

## 5. The Twatt Family, 1780–1840: Amerindian, Ethnic Category, or Ethnic Group Identity? (1997)

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*The northern Métis have often been neglected in favour of their Red River cousins. To redress this imbalance students of history need many focused, exploratory studies based on detailed archival research, permitting to identify the beginnings of mixed-descent groups in the old fur trade area. At the root of this pattern of mixed descent are interest groups which define a corporate identity and therefore shape the ethnic profile of future generations.*

### Introduction

The genesis of this study derives from some intriguing findings on the possible early development of a mixed-descent ethnic group in the Nipawin, Saskatchewan area which were not able to be used extensively in my earlier work on the history of initial cross-cultural contact and the resulting fur trade relations between Amerindian<sup>1</sup> people and Europeans in the lower Saskatchewan River region.<sup>2</sup> It was also stimulated by the early observation of Richard Slobodin that the distinctive cultures and histories of northern Métis groups have been (and we can say to a large degree continue to be) ignored in all of the scholarly attention paid to the Red River and more generally the Plains Métis groups.<sup>3</sup> In fact, one of the primary characteristics of the mixed-descent peoples in the Canadian West is the wide variety of social positions and settings, ecological and economic niches, as well as forms of self- and other-identifications which made these northern mixed-descent groups and their histories notably different from the Red River Métis.<sup>4</sup>

The major historical problem to be addressed here is: did a mixed-descent ethnic population develop as a separate self- and other-identified corporate group at this time and place and, if so, how was this process

accomplished? This article is presented as a vehicle for testing some preliminary ideas and to identify some potential directions for further research. One particular mixed-descent group inhabiting the Nipawin, Saskatchewan area in the latter part of the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries has been named in the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) documents. This examination is a first step in a proposed full-scale study of the emergence of such populations along the lower Saskatchewan River. The current discussion is narrowly limited by the nature of the original research which focussed primarily on Amerindian-European trade relations in this region, as revealed in the HBC journal records from Cumberland House. I also acknowledge the criticism by Frank Tough that this earlier work relied too heavily on "impressionistic data" from the HBC journals, without reference to the statistical sources available in the accounts and census data for example.<sup>5</sup> This preliminary study remains open to this critique. However, it is recognized that, as discussed below, the research will have to be extended well beyond the Hudson's Bay Company Archives series of post journals.

The theoretical underpinnings of this study derive from some of the social scientific approaches to ethnicity. As a starting point, I take it as axiomatic that historical analysis can be broadened and strengthened a great deal by employing social science theory, methods, and data. In combination with historiographical considerations this approach is known as ethno-history.<sup>6</sup> Such adjuncts are useful to historiography as long as the caution of R.A. Schermerhorn is kept in mind: that social theory developed within a modern social context cannot automatically be applied to explain historic situations which may lack the structural characteristics assumed for the validity of the theory.<sup>7</sup> Its true relevance must be tested on data such as those presented here and in the proposed study.

When looking at the history of the development of mixed-descent groups along the lower Saskatchewan River, the social science theories of ethnicity become useful to the analysis.<sup>8</sup> Several factors including geographic origin, common ancestry, kinship, endogamy, physical characteristics, culture, worldview, consciousness of kind, relations of the internal *Gemeinschaft* (or "primary group") type, separate institutions, ecological factors, and territoriality should be considered.<sup>9</sup> The reliance on the use of culture alone to define ethnic groups has been criticized,<sup>10</sup> and alternative discussions of ethnicity theory have focussed on the concept of boundaries (social, physical, psychological) which, although salient, in practice tend to be permeable and flexible—indeed "situational"—and may vary according to whether it is a self- and/or other-identified attribute.<sup>11</sup> Because ethnicity is such a slippery concept,<sup>12</sup> it is well also to consider Bruce G. Trigger's introduction of the

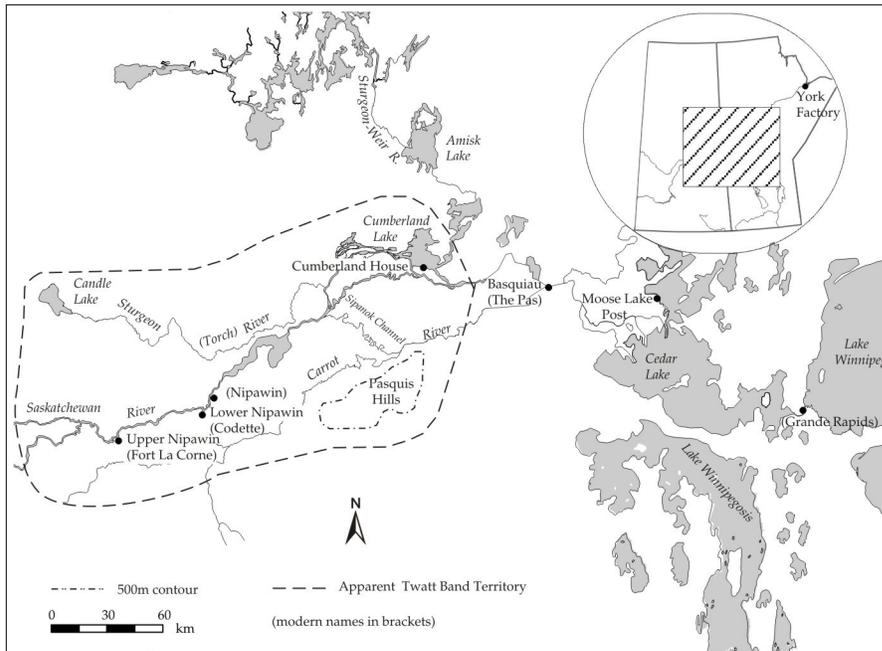


Figure 1. Map of study area showing location of names mentioned in text.

concept of “interest group” as the focus of analysis which examines common goals, behaviour, and, most importantly, common action demonstrated by a particular group.<sup>13</sup> This study will examine the available data using the markers of ethnicity identified in the social science literature, in order to help determine whether or not a functional self- and other-identified mixed-descent ethnic group evolved in the setting in question.

In this approach it is important to distinguish between what is referred to as an “ethnic category” (i.e. a grouping based solely on the perceptions of others) compared to a true “ethnic group” (i.e. a self-identified association of people who act as a corporate body).<sup>14</sup> People may be differentiated into a separate category by outsiders, but unless they identify themselves with and act in concert to pursue common interests, a true ethnic group can scarcely be said to exist. I take the “synthesist position” which holds that both self- and other-identification are necessary for the establishment of an ethnic group.<sup>15</sup> The discussion of whether a true mixed-descent ethnic group developed along the lower Saskatchewan River during this time period must await the full-scale study proposed. The focus here will be on only one particular mixed-descent family grouping and their characteristics.

### Origins of Mixed-Descent Groups in the Region

Several factors—some of which are directly relevant to the case at hand—have been identified in the historical literature as being important in the development of self-aware corporate mixed-descent groups. The early scholarship of Marcel Giraud<sup>16</sup> pointed to the significance in this process of isolation from metropolitan influence and control, combined with the absence of European settlement.<sup>17</sup> The enduring impact of fur trade influences has also been identified as being central to the development of mixed-descent identity.<sup>18</sup> For example, Slobodin has indicated that, in the Mackenzie River district, the origins of the group he labels “Northern Métis” were bound up inherently with the fur trade frontier, in contrast to the “Red River Métis” group in the region who associated together more on the political and other factors related to their specific history in the Red River diaspora.<sup>19</sup> The observations of Hudson’s Bay Company chroniclers James Isham and Andrew Graham had identified the existence of a new order of distinctive mixed-descent people in Rupert’s Land by the 1740s and 1760s.<sup>20</sup> For example, differences in the physical appearance of mixed-descent individuals in comparison to Amerindians were being recognized in populations of the region by the mid- to late 1700s.<sup>21</sup> The factors of isolation from metropolitan influences, the relatively low proportion of Europeans in the “demographic ratio” which resulted in a lack of control by non-Natives over the social situation, and the entire context of the fur trade in the distant hinterland of Red River clearly apply to the following case.

### Origins of the Twatt Band of Mixed Descent

The progenitor of the group of mixed descent which is the focus of this study was Hudson’s Bay Company servant Magnus Twatt. He was born in 1751, a native of Orphir parish in the Orkney Islands.<sup>22</sup> Further research is required, but, if representative of his compatriots who by the end of the 18th century made up close to 80% of the HBC labour force, his background likely would have been subsistence farming in rather harsh, poverty-stricken conditions—a factor which made employment in the wilds of Rupert’s Land relatively attractive to many Orcadians. Most of those entering the fur trade from this locale were from families with little land or influence occupying the lower ranks of Orkney society, until retirement from the fur trade with a sizeable fund of saved wages served to raise their status within their home community.<sup>23</sup> The Orcadians were also strongly influenced by Calvinism and some possessed a sound education.<sup>24</sup> Magnus Twatt had a level of schooling sufficient to enable him to pen some of the Cumberland House journals.

By 1771, Twatt had been taken on by the HBC as a general labourer to

begin his service at York Factory.<sup>25</sup> In 1783 he was transferred to Severn post, returning to York Factory the following year. In 1785 his position was listed as “canoeman,” which would have meant that his duties began to take him inland into the study area. Between 1786 and 1791 he was carpenter and canoeman, becoming carpenter and steerman by 1792. In 1794, at his York inland posting, the titles canoe builder and occasional maritimer had been added. The year 1795 saw Magnus Twatt on a trip to England. He must have returned to Hudson Bay the following year (not in 1797 as the HBCA biographical reference maintains) as, at the end of September 1796, the Cumberland House journal showed that he was placed in charge of Cumberland House upon the departure of Peter Fidler.<sup>26</sup> Until 1800, Twatt was listed as a trader in his York inland posting.

The HBC records reveal that Magnus Twatt was highly regarded as an employee. Writing at Cumberland House in October 1793, Malcholm Ross described Twatt as a “trusty servant” who was worthy of much confidence and responsibility.<sup>27</sup> Evidently, he was also extremely “handy” for, on top of his titled duties as canoe builder, the post journal of January 1794 reported him to be working at the manufacture of sleds and snowshoes, articles for which the company was still largely dependent upon Amerindians.<sup>28</sup> Magnus Twatt also was designated as leader of many parties *en dérrouine* which took him directly into Amerindian camps at a distance from the post with a supply of trade goods.<sup>29</sup> This would have placed him in close extended contact with Cree society, and would have helped to establish the close relations in evidence later. His name headed many of the Cumberland House journals between June 1791 and May 1795 as he was left in charge of the trade.

The first mention of Magnus Twatt’s “family” to appear in the Cumberland House journals came on October 21, 1801 when his unnamed wife and sons arrived at the post, likely to sojourn with him during an illness which was described as the loss of power in the lower part of his body accompanied by delirium.<sup>30</sup> Even though Twatt remained ill, only one day later William Tomison entrusted him with leadership of an expedition to oppose the North West Company (NWC), which was establishing a post in the Carrot River area at the time.<sup>31</sup> In the past, Malcholm Ross had indicated that Twatt was remarkable for his dedication to his duties at Cumberland House. In spite of an injury from a fall in April 1794, Ross had noted, “his will to Work ... is such that I cannot Prevail on him to be at Rest a few days till he gets Better. but is Working now ... & he is hardly able to stand.”<sup>32</sup> This is rather significant, as the vast majority of comments recorded in HBC journals regarding the attributes of workers were negative in character.<sup>33</sup> The

Cumberland House journal reported that Magnus Twatt died on October 23, 1801 while on the mission from Cumberland House to the Carrot River area.<sup>34</sup>

It is evident that Twatt had gained the respect not only of his supervisors but of Amerindians as well. One piece of evidence to support this contention arose in April 1779 when he took up the interests of some Amerindians who had been incarcerated near the Upper Hudson House post by NWC trader William Holmes in an attempt to force them to trade their furs with his concern. When Magnus Twatt protested this treatment, Holmes beat him “in a cruel manner.”<sup>35</sup> Although such an interest may have been motivated more by loyalty to his employer than pure sympathy for the Amerindians involved, it would have served to place Twatt on the side of the aggrieved Amerindians, gained him some currency in their eyes, and may even indicate the operation of the kinship link to his wife’s family. A review of the Hudson House records yet to be undertaken should help to clarify this question.

Further evidence of Twatt’s relatively close relationship with Amerindians became apparent after his death when, on June 6, 1802, Tomison wrote to John Ballanden from Cumberland House that Twatt had been buried by the Amerindians at Carrot River: “the Indians had taken great pains in burying him, they also when in life did attempt to bring him to the House but he was too heavy for them to carry being a long distance from the water.”<sup>36</sup> Such consideration would be consistent with a kin relationship to his wife’s family and positive social connections developed over his time spent *en déroutine*.

### Emergence of the Twatt Band of Mixed Descent

If we can assume that Magnus Twatt’s two sons were at least in their teens when first mentioned directly as being involved in the trade by HBC Cumberland House journalists, their births would have occurred in the late 1780s. This timing would have coincided with Magnus Twatt’s journeys inland from York Factory, beginning in 1785 when he was employed as a canoeman. Of course, company strictures against relations with Amerindian women were much less successfully imposed on HBC servants while they were away from the confines of York Factory.<sup>37</sup> Even lower-ranking company servants such as Twatt often were able to establish long-term and relatively stable relations with Amerindian women.<sup>38</sup>

After the death of Magnus Twatt, the first specific mention of his family being engaged in trading at Cumberland House was made by William Tomison in the journal entry of December 20, 1802.<sup>39</sup> This reference mentioned their arrival “for their father in law,” bringing only ten made beaver,<sup>40</sup>

which was his entire hunt since the previous August. From this we can see that the two young men continued to live with their mother's people and, as was commonly the case with the families of lower-ranking servants,<sup>41</sup> they were being accommodated within the Amerindian social setting, apparently associating themselves with their wives' father in the traditional Cree practice of "bride service" which was expected until the birth of a first child.<sup>42</sup> This was in marked contrast to other "boys" mentioned at that time in the Cumberland House journals who, as the offspring of HBC "gentlemen" such as I.P. Holmes, Alex Kennedy and George Sutherland, were obviously more closely integrated as part of the local society and labour force at Cumberland House then and previously.<sup>43</sup> The status of the father within the hierarchy of the HBC—increasingly in the 19th century two nearly exclusive categories of "gentleman" and "servant"—was a factor which has been identified as being crucial in determining the social placement of mixed-descent children.<sup>44</sup>

It seemed, therefore, that the Twatt boys had been enculturated into a Cree social milieu with what appeared to be limited direct influence from their father. With the present data at hand, it is not possible to determine how much contact Magnus would have had with his family while employed *en dérrouine* away from Cumberland House. This may in fact have been substantial if his wife and family travelled with him while on his missions remote from the post. To paraphrase the lesson HBC seaman and explorer Samuel Hearne had learned several years earlier from his Amerindian mentor Matonabee, "women were made for carrying," and success at almost any enterprise depended on their labour.<sup>45</sup> Traders such as Philip Tumor travelled long distances with women alone and reported that they were as useful as men on journeys.<sup>46</sup> Magnus Twatt himself wrote in August 1793 Cumberland House journal entries that women were sent with HBC servants to help carry provisions to the post<sup>47</sup> and HBC servants were often mentioned to be travelling with their families.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Twatt may have had more contact with and influence on his family than is immediately apparent from the journal records. Further research is required here.

In October 1806 the two Twatt boys were reported arriving at Cumberland House among a party of nine canoes in the company of Brassy and Chukoopan. "Old Brassy," who may have been the young men's father-in-law (or perhaps by this time their grandfather should children have been born serving to end bride service obligations in the meantime), was a leading Cree trader and supplier of country produce, whose territory extended to the north and west of Cumberland House. He was highly respected by Amerindians who, it was noted, brought presents to him from as far afield

as Moose Lake.<sup>49</sup> The Twatts were reported to be in Brassy's party as it left the post on October 5, 1806 with a consignment of cargo from Cumberland House for "Ind" (inland or Indians?). Brassy's death on January 5, 1807 was noted in the post journal as follows: "he was the only old Indian belonging to this place—& much beloved by all the other Indians here—and according to custom the rest will do very little this winter."<sup>50</sup> It is not clear from the journals whether the young Twatts were still included among the five hunters who were said to be associated with Old Brassy at the time.

The Twatt boys, still named only as Magnus Twatt's sons, were next mentioned in association with a party of thirteen canoes under the leaders Belbird, One Eye, Jickoopan (almost certainly Chukoopan above), Cathead's son, Weenitisaway, and others who arrived at Cumberland House on May 26, 1807.<sup>51</sup> Belbird's territory was reported to be near the forks of the Saskatchewan River, some thirteen days' travel west from Cumberland House.<sup>52</sup> It may be that the Twatts were the grandsons (or perhaps sons-in-law) of Jickoopan (Chukoopan) rather than Brassy, since they were named immediately after the former in both the above cases. Further research in the account records should help to firmly establish the Twatt's family ties.

When the Cumberland House journals begin again after an unfortunate eleven-year gap between 1807 and 1818, Thomas Isbister reported the arrival of the Twatts with their mother, their wives and families on July 2, 1818 with 100 muskrat pelts "& are being noisy because we have no rum to give them."<sup>53</sup> As their mother had apparently remarried the year following Magnus Twatt's death, they may have associated themselves with her new husband's band or, as was typical of the highly flexible and dissoluble nature of Cree social organization, had begun a new co-residential group of their own. If included among the group of "Cumb<sup>d</sup> House Indians" referred to subsequently, the Twatts may have traded their "old Iron works, such as hatchets, Chizels, Spears & Fils" at the nearby NWC post for the alcohol they were "very Clamorous for want of." The post journals were silent on the presence of the Twatts again until May 4, 1819 when they arrived with most of the other Cumberland House Cree "in order to partake of the general Spring Bouze."<sup>54</sup> In such cases, their general approach to the consumption of alcohol (which it should be acknowledged was derived from European practice<sup>55</sup>) and the overall fur trade economy was comparable to that pursued by the Amerindians in the region.<sup>56</sup>

By July 1819, we have been informed that the first names of Magnus Twatt's sons were "Mansack" and "Willock."<sup>57</sup> Named first in the journal entry (which tended to be indicative of a leadership role) among a group including Winter Child, Nesannecappoe, Ka Kee Ki Huggeemaco, Wethiny,

and Long Legs, the Twatts and their wives arrived with a good deal of dried meat for the Cumberland House larder. "Mansag" (a variant spelling of Mansack) arrived in company with Big Frog and many others, again with dried provisions, on October 13 the same year.<sup>58</sup> In his Cumberland House report for 1819, Alex Kennedy named "Mansag Twatt" as "A good hunter who knows his value."<sup>59</sup> In concert with a significant number of Cree hunters, therefore, he was obviously participating in the fur trade economy in large part as a provisioner, which meant an intensification of hunting productivity rather than a complete conversion to a dedicated trapping lifestyle.<sup>60</sup>

The variation in spelling continued in an entry made on November 13, 1819 during a measles and whooping cough epidemic: "Mansae Twat a half Breed sent a request by the abovementioned Indians [reference is unclear] to Mr. Holmes to send some provisions for their relief. they are only one Days walk distant in the NW side of the lake in Sturgeon [modern Torch] River."<sup>61</sup> Notable in that the usual terminology applied to the Twatts to date had been "Indians," this is the first instance in which the Cumberland House journals distinguish them as "Half Breeds."<sup>62</sup> According to Jennifer Brown, the term itself was picked up from the NWC in the early 1800s, but was used by the HBC to refer simply to the objective facts of parentage, rather than in the sense of a distinctive sociocultural category as recognized by the NWC.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the HBC traders must have found some real descriptive utility in this term in order to introduce it into their lexicon. The challenge of the proposed research will be to determine the meaning and context of its use in this region.

This terminology for the Twatts continued to be repeated on a sporadic basis such as in naming Willock in September 1829.<sup>64</sup> As became typical practice in HBC parlance,<sup>65</sup> however, the traders referred to the Twatts interchangeably by both terms—sometimes in the same reference—as did Thomas Isbister in this December 14, 1832 journal entry: "Twatt the Half Breed being very Solicitous all fall to purchase a Horse. rather than displease a good Indian I have Sold him one for 40 Skins 1/2 in fine furs."<sup>66</sup> It is clear, however, that the Cumberland House traders had specifically recognized the Twatts as being notable for their mixed descent by the end of the second decade of the 19th century. This is significant as the "other definition" which is one important marker for a true ethnic group.

In late September 1821, Mansack and Willock Twatt were being referred to as "Indians" by Cumberland House master Thomas Swain when they arrived with 350 pounds of dried meat.<sup>67</sup> At this time, their wintering territory was said to have been "some distance" away. From information in the

Cumberland House journals, they appeared to have been maintaining a migratory pattern—based on the seasonal fluctuations in the availability of food resources—similar to that of local Amerindians.<sup>68</sup> Their arrival at the post was variously reported as being from up the Saskatchewan River, Carrot River, Gun Worm River, Candle Lake, Shoal Lake, the Pasquia Hills, and from the Sturgeon [Torch] River areas. Anthropologists would classify this type of subsistence-settlement pattern as rather closer to the latter on the forager-collector continuum, meaning that their “logistical strategy” was based on the well-planned use of several types of resource locations and moving goods to consumers rather than continually shifting camps to game kills.<sup>69</sup> A study of their yearly cycle using the graphic approach suggested by historical geographer Frank Tough<sup>70</sup> could be employed profitably here to identify the seasonal round of the Twatts and compare it to that characteristic of Amerindians in the region. Prior to any formal study of this nature, it appears as if the yearly migratory cycles of the Twatts and local Cree bands were quite similar in nature at the time.

By 1825, however, the Twatts seemed to have established themselves more or less permanently around Nipawin. The locational data in the Cumberland House journals show that this appeared to have been particularly so for Willock by this date.<sup>71</sup> However, both Mansack and Willock also tended to winter at a common haunt in the Candle Lake district, a distance of about 100 kilometres to the northwest of Nipawin.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, references in the journals to either Mansack or Willock appearing from directions other than Nipawin essentially disappeared by 1827. If additional corroborating evidence can be found, these data may indicate the establishment of two other factors characteristic of an ethnic group: a centralized home base, and territoriality.

There is also evidence for the corporate nature of the Twatt’s identity. As early as April 1826, the HBC journals were referring to “The Twatts Band.”<sup>73</sup> For example, the corporate term “Mansack Twatts band” also was used to identify two young men who came to Cumberland House on March 25, 1838 to request that the group’s furs be fetched from “Nepawan” by the HBC men.<sup>74</sup> The Twatt group, therefore, had clearly been specifically named as an identifiable corporate body by the HBC in the mid-1820s. According to sociologist Wsevlod Isajiw, such a perception by others is another crucial marker in the evolution of an ethnic group character.<sup>75</sup>

However, in terms of the perceptions of Amerindians about the Twatt’s identity, on May 1, 1825 Kewaymettaway, a Sturgeon [Torch] River Cree, brought furs to Cumberland House, “Being the hunt of his *brother* [emphasis added] Willock also, Says that Mansack and his party are there also, Not

having got their Credits prevents them from coming to the Fort till they have a trial amongst the rats."<sup>76</sup> This may indicate that Amerindians such as Kewaymettaway did not perceive the Twatts to be a separate and distinct social group, but rather had integrated them within the notion of affinal kinsmen. The Cree in this region considered and named parallel cousins as siblings.<sup>77</sup> Kewaymettaway, therefore, was likely Willock's parallel cousin, that is a son of Willock's mother's sister.

During the time of intense competition between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in this region prior to the union of the two companies in 1821, the Twatt brothers and the group of hunters associated with them had become the focus of a good deal of attention from both adversaries. The Twatts were employing the same strategies as Amerindians were in order to exploit the competitive situation successfully.<sup>78</sup> Cumberland House master I.P. Holmes reported the arrival of Long Legs, who was often mentioned as a provisioner for Cumberland House, and Willock Twatt with 313 muskrat skins on July 29, 1820 stating: "the latter Indian has for some time been trading with the NW<sup>t</sup> but has been induced again to join us, however this cannot be reckon'd any acquisition as both him and his brother Mansack will always be more expense to us than the value of their hunts will amount."<sup>79</sup> Of course, what was being reported here is that, as was common for Amerindian traders, Willock was following his own best interests, which did not necessarily coincide with those of the HBC. This rather rare negative view concerning the value of the HBC trade relationship with the Twatts was contradicted by Alex Kennedy's positive evaluation in his Cumberland House report of the previous year,<sup>80</sup> and this evaluation improved substantially in later years. Even so, the Twatts continued to exploit the trade situation vis-à-vis the HBC from this time until the end of the period under consideration. For example, even after monopoly conditions obtained after 1821, they were able to force the HBC to continue the earlier competitive practice of supplying them with trade goods directly in their camp rather than having to absorb the transportation costs themselves.<sup>81</sup>

In comparison to their Amerindian confreres, it is evident that the Twatts had developed some elements of a special relationship with the HBC at Cumberland House. For example, as Thomas Swain reported on 11 September 1820 when it was learned that they were ill, Willock Twatt and his wife were ordered to Cumberland House until they could recover.<sup>82</sup> Three days later it was noted that Twatt brought geese to the post, and so we can assume he was employed as a hunter for Cumberland House on occasion. Just as the Cumberland House traders depended on local Amerindians for crucial

supplies of “country produce,” meaning that many Amerindians adapted to the fur trade by intensifying traditional big-game hunting activities,<sup>83</sup> the Twatts also contributed a great deal to the Cumberland House larder. At the end of July 1825, Willock Twatt was reported to have arrived “from lower Nepowin”<sup>84</sup> with a good supply of “beat meat,” “piece meat,” grease, dressed moose, swans, and rats, part of which belonged to “three other Indians.” This served to pay credits and trade for rum, tobacco, and ammunition.<sup>85</sup>

As the Twatts tended to be listed first among arrivals at the post, often in company with those such as the Flying Indian, Kewaymettaway, and others, it appeared as if they had become “leading Indians” in the eyes of the HBC in the 1820s. Mansack was reported to have visited the post in mid-October 1827 at the head of a group of ten Amerindians, with the hunts of five others accounting for a total of 10,758 muskrat pelts.<sup>86</sup> It also appeared as if they were similarly regarded by Amerindians. For example, in February 1827 James Leith wrote in the Cumberland House journal that the two Twatts had arrived at the post with nothing to support themselves, as they had used up all the provisions intended to supply a planned marten hunt in order to feed starving Amerindians from Lac la Ronge.<sup>87</sup> Such generosity was commonly expected from their leaders by Amerindians.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, by July 1837 Cumberland House clerk Charles Ross referred in a slip of the pen to “Magnus” (i.e. Mansack) Twatt as “Chief from the Nepiwans.” In July 1839 John Lee Lewes named Mansack as “the principal of our upper Indians,” referring to the Nipawin area.<sup>89</sup>

As early as 1824, the Twatt band clearly was being treated differently than Amerindians were, in that the former group received various special considerations from the traders at Cumberland House. For example, Chief Factor James Leith, after determining to reduce the amount of credit advanced to such consistent old Sturgeon (Torch) River Cree customers as Bucks Head and Methatoes, shortly thereafter greeted Mansack Twatt and advanced his credit along with six gallons of mixed rum “as encouragement.”<sup>90</sup> When Mansack and his son-in-law arrived at the post in December 1825, the former was trusted with fifty skins in credit as the latter turned over his hunt to Mansack.<sup>91</sup> This trust was extended according to a report on September 27, 1826: “Mansack is to be answerable for the advances given to his Son in law and Brother and Willock to be answerable for his Son in law and Brother in law” to the tune of 130 skins and 110 skins respectively.<sup>92</sup> Credits continued to be advanced to the Twatts more readily than to Amerindians. In May 1827, when Amerindians were generally provided with only twenty skins in advance, Mansack and Willock were given fifty skins’ credit each “as they are always sure in paying.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Thomas

Isbister indicated in late August 1828 that the Twatts were regarded as the best trappers trading at Cumberland House, to the extent that they were given 100 skins each on credit on top of an additional 180-skin balance from the previous spring.<sup>94</sup> On January 3, 1833, Isbister entrusted goods totalling 100 skins' worth of ammunition and tobacco to one of the Twatt brothers (unclear which), apparently for trading purposes, and stated: "he is an honest Indian & is responsible for the property he has in charge."<sup>95</sup> In March 1839 it was further reported that the Twatt band at "Neppowin" had "exerted themselves well this Year having up to this date doubled their hunts of last Year."<sup>96</sup> By the end of the period under consideration, therefore, the Mansack and Willock Twatt band was dearly held in high regard by Cumberland House traders, which in turn led to preferential treatment.

Mansack and Willock Twatt also came to be relied upon by the Cumberland House traders for intelligence and counsel which they trusted and acted upon. In August 1827, Thomas Isbister depended on Mansack Twatt to verify Amerindian claims that muskrats were plentiful in their territory before granting credits to them to support this hunt, at a time when the advances ranging from twenty to eighty skins' value were rarely being given out to Amerindians.<sup>97</sup> On July 7, 1839, John Lee Lewes went to the trouble of recording in the Cumberland House journal a rather lengthy response from Mansack Twatt regarding his views on the recently imposed prohibition on alcohol.<sup>98</sup> The opinions of no others were given such prominence by HBC journalists on this or any other such questions.

## Discussion

For the present, the story of the mixed-descent Twatt family group will have to be interrupted due to the temporal limitation of my original research which was selected to coincide with 1840, the date when major new influences were introduced into the social setting along the lower Saskatchewan River in the person of Henry Budd—himself a mixed-descent Cree from Norway House—who became the first missionary to be established permanently in the region.<sup>99</sup> Budd commenced his Anglican mission at Cumberland House, moving it shortly thereafter to The Pas, and later spent several years at "Nepowewin"; thus, more useful documentation on the Twatt mixed-descent group can be expected to be found in this source. In concert with documents left by Roman Catholic missionaries who arrived on the lower Saskatchewan River shortly after Budd, research in mission records will provide an important additional perspective to help balance the HBC records relied on to date. Further documentation found in federal government records dealing with the study area became available beginning

with the signings of the adhesion to Treaty Five and Treaty Six in 1876. The treaty-making process, the subsequent scrip commission activities, and the efforts of various individuals and families to move in and out of treaty will reveal a good deal about the ultimate disposition of the Twatt band of mixed descent. Another valuable source of information will be the genealogical work which is being carried out on the Twatt family by Alexander Deetz.<sup>100</sup> Of course, as mentioned at the outset, the financial and other records of the HBC which were not consulted during the original research should provide further information of significant value.

Beyond the work of Giraud and Slobodin on the distinctive natures of northern Métis groups, there are a number of factors which point to the logic and importance of a detailed study of the mixed-descent groups such as the Twatts along the lower Saskatchewan River. To begin, the ecological context of ethnicity will be rooted in the physiographic unity of the region, which is divided between the Saskatchewan River Lowlands Landscape Unit and, below the head of the Sipanok Channel, the Saskatchewan River Delta.<sup>101</sup> This boreal forest landscape and the river system itself provided a unifying “riverine” ecological base for the adaptation of the Twatts in a manner similar to that which played a role in the development of other northern mixed-descent groups.<sup>102</sup> Being the major east-west transportation corridor in these latitudes, the Saskatchewan River also carried along the length of its lower reaches both of the main outside influences: in Giraud’s terms, the “Southern Nucleus” or the French speakers of the *Campagne du Nord* and the North West Company, and the “Northern Nucleus” or the English speakers of the HBC. Thus, conditions for, and external influences on, nascent corporate groups were similar throughout the region.

Secondly, there existed a common pre-contact First Nations cultural base throughout this region in the form of the Late Woodlands Period archaeological tradition referred to as Selkirk. This archaeological culture is generally regarded to be pre-contact Cree.<sup>103</sup> Major Selkirk culture rendezvous sites have been found at regularly spaced locations from the forks of the Saskatchewan River all the way downstream to Grand Rapids, where the river flows into Lake Winnipeg.<sup>104</sup> With the exception of the Grand Rapids locale, where Rainy River culture predominated, all of these sites upriver evidence strong representation of Selkirk materials. These data demonstrate a common maternal cultural base for the development of mixed-descent groups in the study area. If confirmed by further testing, the archaeological hypothesis identifying distinctive Métis site characteristics proposed by David Burley<sup>105</sup> also may have significance in making a more decisive determination in this region.

In the early documentation referred to in this study, it is also clear that other mixed-descent groups emerged along the lower Saskatchewan River in locations apart from Nipawin. One in particular, known variously as “Basquiau,” “Rivière du Pas,” later “the Paw,” or what is now The Pas, Manitoba, became an important base for groups of “freemen” and their families. As individuals who had left the service of the fur trade companies—French Canadians from the NWC and less commonly English speakers from the HBC—they established themselves as more or less independent actors in the homelands of their Amerindian wives’ families.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, some 1,200 men (half in the Northern Department) were dropped from the HBC labour force after unification with the NWC in 1821.<sup>107</sup> A good deal of documentation—in some cases more extensive than that available on the Twatts—is available for the mixed-descent groups led by the freemen who had established themselves at The Pas during this period. These individuals included Joseph Constant, Tommie Humpherville, Baptiste Dejarlais, Jean Baptiste Gardipee, James Chaplette, Paul Laventure, Louis Versailles, Martin Lavalley, John Turner, and others. Except for the last named, the majority of these freeman-headed mixed-descent families at The Pas, referred to by the HBC as “halfbreed freemen,”<sup>108</sup> appear to have derived from Giraud’s “Southern Nucleus” or French-Canadian paternal origins.

Apart from those amalgamations of freeman origin, there were also populations of mixed-descent who were associated much more closely with Cumberland House society than the sons of Magnus Twatt. These were the families belonging to a number of men engaged in continuous employment with the HBC. Among them were individuals such as John Ballendine, who was HBC post manager at Moose Lake beginning in 1829, as well as Cumberland House gentlemen George Sutherland, Thomas Isbister, George Flett, I.P. Holmes, and Alex Kennedy. For example, the Cumberland House journal of December 24, 1821 mentioned HBC servants McKay, Came(rere?), and Lajre(?) as returning to the post from The Pas: “The above three men are servants of the Company, but on account of their families (which would be a great burthen to us at the house) are allowed to provide for themselves during the Winter and are allowed the same price for their furs as the Indians.”<sup>109</sup> In her seminal work *Strangers in Blood*, Jennifer Brown has indicated that such mixed-descent children became a significant demographic factor in Rupert’s Land during this period.<sup>110</sup> The available documentation will have to be queried regarding the differences and similarities among these various mixed-descent categories, in order to determine the general patterns of ethnic identification and corporate action as distinct social groups—or otherwise.

Unfortunately, the present study cannot determine whether the Mansack and Willock Twatt band can be considered to be part of a separate functional mixed-descent ethnic group centred in this region, without recourse to the additional documentation referred to above, since the data brought to bear up to this point are suggestive, but not conclusive. The Twatts obviously were recognized by Cumberland House traders as identifiable “Half Breeds.” They were explicitly regarded and clearly treated differently than their Amerindian confreres. By the mid-1820s they had firmly established a home base in the Nipawin area, apparently abandoning the seasonal migratory adaptation of Amerindians. The Twatt brothers were acknowledged as leaders of an identifiable group: they lived, travelled, and clearly acted in concert, and can thus be considered to be an “interest group” in Trigger’s terms. If negative evidence has any value, the Twatts were never mentioned in the post’s journals as being among the participants in the ceremonial feasting and dancing carried out on a regular basis by the Amerindians trading at Cumberland House. If positive confirmation can be found, this may indicate a cultural difference between the Twatts and the Amerindians of the region which would be further evidence of a potentially separate ethnicity.

On the other hand, Mansack and Willock Twatt appeared to have been raised by their mother as Amerindians away from the influences of Cumberland House society (although influence by their father is not out of the question) and, early on, were associated with Cree leaders such as Brassy and Chukooan. They were classed as “brothers” by Kewaymettaway. Although in later years they may have served as jobbers for the HBC, until recourse is made to the Cumberland House account records it appears that their economic adaptation to the fur trade was identical to that of Amerindians at that time.<sup>111</sup> This is not to say that the Twatt brothers failed to identify themselves as a group distinct from Amerindians. However, there are no data currently available to me at this preliminary stage which indicate any particular ethnic boundary maintaining mechanisms at work in the case of the Twatts. Further research is required in order to make this determination.

What appears to be in evidence from the HBC journal records consulted to date is that the Twatt group constituted at least what anthropologists refer to as a “hunting (or task) group”: in other words, a “local band” structured as a “sibling set” and operating in a manner similar to Amerindian co-residential groups found throughout subarctic Canada.<sup>112</sup> The question which cannot be answered at this stage of the research is whether or not the Twatts regarded themselves as a hunting group/local band which was ethnically distinct from their Cree relatives and hunting partners. Apparently, HBC traders placed them in what sociologists refer to as an “ethnic category.” It

remains to be determined by means of the research program identified above whether or not Mansack and Willock perceived themselves to be part of a functional corporate ethnic group characterized by mixed descent and interests which were distinctive from their Cree relatives and hunting partners. Despite the doubts of some scholars,<sup>113</sup> the possibility of such an identification and distinct set of mutual interests exists, especially given the presence of other groups at The Pas and elsewhere in the region who also potentially identified themselves as different from Amerindians. I feel that a full-scale study of the potential development of self-aware corporate mixed-descent groups along the lower Saskatchewan River would be fruitful and prove to be of significance to the history of this rather neglected region. It also would be a potentially worthwhile contribution to the general field of Métis historiography, which could counteract the problem recognized as "Red River myopia."

