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Fur Trading at Saugeen

On Saturday, August 21, 2004, the Ontario Heritage Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque to commemorate the history of fur trading at Saugeen. The bilingual text reads as follows:

FUR TRADING AT SAUGEEN

The Anishnabe lived by the mouth of the Saugeen River before Pierre Piché arrived in 1818 to begin fur trading in the region. By 1826, the Hudson's Bay Company established an outpost at Saguingue to compete with independent fur traders like Piché. From La Cloche, its main post on Lake Huron, the Hudson's Bay Company employed First Nations, Métis, French, and British fur traders who largely depended on Anishnabe hunters to supply deer, bear and marten skins. By 1832, the supply of premium furs was exhausted and the company closed its post. Although many Anishnabe gave up hunting and settled in an agricultural village, fur trading continued here until the mid-19th century when Southampton was founded.

LE COMMERCE DES FOURRURES A SAUGEEN

Les Anishnabés ont vécu à l'embouchure de la rivière Saugeen avant l'arrivée du premier commerçant en fourrures dans la région, Pierre Piché, en 1818. En 1826, la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson a établi un avant-poste à Saguingue pour faire concurrence aux négociants en fourrures indépendants comme M. Piché. Depuis La Cloche, son principal poste sur le lac Huron, la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson employait des négociants en fourrure des Premières nations, métis, français et britanniques qui dépendaient beaucoup des chasseurs anishnabés pour leur approvisionnement en peaux de cerf, d'ours et de martre. En 1832, l'approvisionnement en fourrures de première qualité étant épuisé, la société a fermé son comptoir. Bien que de nombreux Anishnabés aient abandonné la chasse et se soient installés dans des villages agricoles, le commerce des fourrures a continué jusqu'à la fondation de Southampton, au milieu du 19^e siècle.

Historical background

The Anishnabe at Sahgeeng

Ojibway-speaking people lived at Sahgeenh¹ by the mouth of the Saugeen River² before the Hudson's Bay Company established its fur trading post in that vicinity in the early 19th century. They knew themselves as Anishnabe – “men” – or Ojibway, which the British corrupted to Chippewa.

The Ojibway moved into southern Ontario from north of Lake Superior after defeating the Iroquois in the Ojibway-Iroquois fur trade wars. A decisive battle - the Battle of Skull Mound - took place at the mouth of the Saugeen River about 1696.³ Beginning in the 1700s, Ojibway used lands in southern Ontario to hunt and to fish.

Warm-weather fishing was very important to the Ojibway's economy. Each spring, they gathered in longhouses near the mouths of rivers, where fish were plentiful. Sahgeeng, which means “mouth of a river”⁴ in the Ojibway language, was an important gathering point on the Saugeen River where sturgeon, salmon trout, pickerel, herring, whitefish, bass and suckers were abundant.⁵ In the winter, they hunted and trapped, carrying their portable winter houses with them as they followed herds of deer, which the Ojibway trapped in purpose-built brushwood fences.

The Fur Traders at Sagingue

The earliest cartographic evidence of fur traders being active at the mouth of the Saugeen River is the 1822 map of Lake Huron by British surveyor Henry Wolsey Bayfield, which notes “Indian Traders” and buildings on the north side of “River Saugink” near the river's mouth.⁶

Another account of the early fur traders at Saugeen was recorded in 1906 by historian Norman Robertson. His information came by way of Fred Lamorandiere, the interpreter at the Cape Croker reserve, who heard the story from Joseph Normandin, a voyageur, who received the story from a Joseph Longe, Sr.

¹ Peter Jones, *History of the Ojibway Indians; With Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennett, 1861), p. 164. Peter Jones, an English-Ojibway missionary and translator, referred to the settlement near the river mouth as Sahgeeng. Other spellings found in historical records include: Saging, Sagingue, Sahkeeng, Saugeeng, Saugin, Saugink, Sauguine and Saucing.

² Present-day Southampton was first called Saugeen. The current spelling of Saugeen (i.e. Saugeen River, Saugeen First Nation and Town of Saugeen Shores) date from the 1840s.

³ Peter S. Schmalz, *The History of the Saugeen Indians* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1977), pp. 3-7.

⁴ Peter Jones, *History of the Ojibway Indians*, p. 164.

⁵ John Benham, “Sahkeeng Mission,” *Christian Guardian*, May 28, 1831, p. 114, United Church Archives.

⁶ H.W. Bayfield, *Canada West, Lake Huron, Georgian Bay* (London: Hydrological Office of the Admiralty, 1828, based on a survey of 1822 and corrected to 1864), Archives of Ontario, H.

One Pierre Piché, in the year 1818, came from Lower Canada to Mackinaw to take part in the adventures and profits of the fur trade. He engaged with one Dr. Mitchell ... Having heard of the richness of the Saugeen country in furs he went there to establish a trading post. It was on the flat, on the south side of the Saugeen River, that he built for himself a house and store, and completed the establishment by taking to himself a wife from the tribe of Indians residing in that vicinity. He received his supply of goods for trading through Dr. Mitchell, and afterwards from his sons George and Andrew ... Piché was a man of great strength and bravery, and on account of these qualities he succeeded in obtaining and keeping control of the best part of the fur trade in the vicinity of Saugeen. He had many competitors, however, who obtained their supplies from W.S. Gooding, of Goderich, Joseph Longe, sen., who supplied these facts, being one of them.⁷

In 1821, the Hudson's Bay Company established its main fur-trading post in the Lake Huron district at La Cloche on the north shore of Lake Huron at the outlet of the creek that flows from Lake La Cloche. Other fur-trading posts were established on Lake Huron to compete with independent traders at Mississauga, Green Lake, Whitefish Lake, French River, Lake Nipissing, Sheshawinaga, Isle aux Sables and Saguingue - the name the Hudson's Bay Company gave to its post at Saugeen (also spelled Saguingue), which is mentioned in records dating from 1826.

From La Cloche, Chief Factor John McBean wrote to his clerk for the Saguingue post, Alexander William McKay, on August 21, 1827, just before McKay and three men set off in a boat with trade goods and provisions to spend the hunting season at Saguingue:

As you are now ready to leave this for Saguingue, your winter quarter, I now do myself the pleasure of addressing you a few lines on the subject of the affairs of your Post.

The little Beaver collected at Saguingue affects so much the returns of that Post, that it is absolutely necessary to rise [sic] the prices of the Goods &c [Etc.] Sold to Indians, so as to be able to support ourselves in that trade. Herewith shall be handed to you a Tariff for making your goods to Indians, and the Companys [sic] Servants which I request you to attend to. The former bears an advance of 25 per Cent on the prices of last year. As a little tallow can be procured at Saguingue you will please get as much as you can, which you will pay in

⁷ Norman Robertson, *The History of the County of Bruce and of the Minor Municipalities Therein ...* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1906), p. 18.

Ammunition, Liquor and Tobacco. The Deer Skins you have valued too high [sic] in your last years trade. You will please to bring them down to 5 % Indian prices. The other furs may continue the same prices as last years.

I approve very much of the low advances you have made last year to your Indians, and now request the same principle may be followed up in the Trade of this ...

I am informed that the loss which your neighbour Mr. Piché has sustained in his last years [sic] Trade has augmented considerably his debt with Messrs. Rollette & Mitchell, and that it was with a great deal of trouble he obtained his Outfit this Summer, and that he had been told by the above Gentlemen that if he did not pay them in full with the following returns that they could not supply him any more. I hope, and I am convinced that you will so well oppose him in the course of this year that instead of paying part of the old Balance that he will considerably augment it, which will clear the place of him for the following year.⁸

The Hudson's Bay Company employed First Nations, Métis, French, and British fur traders who largely depended on Anishnabe hunters to supply the deer, bear and marten skins. In the 1820s, competition from independent traders was more intense in the Lake Huron District than in any Hudson's Bay Company district in the Southern Department.⁹ Although the Hudson's Bay Company post at Saguingue, the most southerly outpost under McBean's supervision, performed quite well against other outposts in the Lake Huron District during the late 1820s,¹⁰ McBean complained in his reports to the company about the state of affairs at Saguingue.

Where fish is procured and salted men are allowed 6 lbs. fish and one Gallon of Potatoes per diem, and when fish are not to be had - they get 1 quart of Hulled Corn and 1 ½ Ounces of Grease with now and then 2 lbs. Flour in lieu of the Corn. The opposition people are fed upon Salt Beef, Salt Pork, Flour and Pease as much as they can eat. This causes many murmurs by the Companys [sic] Servants and is a very great temptation to the whole of them to join the oppositions ...

⁸ John McBean to Alexander William McKay, August 21, 1827, La Cloche Correspondence Book, 1827-28, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/b/1, Reel IM183.

⁹ Norman Anick, "The Fur Trade in Eastern Canada Until 1870," V. 1 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1976), p. 200.

¹⁰ John McBean, "Journal of Transactions and Occurrences at La Cloche, Lake Huron District, 1828/29," June 13, 1828, Post Journals (La Cloche), Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/a/2, Reel IM69; "Journal Of Occurrences at Lacloche, Lake Huron District, from the 1st June 1829 to 31 May 1830," June 10, 1829, Post Journals (La Cloche), Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109.a.3, Reel IM70.

The Goods brought into the District for trade by the oppositions are chiefly all fine Goods, such as fine & Secd. Cloths of all Colours, Calicoes of every discription [sic], Frock Coats, Silk Belts, Trowsers [sic] and Waistcoats of every kind, with a large supply of Shawls and Handkerchiefs both Silk and Cotton, and a very considerable quantity of Provisions of every discription [sic]. These fineries attract the attention of the natives and in consequence we have the mortification of seeing some valuable Furs given to the Oppositions for such articles as the Indians cannot procure from us. With provisions the Oppositions yearly procure many valuable furs, which they would not were we sufficiently provided in that article to prevent it ... The manner that we are to be equipt [sic] for the Trade of 1828 is such (Moose Factory not being provided with the necessary articles for this trade) that I am most confident that the oppositions will reap a great advantage from it and will at last succeed in taking that footing which till now we have prevented them from obtaining.¹¹

The activities of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was trying to settle the Ojibway hunters on farms, furthered the decline of the fur trade at Saguingue, as these were hunters on whom the fur traders depended.¹² The Society began its work of establishing missions in 1822¹³ and nine years later teacher John Benham and interpreter John Simpson arrived at Sahgeeng. They chose a site with a spring one mile from the mouth of the river, on its north side. The Ojibway allowed them to occupy the one-acre parcel and helped to build their 18-foot by 24-foot building that served as residence, schoolhouse and meeting house.¹⁴

By 1830, Hudson's Bay Company employees of the Lake Huron District were complaining about their low wages. One post master, Benjamin McKenzie, "observed that it was no encouragement for him to remain in the Service - that he [would] certainly immediately retire from it did he not see the embarassment [sic] which so many retiring at the same time would cause; that he would remain one year more so as to afford to the Governor to consider if something better could be done for him."¹⁵ Another post master, Henry Sayer, "retired from

¹¹ John McBean, "Report on the state of the Posts, Indian Trade & Character of the Indians in Lake Huron District B 1827/28," June 16, 1828, La Cloche Report, 1827-1828, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/e/1, Reel 1M779.

¹² *Fifth Annual Report of the Canada Conference Missionary Society* (York [Toronto]: Christian Guardian for Missionary Society, 1830), United Church Archives.

¹³ Nathan Bangs, *An Authentic History of the Missions under the Care of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1832), pp. 172-73.

¹⁴ John Benham, "Sahkeeng Mission," *Christian Guardian*, May 28, 1831, p. 114; W. Case, "Religious Intelligence," *Christian Guardian*, July 23, 1831, p. 146.

¹⁵ John McBean to George Simpson, September 8, 1830, at the end of "Journal of Accurrences [sic] at La Cloche, Lake Huron, 1830/31," Post Journals (La Cloche), Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/a/4, Reel 1M70.

the [Hudson's Bay Company] Service and is now in Mitchells employ [sic] and in opposition to us at the post of Saguingue."¹⁶

Conditions worsened in 1831 when the Hudson's Bay Company post at Saguingue had difficulty getting premium furs.

The Trade of the Post of Saguingue, under the charge of Mr. Wallace, has fallen much. The indians have done very little there last winter. This is owing to nearly the entire disappearance there of Bears and Martins [sic], and to the indians having devoted the greatest part of the Season for hunting in attending to a Methodist preacher established among them, the greatest part of them (the indians) being now members of that persuasion.¹⁷

At the end of the 1831-32 season, Chief Factor John McBean closed Saguingue.

The Post of Saguingue has been evacuated by our men readily so as that Establishment was kept up for the purpose of procuring parchment Deer Skins at a time could not be had from elsewhere, but now that we are fully supplied from Moose and that the trade of furs at that post cannot cover the expences attending it, it would in my Opinion have been extravagance to have continued it any longer; moreso [sic] as that post does not protect the Companys [sic] trade of Timiscamingue[.] That of itself will be a saving to the District in wages alone of £1111.0.0.¹⁸

In the same letter, McBean reported that Henry Sayer, the former Hudson's Bay Company clerk who left the company, had outlasted the Hudson's Bay Company and intended to settle at Saguingue for life.

The Impact of the Fur Trade at Saugeen

In the early 19th century, the Hudson's Bay Company employed First Nations, Métis, French, and British fur traders who largely depended on Anishnabe hunters to supply deer, bear and marten skins. By 1832, the company closed its post after exhausting the supply of premium furs. Although many Anishnabe gave up hunting and settled in an agricultural village of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, fur trading continued at Saugeen into the mid-19th

¹⁶ John McBean to George Simpson, September 8, 1830, at the end of "Journal of Accurrences [sic] at La Cloche, Lake Huron, 1830/31," Post Journals (La Cloche), Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/a/4, Reel 1M70.

¹⁷ John McBean to George Simpson, July 25, 1831, La Cloche Correspondence Book, 1831/32, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/b/4, Reel 1M183.

¹⁸ John McBean to George Simpson, October 26, 1832, at the end of "Journal of Occurrences in Lake Huron District, Outfit 1832 & 33," Post Journals (La Cloche), Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.109/a/6, Reel 1M70.

century when the British established present-day Southampton and ruins of several fur trader forts were reported at the mouth of the Saugeen River in 1906.¹⁹

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¹⁹ Norman Robertson, *The History of the County of Bruce and of the Minor Municipalities Therein*, pp. 17-19.