye lost his life along with Father Aulneau on June 8, 1734, at Lake of the Woods when the whole expedition was killed by the Sioux “as a penalty for having armed the Indians of his command against the Sioux in 1734.”¹¹ The father had sent his son to live with the Cree to learn their language and customs, and the French explorers and traders continued this practice as good communication with their allies and customers was a priority.

To undertake these great journeys to the west, La Vérendrye recruited young men from Quebec who paddled the canoes for his expeditions and carried out the labouring jobs of the posts where they wintered. According to voyageur contracts in Quebec notarial records, François Jérôme, the son of a French militia officer by the same name, was one of these young men. His father’s whole name was François Jérôme dit Latour dit Beaume, who had come from Brittany to Montreal in 1698 and married Marie-Angélique Dardennes in 1705 in Montreal.¹² They had 13 children, including two sets of twins; the eldest son, François Jr. was born in August 1706. After 1718, the family moved to the parish of St. Laurent on the island of Montreal.¹³

François Jr. first engaged for the West in 1727, his voyageur contract vaguely stipulating that he was engaged by M. De Villiers to make a trip to the *pays d’en haut*.¹⁴ The exact destination was not named. On October 12, 1733, he married Marie-Denise Denoe dite Destailis. His mother-in-law was Jeanne Adhémar, a sister of the Royal Notary. Her father was Antoine Adhémar de Saint-Martin, and his son, Jeanne’s brother, succeeded him to the title; Jean-Baptiste Adhémar became Royal Notary in 1714, and he was François’s uncle by marriage. The prestige of being married to the Royal Notary was passed down through several generations of Métis families in the North West, along the Saskatchewan and into Red River, as various descendants used the label “dit St. Martin” or “St. Matthe,” corrupted in English as “Samart.”¹⁵

François Jerome and Marie-Denise Denoe had eight children, baptized in Montreal between 1735 and 1746; the five boys and three girls were registered in the parish of Notre Dame de Montreal. Two died as infants. In the genealogy of Tanguay, however, there are no continuing descendants of this line, although there are listed descendants of some of François’s brothers, Nicholas-Charles and Jean-Baptiste.¹⁶ This is perhaps an indication that François’s male descendants moved out of Montreal, most likely because of the fur trade.

François’s career as a voyageur and later a trader continued from 1727 to 1757 (see Figure 1 for the geographical extent of his contracts). In the 1730s,

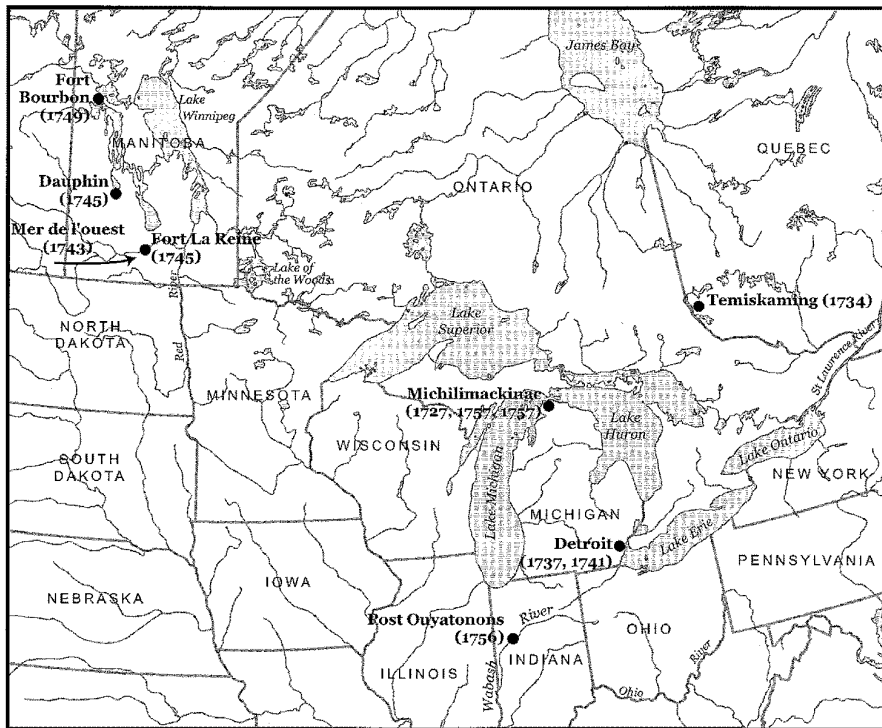


Figure 1. Fur trade voyager contracts for François Jerome, 1700s.

Note: Modern provincial and state boundaries are included for reference. Source: *Rapports de l'Archiviste du Québec*. Cartography by Douglas Fast, University of Manitoba.

he was appointed to the French post at Detroit, south of Lake Huron.¹⁷ The father, Pierre Gaultier, Sieur de la Vérendrye, had retired in 1742, but his sons were carrying on his exploration work.

In 1743, François Jérôme made a contract with the “Sieur de la Vérenderie” [*sic*] to go to the Sea of the West.¹⁸ In 1745, François was hired by the Sieur Maugras to go to Forts La Reine and Dauphin in the same vicinity as the famous sons.¹⁹ Fort La Reine was located on the Assiniboine River near Portage la Prairie, and Fort Dauphin was between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis. In 1749, François Jérôme had a contract for Fort Maurepas²⁰ and Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine.²¹ Both these forts had been established by the La Vérendrye family, as they were located on strategic waterways which connected with Manitoba Lakes that led to the northern reaches. In 1756, François Jérôme *dit* Latour contracted to the Sieur Louis Lamay Desfonds to Apostle Ouyatonons, the Wabash Post in the Illinois country southwest of Lake Michigan.²² The following year, he must have

made enough money to hire his own voyageurs and thus became a trader himself: "Sieur François Jérôme *dit* Latour" hired Joseph Beaumayer and Gabriel St. Michel to go to Michilimackinac.²³ This suggests that the latter French post on the Michigan shore between Lake Michigan and Lake Superior was now François's base of operations and that he may have stopped returning to Montreal each season.

If a trader wanted to penetrate the forested interior beyond Lake Superior, he had to establish a base in the Great Lakes and arrange to have the goods brought from Montreal; then when the furs came out, a Montreal crew would return with them. The voyageurs from Montreal were called *mangeurs de porc* (pork-eaters). The North West voyageurs in the interior were known as the winterers; although their diet at the posts consisted mainly of fish and meat, or pemmican, the canoe brigades ate Indian corn and wild rice traded from the Indians. The Canadian companies used the model of La Vérendrye to organize posts at regular intervals to stockpile food, as the voyageurs did not have time to hunt and fish on their long journeys. Men like François, who organized the trade and supervised the voyageurs, were called "wintering partners" and they had the support of Montreal merchants and financiers who organized the trade goods to go to the Great Lakes as well as the selling of the furs in Montreal and Europe. The pioneering efforts by the La Vérendrye family and the Great Lakes traders like François Jérôme *dit* Latour, who obviously learned a great deal when he worked for them, developed the extensive Montreal-based trade network which culminated in the North West Company, which spanned the continent to the Pacific and the Arctic Ocean by the 1790s. Obviously, when British partners became involved in the Canadian companies after 1763, they did not have the expertise and depended on the experience of their French traders and voyageurs to keep pushing north and west to the finest fur fields of the Athabaska. Generally, anglophone historians like A.S. Morton emphasized the British leadership of the NWC after 1763, and little is known of the French traders and voyageurs who continued to work for the Canadian concerns after the fall of New France.

The sons of Pierre de la Vérendrye continued with the fort-building north of the Assiniboine and west of Lake Winnipeg. Between 1741 and 1743, Pierre Gaultier de La Vérendrye (second son of Pierre Sr.) built Fort Dauphin, near Lake Winnipegosis, while other members of their group built Fort Bourbon to the northwest of Lake Winnipeg, and Fort Paskaya (The Pas) to the northwest of Cedar Lake.²⁴ François Jérôme may have been involved in the establishment of the posts west of Lake Winnipeg. Jérôme became associated with the La Vérendrye family in 1743 when he signed a

contract to explore for the *mer de l'ouest*, and later in 1745 with the Sieur Maugras for Forts La Reine and Dauphin.

The Sieur Pierre Gamelin Maugras was the cousin by marriage of Louis-Joseph Gaultier de la Vérendrye, also known as Le Chevalier, Louis Joseph Gaultier (the fourth son of Pierre Gaultier de la Vérendrye and Marie-Anne Dandonneau),²⁵ so it appears that Jérôme was most closely associated with this member of the famous family. Le Chevalier had spent from the spring of 1742 to July 1743 exploring the plains south-east of Fort La Reine, looking for the "Sea of the West." According to his biographer, Antoine Champagne, he was accompanied by his brother, François Gaultier du Tremblay, two Frenchmen, and some Indian guides. Although François Jérôme was engaged to explore for the Sea of the West in 1743, it is not clear whether he accompanied the La Vérendrye brothers in 1742–43.²⁶ This trip greatly increased geographical knowledge of the central plains, and also proved there was no Sea of the West in that area: the large body of water described by the Indians was probably Lake Winnipeg.²⁷ Before he died, La Vérendrye Sr. decided to focus his explorations on the north and the Saskatchewan River.

The governor of New France, Charles de Beauharnois, had a master plan to extend French control of the west; but it suffered from the vagaries of French politics and the explorers had trouble getting the financial support they needed. Pierre Sr. had been replaced as commandant for the *poste de l'Ouest* in 1743 while his sons stayed in the west:

In 1747 [Beauharnois] sent Pierre and the Chevalier [Louis Joseph] de la Vérendrye to carry on the trade of the Western Posts, doubtless hoping that the Court would relent, as indeed it did and reappoint the father [Pierre as commandant]. The sons spent the winter at the northerly posts facing the English. In the spring of 1749, the Chevalier ascended the River Saskatchewan [Paskoyac] probably from Fort Bourbon, to the confluence of the north and south branches "where [there] is the rendezvous every spring of the Crees of the Mountains, Prairies and Rivers to deliberate as to what they shall do—go and trade with the French or with the English." That year the French carried off the main part of the trade in small furs at the expense of York Fort.²⁸

In the late 1740s the sons stayed in the west, while their father tried to raise more capital for their exploring projects and their men continued to pursue the fur trade and take furs away from the English on the bay.

Unfortunately, Pierre Sr. died in December 1749 in Montreal while his sons were recalled to Quebec for various military engagements.²⁹ It is generally assumed by historians that when the French officers were recalled to New France to defend it, everyone left and the French lost the colony in 1763³⁰; little is known of the French traders who worked with the military and who were taking the furs away from the HBC.

When Jérôme went to Fort Bourbon in 1749, he was not a soldier like the La Vérendrye brothers but a voyageur and trader. In May 1749, the master of York Factory received a letter from François Jérôme, asking for a list of prices and proposing a little *commerce caché*, or private trade. The French trader also showed his wisdom based on experience in dealing with the Natives:

As it came to our knowledge by the bearer of the said letter that you was ready to send one of your men in those parts, you may do it with all safety and fear nothing on our side. Leave the Indians quiet as we do. Although we have an officer with us, If you have any money, Goods or otherwise, we might settle a little private trade. Send us word at what price you take Beaver...

He sent along his broken oboe with the Cree middlemen, asking that it be repaired by the blacksmith at the fort: "I send by the Bearer of the Letter a Hautbois to get mended and in so doing, you will do me a sensible pleasure. You will give it to the Bearer of the Letter, and I shall have the Honour to send you the payment next year or bring it myself."³¹ Historian A.S. Morton noted that this was the "first evidence of the plaintive reed by the shores of a western lake."³² John Newton, the master at York, dismissed the French trader's proposal, but copied a translation of his letter in his journal; the original must have been in French.³³

In the early 1750s, the HBC masters at York Factory were so concerned at the threat to their trade that they began sending young men back with the Cree traders to explore and gather information about the Canadian traders, the "pedlars." Anthony Henday left York Factory in June 1754 and travelled along both branches of the Saskatchewan, reporting on the vast buffalo herds and resources of the plains. He also learned that the Cree and Assiniboine were middlemen in the trade, gathering up the furs of the Blackfeet who did not want to make the long trip to Hudson's Bay.³⁴ Gerald Friesen described the problems that Henday encountered in getting the plains furs back to York:

But when his party commenced the long journey toward York, their sixty newly built canoes heavy with the furs they

had gained in trade, they did not breeze past the French posts as Henday had hoped but rather stopped at each one for a little relaxation. At Fort la Corne,³⁵ for example, “the master gave the natives ten gallons of adulterated brandy and has traded from them above one thousand of the finest skins.” The story was repeated at Fort Basquia, and when the flotilla reached Hudson Bay in later June, many of the best and lightest furs had been left behind with the French...³⁶

In one version, Henday described the French trader he met at Basquea (The Pas):

The Master invited me in to sup with him, and was very kind: He is dressed very Genteel, but the men wear nothing but thin drawers, and striped cotton shirts ruffled at the hands and breast. This House has been long a place of Trade belonging to the French, and named Basquea. It is 26 feet long; 12 feet wide; 9 feet high to the ridge ... and divided into three Apartments: One for Trading-goods, one for Furs, and the third they dwell in.³⁷

Geographer A.J. Ray noted that the only reason the Cree and Assiniboine made the arduous trip to the Bay, according to Henday, was to get Brazil tobacco from the English traders.³⁸ Henday had complained in his journal: “It is surprizing to observe what an influence the French have over the Natives; I am certain he hath got above 1000 of the richest skins.”³⁹

Friesen also contends that the problems arising from French competition were not communicated to the London Committee, who only saw an “expurgated version of Henday’s full journal, and his information was not acted on for another two decades.”⁴⁰ Presumably he is referring to the establishment of the first HBC post in the interior, Cumberland House, established by Samuel Hearne in 1774.⁴¹ The York masters continued to send out exploring expeditions which brought back information about the French pedlars in the 1760s and 1770s, involving people such as Joseph Smith, Joseph Waggoner, Isaac Batt, George Potts, Henry Pressick, William Pink and Matthew Cocking. A.S. Morton noted that nine voyages were made into the interior from 1754 to 1762.⁴²

François Jérôme was obviously part of these early French trading operations along the Saskatchewan, and he gained valuable experience about the logistics of the trade without having to deal with the politics of the French court and colonial administration like the La Vérendrye family. The French

traders saw an opportunity when the war in New France called their officers home, and they took advantage of the lack of colonial control to continue their Indian trade on the strategic Saskatchewan route. Encounters documented in the HBC journals by the inland British visitors suggest their continuing presence, although Canadian historians have largely ignored them. The fact that HBC men kept journals that have survived meant that explorers like Anthony Henday were extolled while the French traders were almost invisible.⁴³ Morton observed this contradiction more than most:

The Frenchmen remaining at the posts were little more than voyageurs and clerks long in the trade. Among them, probably, were Louis Menard at Nipigon, the elusive François on the Saskatchewan, and perhaps a Blondeau at La Reine. One by one the posts were abandoned, no doubt for lack of goods. La Reine was still open in the winter of 1757–58, when Joseph Smith was on the Assiniboine. In the spring Fort Bourbon was burnt. It was not reoccupied. In 1757, La Corne's Fort St. Louis was closed; in 1759, Fort Paskoyac. That summer a Frenchman named Jean-Baptiste Larlee came down from this last post to York Fort to seek employment. He was sent off to England... He reported that ... Frenchmen were building where Henday had proposed that the Company should open a post (at Moose Lake). By 1760 all the French posts on the Saskatchewan were closed.⁴⁴

It seems unlikely that all the French military posts closed by 1760, because some of the traders stayed in the west. When HBC man William Pink encountered the French peddlars in the spring of 1767, the Indians told him that the Canadian houses had been on the Saskatchewan for at least ten years, i.e. 1757, before the end of the French regime. François Jérôme had been sent to the Wabash River in Illinois country in 1756; but at that time the trade became free and he hired his own men at Michilimackinac in 1757 and returned to the Saskatchewan.⁴⁵ Morton reports a story from Fort Bourbon in 1757, when HBC trader Joseph Smith met the French master over a pot of brandy. The French leader questioned his guest about their involvement in the Seven Years War and whether the fur traders should allow military conflicts to interfere with the trade: "What if the King of England and the King of France are att [*sic*] war together, that is no reason why we should, so Lett us be friends."⁴⁶

The Elusive "Franceway"

It was a long way back to Montreal and it was probably around this time

that the French traders started using Michilimackinac and Grand Portage as rendezvous points⁴⁷ so that they could take their furs out in the spring and return with their Canadian goods before the cold weather in October.⁴⁸ After the Seven Years War ended, there was no official sanction for interior trading and no licenses granted until 1767.⁴⁹ After working west of Lake Superior since 1743, François Jérôme had acquired knowledge of local Indian customs and of the Cree language, which helped him pursue a successful trading career. By 1757, he was in charge of his own crews and continued his role as a wintering partner for another 20 years along the Saskatchewan.

There is some disagreement in the literature about when the first Canadian traders entered the North West after the end of the war because trade licenses were not issued until 1767. However, contemporary documents hint at an illegal trade before licenses were authorized. W.S. Wallace observed that the Moose Factory journals from James Bay reported that Indians had seen the Canadians since 1761.⁵⁰ A.S. Morton noted that Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher wrote to Governor Haldimand that the first trader from Michilimackinac to the interior was reported in 1765. He asked rhetorically:

There were men, then, who snapped their fingers at the Regulations, and from 1765 slunk through into the North-West. Who were they? The historians must now put on the mantle of Sherlock Holmes, point out the delinquents, and track them to their lair.⁵¹

The use of his language suggests colonial dishonesty, rather than entrepreneurial competitiveness. W.S. Wallace identified “Franceway” (surname not mentioned) as the first master pedlar to reach the Saskatchewan in 1767. HBC explorer William Pink saw Franceway’s buildings near The Pas in the spring; but the French were not there, possibly having already left for the Great Lakes rendezvous.⁵²

In 1767, there was a license issued to François Le Blanc (printed as “Blancell”). In the fur trade returns for 1767 at Michilimackinac, Le Blancell was listed as being financed by Alexander Baxter of Montreal to take six canoes to Fort Daphne (Dauphin) and La Pierce (Portage La Prairie or Fort La Reine), valued at 2,400 livres. This was the largest consignment of goods that year; the next highest value was 1,106 livres to Louis Menard, financed by Forrest Oakes.⁵³ “That François Le Blanc was handling business (for himself or for others) in a large way is shown by the value of his cargo,” muses Morton.⁵⁴ Le Blanc as a name then disappeared from the records, but genealogists suggested that this was a surname used by the Jerome family.⁵⁵

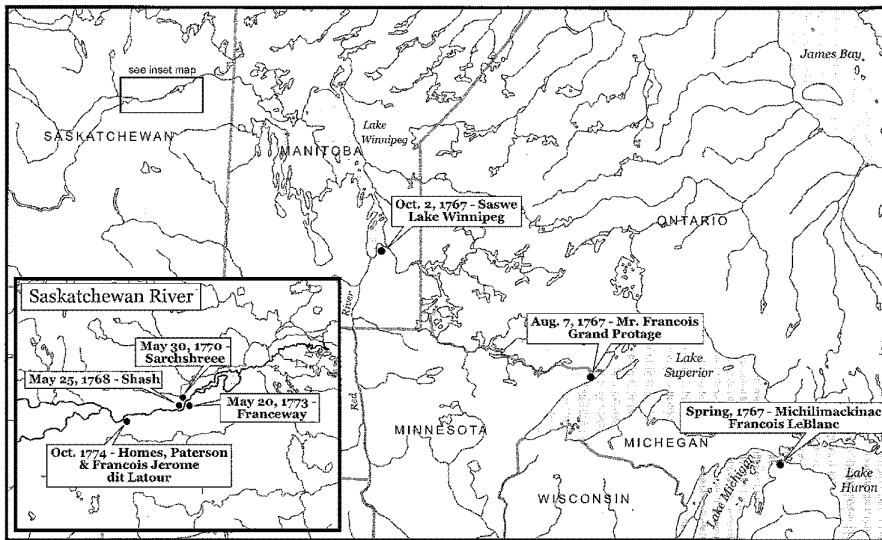


Figure 2. Reports of Mr. François, Saswe, Franceway and François Jerome, 1767–1774. Cartography by Douglas Fast, University of Manitoba.

A number of the HBC traders sent inland encountered a man known to them as “Franceway” or by his Indian name, “Saswe,” or a variant of it from 1767 to 1777. This figure has remained somewhat mysterious because no surname identified him, but circumstantial evidence suggests he was François Jérôme who had been at Fort Bourbon in 1749. Figure 2, tracing Franceway’s movements between 1767 and 1774, suggests that François Le Blanc of Michilimackinac, Franceway and Saswe were the same person. For example, in August of the same summer, British explorers Captain James Tute and Jonathan Carver met “Mr. Francois” at Grand Portage when the Michilimackinac commander Robert Rogers sent along messages with the trader to the starving expedition.⁵⁶

A month later, William Tomison had come inland for the HBC from Fort Severn on the Hudson Bay coast. He did not meet Franceway himself, but observed the Canadian traders on Lake Winnipeg who threatened British trade on September 3, 1767:

Arrived at the great Lake [Lake Winnipeg] where I found many Indians, waiting for the arrival of the English and French pedlars. They informed me that there were two Houses at Misquagamaw [Red] River within 2 days padle across the Lake.⁵⁷

This suggests the first documented penetration of Red River since La

Vérendrye, but it is possible that Canadian traders like Jerome, Charles Boyer and Forrest Oakes had used it before they were observed by the HBC. Tomison also commented on the variety of goods the Canadian traders were bringing into the interior:

they take all kinds of furs, the natives were cloathed in french cloth, blankets, printed callicoos and other stuffs ready made-up and many other sorts of trading goods, their tobacco is white and made up in rolls and brinks, their guns are lightly made.⁵⁸

He was “humiliated” to find that he could not prevent the Indians from selling their best furs to these Canadians.⁵⁹

A month later, in October 1767, on Lake Winnipeg, Tomison met a French trader with ten Frenchmen and fourteen Indians in six large canoes on their way to The Pas, west of Lake Winnipeg, and identified the leader as “Saswe.” This was two months after “Mr. François” left Tute and Carver at Grand Portage. Tomison complained that Saswe refused to talk “Indian” with him. Perhaps this is because the French trader chose not to give out information. Intelligence gathering on the opposition was an important rule for inland men: HBC inland traders were instructed to gather intelligence about the competition, and Saswe may have been reluctant to divulge his destination. Tomison learned through an interpreter that Saswe was financed by a Frenchman in Montreal and was not connected with the traders at Misquagamaw (Red) River. He described Saswe as follows:

his dress was a ruffled shirt, a Blanket Jacket, a pair of long trousers without stockings or shoes, his own hair with a hatt bound about with green binding, a poor-looking small man about 50 years of age, he seemed to have a great command over the men, he lay in the middle of the canoes with his wife and son, each of these canoes carie about 3 tons, his Indian conductor guide padled in a small canoe with his wife who was dresed [*sic*] very fine, when the wind favoured, they have a square sail which helps them greatly.⁶⁰

Tomison’s description provides details of the material culture of the French Canadian traders coming into the North West after 1763. François Jerome was born in 1706, so in 1767 he would have been 61; but a man doing this kind of hard travelling twice a year would have been in good physical shape, even if he was not paddling the canoe like a voyageur. The “poor-looking” comment suggests that he was not ostentatious, but dressed for practicality, like the Indians. Instead of Canadian shoes, he probably wore

moccasins made by his Indian wife. The “blanket jacket” refers to the typical Canadian voyageur *capote* made from a blanket. The reference to the family suggests he had an Indian country wife (she was probably at least twenty years younger than him, since the son sounds like a child; if the son had been a teenager, he would have been paddling the canoe).

Saswe must have enjoyed the respect of his Indian companions as he commanded a large fleet of six canoes. Since he sat in the middle of the canoe with his family and was not paddling, he was in a higher social position than his men, suggesting that he was no longer a voyageur and had become a “bourgeois” or wintering partner. Since he had “great command over the men”—not a given in the social hierarchy of the fur trade—he must have had a gift for treating his men well and with respect, i.e., he was a good leader. After trading four bags of wild rice from Tomison’s Indians, Saswe pushed on and did not stop at The Pas as he had told the HBC man, but continued to Pemmican Point on the Saskatchewan.

Although the HBC traders often underestimated their Canadian competition, Saswe was a successful trader who got along well with his French Canadian engagés as well as his Indian customers, to such an extent that the bayside managers realized that they were losing about a third of their furs every season to these newcomers. William Pink, another HBC trader inland from York, passed the Canadian houses in the spring of 1767, also trying to get information on the Canadian traders for his master, Ferdinand Jacobs. The following spring of 1768, on May 25, Pink passed the house where “Shash” had resided.⁶¹ He was told that Shash was in partnership with James Finley of Montreal, “the first British Pedlar of whom we have record on the Saskatchewan after the ‘conquest.’ He noted that the chiefest persons name is Shash, they are all French men that are heare upon the account that the English did not now the way.”⁶² The following year, on May 16, 1769, Pink observed:

this day i came down to the plase whare the people of Quebeck ware staying as i went up heare i find the people belonging to this man ware not yet come up ... one English man with 12 Frenchmen with him, his name is James Finley from Montreal, he came up with three canewes.⁶³

On Pink’s fourth journey, on May 30, 1770, he noted that no Canadian canoes came up in the fall of 1769. He met a canoe with four Frenchmen who told him that “Sarchstreee” would be coming with four canoes; but that winter had come on too early and they had a good deal of goods taken, presumably by Indians. They had come from forts “at the Bottom of the Bay.” Usually this term referred to the bottom of James Bay, but that was not

on the Canadian route to the interior. Perhaps Pink misunderstood, and the French Canadians were referring to Traverse Bay at the bottom of Lake Winnipeg on the southeast side. The Canadian route through the Winnipeg River emptied into the lake at this point. Although there were no forts there in 1770 (the post farthest west of Lake Superior was at Rainy Lake), it was customary for the traders to meet the Indians (and vice versa) at the mouths of significant rivers, as Tomison had done.⁶⁴ It would take 20 years for the Canadians to realize that it would be a good idea to have a provisioning post at this site (Fort Bas de la Rivière Winipic and Fort Alexander) where they could supply the canoe brigades with pemmican for their long journeys to the Athabasca.⁶⁵

To summarize the reports of this French trader, Figure 3 outlines his progress from the Great Lakes to the Saskatchewan. In the summer of 1767, François Le Blanc obtained the fur trade license at Michilimackinac. On August 7, 1767, Mr. François met Captain Tute and Jonathan Carver at Grand Portage, Lake Superior. On October 2, William Tomison met Saswe with six large canoes and fourteen Indians on Lake Winnipeg, claiming he was going to The Pas. On May 25, 1768, the following spring, on the Saskatchewan River, William Pink passed the house where Shash had resided and then visited the new post where he was partners with James Finley from Montreal. These reports apparently were about the same trader, a man well-known to the Indians along the Saskatchewan, who was the principal Canadian opponent of the HBC.

The third HBC trader who encountered the trader he called Franceway was Matthew Cocking, but before they actually met he received information about him from his Indian companions.⁶⁶ For example, on March 4, 1763, Cocking heard from a young hunter that "Franceway had sent some of his Men through the Country among the Natives to collect provisions..." Franceway knew the importance of collecting country produce before the long winter. Later, he would use the same deployment, called *en dérrouine*, to send his men to the Indian camps to collect their furs without waiting for them to bring these furs into the posts. On March 17, 1773, Cocking observed that "several canoes are laying in places all the way down to the Pedlers principal settlement at the Grand Carrying Place." The Indians told Cocking that they were dissatisfied with Franceway's trading practices and threatened to take away his furs by force if he refused to comply with their demands. This may have been said only to impress the Englishman, because in fact the Indians liked the French traders and Franceway in particular.

On May 20, 1773, Cocking and his Indians arrived at Franceway's settlement and the trader greeted the Indians with a gift of four inches of tobacco.

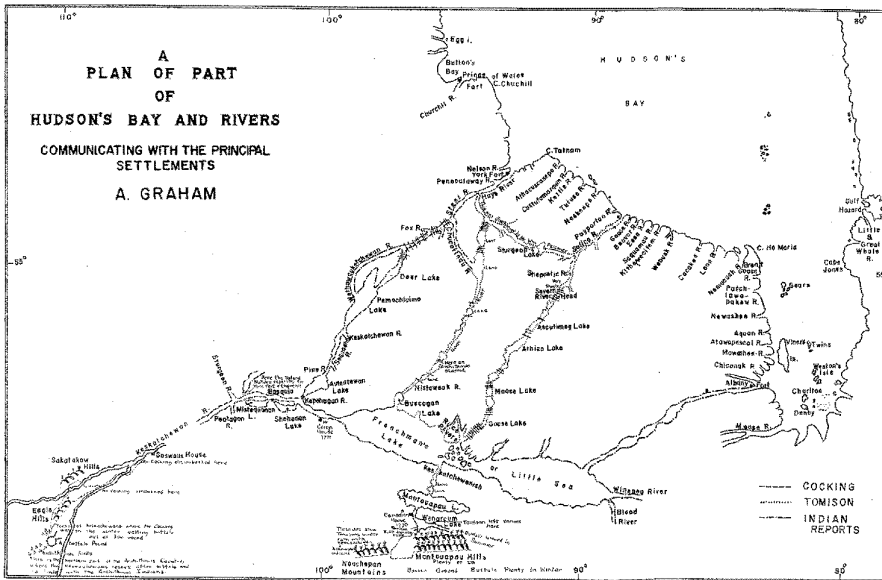


Figure 3. Saswaus House on Andrew Graham’s map.

This map was prepared by R.I. Ruggles, from two original manuscripts (maps G.2/15 and G.2/17) in the HBCA, London. It was based on information received by HBC traders who were sent inland by Graham who remained at York Factory at the bay as well as Indian reports. Graham notes “Saswaus House” on the “Keskathcewan River” east of the fork in the Saskatchewan River. He notes: “Mr. Cocking disembarked here.” See John Warkentin and Richard Ruggles, *Historical Atlas of Manitoba*, Historical & Scientific Society of Manitoba, 1970: 94–95.

Cocking estimated that he had about 20 men with him. He described Franceway’s trading post as follows:

Franceway’s dwelling is a long square Log house, half of it appropriated to the use of a kitchen and the other half used as a Trading and Bedroom with a loft above the whole length of the Building where he lays his Furs. Also 3 small Log Houses, the Mens apartments, the whole enclosed with ten-foot stockades forming a square of about 20 yards. His canoes are 24 feet long measuring along the Gunwhale, 5 quarters broad and 22 inches deep.⁶⁷

Cocking complained about the way the Indians gave away all their furs for a low price and a gift of “spiritous liquors.” Cocking was surprised that the Indians who had previously complained about Franceway were on such good terms with him and were willing to trade away all their furs. On May 21 “The Natives all owned and complained at their hard Dealing of

Franceway and at the same time cannot account for their folly in expending their Furs.”

On May 22, 1773, Cocking accepted an invitation to dinner with Franceway and his country wife. The latter employed a translator, whom Cocking thought was an Irishman; but possibly it was Peter Pangman, whose New England accent might have been confused for an Irish one. Pangman later that summer travelled to York Factory to see if he could import his goods through Hudson Bay; but Cocking’s superior, Ferdinand Jacobs, disabused him of that notion.⁶⁸ What really bothered Cocking was that François allowed the natives and engagés to come and go inside his house when they liked. “They never keep a watch in the night, his reason was that the men would not consent to any such order if given by him.”⁶⁹ In the hierarchical nature of the Hudson’s Bay Company, there were social distinctions between officers and “servants,” their term for the labourers, and social distances between the officers, men and Indians. Since the HBC had not yet moved inland, they were not used to dealing with Indians in their own territory. Keeping a distance between traders and clients of whom Cocking was somewhat afraid was an issue for him. Cocking was critical of Franceway’s methods of dealing with the Indians, but this was more a reflection of his own prejudices than an objective assessment of the French trader’s success. A.S. Morton saw through the pretence:

Cocking, with no goods, no rum, and but little tobacco, a stranger, with a great gulf—an English gulf—between him and the Indians, was helpless before this Indianized Frenchman.⁷⁰

It was precisely the French traders’ ability to live like “Indianized Frenchmen” that made them successful traders in the interior. As Thomas Hutchins at Albany Post pointed out in 1776:

The Canadians have great influence over the natives by adopting all their customs and making them companions. They drink, sing, conjure, scold with them like one of themselves and the Indians are never kept out of their houses whether drunk or sober, night or day.⁷¹

British traders like Hutchins and Cocking found the Canadians’ egalitarian attitudes disturbing to their accepted ideas of the British class structure. Readers should therefore be cautious about accepting literally the judgmental attitudes of traders like Cocking, for example, when he called Franceway “an ignorant old Frenchman.” He also mocked Indian rituals that they used to ensure good hunting and regarded their medicine as superstitious. On October 30, 1772, he observed:

Indians all employed looking after their Traps. The evenings are all spent in smoking and singing their God Songs, every Indian in his turn inviting the rest to smook and partake of a cold collation of Beries; this is done that they may be fortunate in trapping, live long, etc. Which they think has a great effect at the same time neglecting the only method of building many traps, most of them being very dilatory.⁷²

Unlike Anthony Henday who enjoyed living with the Indians and made the most of their hospitality, Cocking depended on them to guide him in a foreign country, but at the same time acted judgmental and wrote critically—not a good way to ensure strong trading relations.⁷³

Franceway understood the nature of fur trade rituals, immediately giving Cocking's Indians some tobacco when they arrived at his camp. Some of his Indian informants told Cocking that they had collected forty skins at the buffalo pound and sent them to Franceway expecting a supply of ammunition and liquor in return. Cocking was at a disadvantage because he only had Brazil tobacco, highly prized by the Indians, but few goods to trade. "But I know Liquor is the chiefest inducement which I find the Natives always go for to the Pedlars in the Winter."⁷⁴

There were other references to Franceway/Saswe in the records of the fur traders. Now the inland traders were not just from York, but from other bay-side posts, such as William Tomison from Severn. Moses Norton, master at Churchill, sent Joseph Hanson inland in 1773 to report on the invasion of pedlars. A.S. Morton writes:

Joseph Frobisher and François were on the Saskatchewan in the Frobisher-McGill—Blondeau interest... An old Canadian who had been upwards of 30 years among the Indians, had come in with three canoes equipped by one Solomon, a Jew from Montreal.⁷⁵

Victor Lytwyn identified this French trader as François Jerome dit Latour, and his financial backer as Ezekial Solomon.⁷⁶ A.J. Rae indicated that in 1774 William Holmes came into the Saskatchewan Country with Charles Paterson and François Jerome dit Latour, with seven canoes on their way to their post at Fort des Prairies (Fort à la Corne, Saskatchewan).⁷⁷ A.S. Morton found references to these pedlars in Samuel Hearne's Cumberland House Journal:

A month after Hearne finished his log hut [at Cumberland House], the Pedlars came up the Saskatchewan on their

way to their wintering grounds. The two Frobishers, Joseph and Thomas, and their partner, Charles Paterson, with François, in the company came... Their partner, Paterson, with François, was going up the Saskatchewan with 12 canoes and 60 men. These two, while in friendly association, were probably connected with different firms in Montreal—Paterson ... with the Frobisher-McGill partnership, and François with Finlay. François, as has been seen, had come inland the year before independently of Blondeau, but had entered into an arrangement and occupied what came to be called Isaac's House jointly with him... Thus, the Pedlars were on all the water-ways converging on Cumberland House.⁷⁸

The fierce competition taught the pedlars that they were better off combining their interests and cooperating so that they could all profit while putting the HBC at a disadvantage.

In 1775, Alexander Henry travelled along the Saskatchewan with Paterson, Holmes and two Frenchmen (unnamed) which is odd because he was probably with the Canadians along the Saskatchewan. He did not mention Franceway, although the latter was still wintering in the area. Morton writes that

There was a Frobisher post somewhere beyond Lake Winnipegosis. A Master along with Isaac Batt was to winter at some place to be agreed upon with the Indians.⁷⁹

After 1784, the references to Franceway were less frequent; and they stopped by 1777, when Cocking reported Franceway had left the country after killing an Indian.⁸⁰ He retired to Detroit, and his death date is unknown.⁸¹

To recapitulate, François Jérôme *dit* Latour, the son of the militia captain in New France, went to the Great Lakes and *pays d'en haut* in 1727. By 1743, he was assigned to the La Vérendrye party to explore for the *mer de l'Ouest*. In 1749, he was working at Fort Bourbon on Cedar Lake, on the strategic route linking York Factory with the interior, and the competition of these Canadians forced masters at York Factory to send men inland to gather information about the competition and persuade the Indians to maintain their custom of trading at the Bay. Several of these men, such as William Tomison, William Pink and Matthew Cocking, encountered a trader named Franceway, Saswe, Shash, or Shashree. His surname was never mentioned and the only French Canadian who had a fur trade license out of Michilimackinac at this time was François Le Blanc. Genealogist Cyprian

Tanguay suggested that the Jerome family used other surnames, such as Beaume/Beaune, "*dit* Latour," and Le Blanc. Both fur trade historians A.J. Ray and Victor Lytwyn argued that the famous Franceway, who was one of the earliest French Canadian traders up the North Saskatchewan and who had been in the country (according to Cocking) for thirty years, was François Jérôme *dit* Latour.

The other piece of the puzzle is that there were Jeromes mentioned in fur trade records as living on the Saskatchewan River, in the area around Fort Carlton, for three generations after François before they moved to the Red River Settlement in the 1820s.⁸² Pierre Jerome/Gerome was an interpreter at Fort des Prairies on the Saskatchewan in 1799 and 1804.⁸³ Similarly, when Alexander Henry the Younger moved to Fort Vermilion in 1809, he hired "Jerome" as his Cree interpreter.⁸⁴ The fact that this man was working as a Cree interpreter suggests that either he had been living in the area for a long time or he had a Cree wife and children.

Pierre Jerome died at Carlton in 1821 and the officer in charge, John Peter Pruden, suggested that he had been "many years in the service of the NWC as Interpreter for the Crees and I should suppose he must be upwards of 80 years of age."⁸⁵ This would put his birth at about 1740.⁸⁶ At the same time there was at Fort Carlton a young Martin Jerome aged about 20 years old, but it appears that a Martin Jerome Sr. was between the generations of Pierre and Martin Jr. Martin Jr. listed his father as Martin Sr. on his marriage certificate; and his sister, Marie Louis Jerome, born in 1803, listed her father as Martin on her St. Boniface marriage record.

Henry's journal also suggests that the man he used as Cree interpreter was younger and more active. When he worked at Fort Vermilion in the winter of 1809–10, he worked *en déroutine* collecting furs from the Crees: for example, September 19, "Jerome returned from the Cree camp, where there are 20 tents"; February 13, "I sent Jerome off *en déroutine* to Mistanbois"; February 20, "Jerome and [La]Rocque cutting out pemmican bags"; May 21, "Jerome & the lads supply us with fish."⁸⁷ Jerome also appears on Henry's census of 1809 with no wife, but with four children. On the June 3, 1810, roster of families we find that in 17 tents for Henry's men, Jerome and LaPierre shared a tent with 2 men, 1 woman and 5 children.⁸⁸ These records suggest that Jerome had lost his wife and was raising the four children himself. However, only two of the four later showed up in Red River Settlement in the 1820s. Jerome's father was probably Martin Jerome Sr., who had no birth record in Quebec and was probably born along the Saskatchewan and lived there all his life.

In the North West Company Fort des Prairies Equipment Book of 1821,

Martin Jerome, age 19 (born around 1802) has an account, showing him to be a "Native of Fort des Prairie," i.e., born on the Saskatchewan; his good friend, Jean-Baptiste Letendre Jr., was also listed in the account book. Called "Samart Gerome," Martin did some work for the master at Carlton House in 1821–22. For example: December 17, "Sent off Wm. Gibson and 2 half Breed young men with the packet for Dog Rump Creek"; January 30, "Samart Gerome and Battoshes Son [Letendre] arrived from Dog Rump Creek House, but brought no letters from Edmonton House"; June 5, "Mr. Monro, Samart Gerome, Beauchamps and Gausawap arrived with horses from Edmonton, 15 of which belonged to the Company [HBC] and 6 to private individuals."⁸⁹ Chief Factor Colin Robertson at Norway House requested Pruden to have guides ready for his trip from Carlton to Edmonton in 1822, and suggested that "Jerome and the White Eagle's son are supposed to be the best guides."⁹⁰

In the early 1820s, Martin Jerome Jr. became a freeman and moved to Red River Settlement with the Letendre family after the death of Pierre Jerome. He married Jean-Baptiste's sister Angelique and is listed in many of the subsequent censuses.⁹¹ This migration to Red River by the Jerome and Letendre families paralleled the general movement of freemen and their families to the settlement, where they could raise their families close to schools and churches.⁹² These young men were thus typical of Cuthbert Grant's Métis cavalry: multilingual with French and Cree as their main languages, expert buffalo hunters, and plains traders with no ties to Quebec.

It is not possible to determine the exact relationship of François, Pierre, Martin Sr. and Martin Jerome Jr. (Samart Jerome). It appears that Pierre was born in Quebec, and Martin Sr. and Jr. on the Saskatchewan. Their mothers must have been Indian or mixed-blood, but their identity is unknown. The fate of François's Indian wife and child is also unknown. It seems likely that Pierre was the nephew of François Jérôme *dit* Latour, the son of the latter's brother Pierre, born in 1718. A Pierre Jerome was married in Quebec in 1740; it is possible that he had a son Pierre a year or so later, which would be the right age for the man who was Cree interpreter at Fort Carlton and died at the approximate age of 80 in 1821.⁹³ The difference in ages suggests that Pierre was Martin Jr.'s grandfather, and that Martin Sr. died between Henry's departure (1812) and the consolidation of the fur trade companies in 1821. It is not unreasonable to suggest that there were three generations of Jeromes on the Saskatchewan after François, and that they must have had some connection with him.⁹⁴

John Foster speculated that it was freemen of the 1770s and later, like François and Pierre, who married native women and gave birth to the young

people who became the New Nation, the Métis of the Red River Valley. He argued that going *en dérouine* to the Indian camps, marrying Native women, but still being outsiders led to the development of this separate identity.⁹⁵ The only example he used was that of the Dumont family, whose descendant Gabriel became famous in the 1885 confrontation with the Canadian government.⁹⁶ This was the first step in an inter-generational process of ethnogenesis. Language was also a good indicator of new ethnic identity. It probably took several decades for the in-group language of Michif (French nouns and Cree syntax) to develop in the buffalo hunters' camps, but I think that Foster would have agreed that this probably happened outside of Red River before 1815.

The Jerome family are thus a useful prototype of Métis ethnogenesis; by the third generation of French Canadian descendants living as Cree interpreters, they evolved a separate identity from the parent groups. They became the great horsemen and buffalo hunters, fluent in Cree and using Indian technology to survive on the plains and parkland. They were economically and psychologically independent, giving rise to the name by which they called themselves: *gens libres* or Freeman. They could support their families and hunt communally, sharing with their friends and relatives, while at the same time participating in the capitalist system of profit by trading their surplus dried meat and fat for pemmican to the fur trade companies, who were dependent on them for country produce to supply the canoe brigades to the northern fur fields. Although Ray suggested that the Plains Cree and Assiniboine became the provisioners in the Plains fur trade in the 1790s because the peddlars were taking the furs, it may be that the sons of mixed ancestry who travelled with the Cree bands and spoke Michif took over this function to make a profit rather than for subsistence.⁹⁷

Foster identified the first step in the process, but he was only partly right. It was young men like Martin Jerome Jr. and his friend Jean-Baptiste Letendre Jr. who developed the freemen culture and carved out their economic niche in the provisioning trade, separate from the Quebec traders and Plains Indians, which led to the development of the Métis. After the consolidation of 1821, when large numbers of these families were no longer employed in the fur trade war, they moved to Red River, where they became the dominant group and claimed their birthright to the settlement of the North West.

