HISTORICAL REPORT ON THE MÉTIS COMMUNITY
AT SAULT STE. MARIE

BY

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The Sault Ste. Marie Métis Community:

A Métis community was established at Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario) well before the Lake Huron Treaty of 1850 (known as the Robinson Treaty). One of the most distinctive features of the Métis community at Sault Ste. Marie was their settlement pattern. The Métis settled close to the river, occupying strips of land perpendicular to and along the river. These river lots were similar to the settlement patterns of early French farms along the St. Lawrence River. The river lot settlement pattern was also characteristic of other Métis communities in the Great Lakes region (for example, the Detroit settlement) and in the western interior of North America (for example, the Red River settlement).

Early visitors to the Sault Ste. Marie area noted the distinctive settlement pattern. For example, Thomas McKenney described the Métis community in his diary entry made on 3 July 1826. He wrote:

"...along down the river for about two miles, you may count about eighty houses, including every kind of building." (DOCUMENT 1)

In 1845, Lieutenant James Harper described the Métis community as being comprised of "250 souls, occupying 50 houses." (DOCUMENT 2)

In 1846, Provincial Land Surveyor Alexander Vidal was sent to survey a town plot at Sault Ste. Marie. Vidal found that there was an existing Métis community on the site. He listed the heads of each household and provided a brief description of the river lots they

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1 Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippeway Indians, and of Incidents Connected with the Treaty of Fond Du Lac. Thomas L. McKenney, Barre (Massachusetts): Imprint Society, 1972: 158.
occupied. ³ (DOCUMENT 3) Vidal also made a sketch map of the area, showing the river lots occupied by the Métis. His map and report that were submitted to the government of Canada West provided clear evidence of a distinct and cohesive Métis community at Sault Ste. Marie.

Resource Harvesting:

The Métis of Sault Ste. Marie lived off the resources of the land. They obtained their livelihood from hunting, fishing, gathering and cultivating. They hunted and fished in the same manner and often in the same areas as their Ojibway neighbours. In 1830, Ojibway Chief Shinguakonse made a speech that explained that the Métis “live like the Indians.”⁴ (DOCUMENT 4)

Most historical descriptions focussed on the fishery mainly because it was so productive and valuable. In the fishery at the Sault Rapids, both Métis and Ojibway fishermen harvested the fish for subsistence and commerce. William Nourse, manager of the Hudson’s Bay Company trading post at Sault Ste. Marie, recorded an early written description of the fishery. In a letter dated 27 October 1834 to Louis Denis Delaronde, a Métis fur trader, who was in charge of the Company’s outpost at Batchewana, Nourse wrote:

"Of the Half Breeds\(^5\) on this side of the river who might be troublesome to you, all are now engaged either scooping at the rapids or fishing down below here."\(^6\) (DOCUMENT 5)

In 1856, Provincial Land Surveyor Albert P. Salter visited Sault Ste. Marie and reported that:

"The Fisheries, though of minor import to the subjects above treated of [agriculture, timber and minerals], I feel it my duty to touch upon, as they, at present, furnish the principal staple production of the Country, many hundred barrels of Whitefish and Trout being yearly exported from the several fishing stations on the lake.

The principal parties employed in taking the fish are half-breeds, who resort to the same grounds year after year; and no reasonable doubt can be entertained, but that there are many other stations on the coast, now unfrequented, which, if worked, would, considerably increase the take and export of this article of commerce."\(^7\) (DOCUMENT 6)

In 1859, William Gibbard, Fishery Oversee for the government of Canada West, reported on the fisheries in Lake Huron and Lake Superior. He noted the importance of fishing to the subsistence and economy of the Sault Ste. Marie Métis. Gibbard wrote:

"A greater portion of the Indians, and the half-breeds depend upon fish, from September till sugar-making. ...In Garden and Root Rivers, and various branches of the Sault Ste. Marie Rapids and in the small creeks and Bay above the Rapids, they [speckled trout] are still plentiful. The Half-breeds and Indians with nets and spears take large quantities for the American boats. ...Sparring [with 'torchligh'] and trolling are carried on to a great extent by Indians and half-breeds, on all parts of these lakes."\(^8\) (DOCUMENT 7)

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\(^5\) The term "Half-breed" was commonly used in the 19\(^{th}\) century to describe Métis in the Great Lakes region. Most Métis originated from the unions of French fur traders and Aboriginal women. Some traced their ancestry to English, Scotch and other European men. By the mid 19\(^{th}\) century, many Métis communities, such as the one at Sault Ste. Marie, were well established and Métis families were generations removed from the original parents.

\(^6\) Letter from William Nourse, Sault St. Marys, to Louis Denis Laronde, Batchewana Bay, 27 October 1834, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B.194/a/9, p. 27.


Historical Geographer J.L. Goodier noted the importance of fishing to the livelihood of the Sault Ste. Marie Métis community. In an article written in 1984, Goodier observed that:

"Men from Sault Ste. Marie turned to the St. Mary's rapids in October to supply whitefish, both for their personal needs and the foreign market."9 (DOCUMENT 8)

While Métis fishing was prominent in the written accounts, hunting was also an important part of their livelihood. The relatively few references to hunting in the written records can be attributed to the timing of the visits to Sault Ste. Marie by travellers who recorded (and sometimes published) their experiences. Most visitors came to the Sault during the warm weather months, while hunting was primarily a winter activity.

However, some visitors did note the importance of hunting to the Sault Ste. Marie Métis. For example, Lieutenant James Harper, who visited the Sault in the summer of 1845, wrote:

"Their livelihood is obtained by fishing, shooting, the cultivation of a small garden, daily labor, and any little job work they can get. [underline added]"10 (DOCUMENT 9)

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A traditional winter hunting area for the Sault Métis was the Goulais Bay area. This was noted in a letter from William Nourse to Louis Denis Delaronde dated 19 December 1834. Nourse notified Delaronde that:

"...in a short you may expect as usual all the Freemen [i.e. Métis] at the Sault to be resorting to Goulais Bay..." (DOCUMENT 10)

Some Sault Métis wintered and hunted in the Batchewana Bay area. On 19 January 1841, Church of England Missionary Frederick O’Meara wrote to Bishop John Strachan, and noted that:

"John Robertson a half Indian who generally encamps at Batchewanhnah in Lake Superior came with his wife with whom he has cohabited for many years and by whom he had four or five children." (DOCUMENT 11)

Many Sault Ste. Marie Métis cultivated crops to supplement their livelihood. Alexander Vidal’s report on the Métis community, noted above, indicated that many of the families had garden plots enclosed by fences. (DOCUMENT 3)

The Métis way of life at Sault Ste. Marie included a diversified subsistence and economy. It included harvesting and processing maple sugar, gathering wild plants for food and medicinal purposes, and trapping furs for clothing and sale.

Many Métis also obtained seasonal employment in the fur and fish trade. They acted as guides, interpreters, hunters and crew members on vessels that plied the Great Lakes.

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11 The term "Freeman" was used by Hudson’s Bay Company officials to describe men who were not engaged as employees of the Company. In this case, Nourse was referring to the Métis of Sault Ste. Marie, many of whom had been previously engaged by fur trading companies.
Some Métis were expert boat-builders, a trade in high demand in the fur and fish trade business. Some Métis operated independent trading stations and competed against the Hudson’s Bay Company.

The seasonal cycle of the Sault Ste. Marie Métis was punctuated by the availability of natural resources and employment opportunities. In the mid-19th century, the Métis way of life incorporated many resource harvesting activities. These activities, especially hunting and trapping, were done within traditional territories located within the hinterland of Sault Ste. Marie. The Métis engaged in these activities for generations and, on the eve of the 1850 treaties, hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering were integral activities to the Métis community at Sault Ste. Marie.

**Métis Involvement in the 1850 Treaties:**

Prior to the 1830s, the British imperial government treated Métis people much like the other Aboriginal people in North America. For Example, the Métis shared in the distribution of presents given by the Crown to Aboriginal allies.\(^{14}\) Métis warriors had fought with other Aboriginal warriors and British troops in the American Revolution and in the War of 1812. Métis negotiators had participated in treaty-making with representatives of the British Crown (and U.S. government).

However, by 1830, British policy began to shift in a direction away from recognising the Métis as Aboriginal people. The most visible shift in this policy was seen in the
termination of gifts to the Métis during the annual distribution of presents from the Crown. Both the Métis and other Aboriginal people resisted this change. In the Sault Ste. Marie area, Ojibway Chief Shinguakonce led the resistance. In 1830, Shinguakonce made a speech to James Givins, Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs, on behalf of the Métis, in which he argued for their right to continue to receive presents from the British Crown. In that speech, Shinguakonce explained that the Métis had appealed to him to protect their rights. Shinguakonce stated:

"The Half Breeds - met in council and came to the determination of attaching themselves to me and placing themselves under my control. The Half Breeds after their Council came to me, and said - We give ourselves up to you and put ourselves under your control, for we sprang from you."

(Document 12)

It is interesting to note that Shinguakonce referred to the Métis meeting in Council. This suggests that the Sault Ste. Marie Métis had their own political organization as early as 1830. The inclusion of some Métis as part of the Ojibway Nation after 1830 was motivated in part by the government’s reluctance to recognize Métis rights. Another factor was Chief Shinguakonce’s desire to unite the Aboriginal people against outside encroachments, particularly the miners. According to the testimony of Joachim (also known as Joshua) Biron in an affidavit made in 1893, Chief Shinguakonce had invited the Métis leaders to a council meeting at Garden River a few years before 1850. Biron recalled the speech made by Shinguakonce:

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14 The annual distribution of presents by the British Crown was a continuation of a practice established by the French Crown. After the defeat of the French in 1760, the British recognized the importance of continuing the tradition of gift-giving to maintain peaceful and friendly relations with Aboriginal nations.
"Several years before the Robinson Treaty was made, Chief Shingaconse of the Garden River Band called a Council – and the Half-breeds of Sault Ste. Marie were invited to attend – so we all went. The Chief told us that if we would join his Band and be his men or soldiers – that he (the Chief) would work for us and that we would get the presents that his band was getting. That some day he might sell his land – and that we half-breeds would have a right to a share of what he, the Chief, might get for it. That only four of us agreed to join his Band – Myself (Joshaw Biron), my brother Alexis Biron, John Bell and Louison Cadotte. All the other Half-breeds said that they were already Indians enough without binding themselves to be under an Indian Chief.”

John Driver corroborated the statement made by Joachim Biron. In a letter to E.B. Borron dated 4 March 1893, Driver wrote (in broken English):

"After all the conversations and discursions i have had with the Members of the Garden River and Batcawaning indian Bands, with regard to the Halfbreeds of Sault Ste. Marie, i, have in my own mind that the Points Mines affere [Mica Bay affair – see my discussion below] had a great dill to do with the friendship and friendly relations with each other, as near as i can find out when considering the information given by the deferent Members of the two Bands that is the Indians and Halfbreeds i have found when looking in to there storeys and accounts it was about that time in the year 1848 & 1849 that Shingocons held that council with the Halfbreeds that Joasam Biron speeks of, it was that the two chiefs wanted to obtain the good will of the Halfbreeds to side with them in the Point of Mines affere that they wished to have the Halfbreeds join there Band and that they the Chiefs would shear in what ever they got for their Lands with them, and in order to make god there Promis, it will be seen in looking over the Hon. W.B. Robinson's Report of September the 24, 1850 that the Chiefs Shinguacouse and Nebenagauching did make a strong effort to have the Halfbreeds included as Members of there Bands." 

Despite Shinguakonce's efforts, government officials were reluctant to acknowledge the rights of the Métis. Chief Superintendent Givins regarded the Métis as squatters and

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18 E.B. Borron described John Driver as a "half-breed." He was probably the son of John Driver, a Hudson's Bay Company employee from the Orkney Islands who was listed as a "settler" at Sault Ste. Marie in Vidal's 1846 report.
recommended that they be removed from their homes.\(^{20}\) Other colonial government
officials and church leaders supported Givins. For example, Thomas G. Anderson, who
was in charge of the Coldwater Indian Agency, wrote in support of the plan to remove the
Métis from their homes. His views were influenced by reports that the Métis had harassed
Protestant missionary Thomas McMurray and had “actually burnt an English bible.”

(DOCUMENT 15) Anderson joined with others in the colonial government hierarchy
who viewed the Métis as supporters of the French and adherents to the despised Roman
Catholic Church. Anderson concluded that:

“It appears to me advisable that the Canadians and other squatters be induced
to leave their locations.”\(^{21}\) (DOCUMENT 15)

Despite the opposition of colonial government officials, the Ojibway continued to regard
Métis rights as equal to their own. In the years to follow, Ojibway Chiefs would seek to
protect Métis rights by including them as members of their own nation. This is evident
from a speech made by Chief Shinguakonce on 10 August 1839, to Samuel P. Jarvis, who
had replaced Givins as Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Speaking again on the
issue of Métis rights to continue to receive presents from the British Crown,

Shinguakonce stated:

“Father, pray give to the half breeds of my band the same presents that we get.
They live with us and we love them as ourselves.”\(^{22}\) (DOCUMENT 16)

Ten days later Shinguakonce made another speech on behalf of Métis rights. He said:

\(^{20}\) Report by William Nourse on Sault Ste Marie District, 1835, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives,
HBCA, B.194/6/8, folios 1-2.
\(^{21}\) Report of T.G. Anderson to Captain G. Philpotts, 18 July 1835, Archives of Ontario, Strachan Papers:
NP.
\(^{22}\) “Speech of the Chippewa Chief Shinguakconse at a Council held at Manitowaning, and reply of Colonel
Jarvis,” Jarvis Papers, Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, Box B57: 319.
"...the young men who now surround you, although half breeds, belong to me. My blood runs through their veins - and they have all given themselves up to me, and now form part of my tribe. ...They are now here to hear from you whether they will be recognized as my children and in future receive presents."\(^{23}\) (DOCUMENT 17)

Like, Givins, Jarvis was unsympathetic to Métis rights and did nothing to bring their concerns to British imperial officials. However, Shinguaconse remained committed to the cause and pressed the issue again before the annual distribution of presents at Manitowaning (on Manitoulin Island) in 1840. Indian Superintendent Thomas G. Anderson, who was in charge of the distribution, wrote to Jarvis on 23 May 1840 and reported that:

"Shin-gwa-konce from St. Marys came down here with a part of his Tribe to enquire whether the halfbreeds would be clothed as mentioned last year but I could not enlighten his understanding on the subject. [underline in original]\(^{24}\) (DOCUMENT 18)

As noted above, Anderson favoured the removal of the Métis because he viewed them as a threat to Protestant missionary endeavours at Sault Ste. Marie. In 1842, Anderson devised a plan to influence Charles Oakes Ermatinger, a prominent Sault Métis, to make the Métis move away from the area. In a letter dated 2 February 1842, Anderson wrote to James Fraser and explained that Ermatinger was to be recruited to:

"...use his influence with his tribe to execute the extinguishment of the land [around Sault Ste. Marie]...with a view to dispossess a number of squatters who are a nuisance to missionary labours."\textsuperscript{25} (DOCUMENT 19)

That plan did not materialize, and in later years the Ermatinger family would become activists against the government's plans to take away Métis lands and rights.

The government was not alone in seeking to nullify Métis rights. Government officials such as Anderson, Jarvis and Givins were among many who wanted the Métis removed from Sault Ste. Marie. Others included mining and timber speculators, who wanted to gain exclusive control over land and resources in the region. The powerful Hudson's Bay Company also had interests in the land around Sault Ste. Marie. Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Company (and also a director of the Montreal Mining Company\textsuperscript{26}), lobbied for a large land grant at Sault Ste. Marie. He viewed the Métis as impediments to the Company's fortunes, and sought to have them removed. Simpson expressed his disdain for the Métis in a letter to George Barnston (HBCA manager at Michipicoten) dated 19 November 1846. Simpson wrote:

"...the British side of the falls was this season surveyed and laid out as a town, but until mining operations be entered upon on a large scale it is not likely to be occupied by any other than the wretched half-caste population by whom that neighbourhood is at present infested."\textsuperscript{27} (DOCUMENT 20)

\textsuperscript{26} In 1848, Simpson owned 340 shares in the Montreal Mining Company, see: Letter from Archibald H. Campbell, Secretary and Treasurer of the Montreal Mining Company, Montreal, to George Simpson, HBCA, D.5/22, folio 444.
\textsuperscript{27} Letter from George Simpson, Lachine, to George Barnston, 19 November 1846, HBCA, D.4/68, folio 208.
By 1845, the land rights of the Métis and other Aboriginal people at Sault Ste. Marie became a focus of colonial government attention. Lieutenant Harper, commander of H.M.S. Experiment, visited Sault Ste. Marie in September 1845 and reported on the problems associated with uncertainty over title to the land in the area. Harper wrote:

"...not one individual on the British side [of Sault Ste. Marie] (with the sole exception of the Hudson's Bay Company28) own one foot of soil or land - their Houses are built and their little gardens planted under the fear that they may be ordered off at any moment and lose all - no title deeds can be got as the Indians here claim the land, and the Government I am told has not yet admitted their claim to it. The present occupants therefore have no interest in the soil; nor any inducement to cultivate or improve an acre of it, although they say it is much better land than on the American side, and would produce much more. Were it possible, Sir, to give these poor people a personal and permanent interest in the land they occupy, and a chance of obtaining more, I feel assured that it would be of a vast benefit to that vicinity, and fix (what I believe to be) a legal population on our frontier."29

(CDOCUMENT 2)

Harper’s report was reviewed by the Executive Council and an Order in Council was passed on 10 October 1845, which stated that:

"The Committee, with a reference to their approved Report of the 19th September 1845, on the report of Commander Harper’s visit to Sault Ste. Marie, would respectfully advise your Excellency to adopt such measures as may seem just and proper for the extension of the authority of the Government over that part of the Province bordering on the North shore of Lake Huron; and should it appear that none of the Indians in that quarter can be regarded as descendants of the Original Tribes who inhabited the Country in question, and do not possess authority to cede their title to the Crown, that Your Excellency may instruct the Commissioner of Crown Lands to survey a Town Plot and Park Lots at the Sault Ste. Marie, giving to the occupants [Métis] a title to such lots as by the survey they may appear to be possessed of."30

(CDOCUMENT 21)

28 The Hudson’s Bay Company claimed land in and around its trading posts by right of first occupation of the soil. At Sault Ste. Marie, the Company also argued that they had been promised a grant of 1,200 acres as compensation for the use of the post by the British military in 1822. The Company ultimately secured a patent to 68 acres at Sault Ste. Marie.


Provincial Land Surveyor Alexander Vidal was sent to survey the land at Sault Ste. Marie and divide the land into town lots. As noted above, Vidal reported on the existing Métis community at the Sault. In 1848, Vidal surveyed mining locations along the north shore of Lake Huron and the area around Sault Ste. Marie. Thomas G. Anderson also visited the region in the summer of 1848, and held a meeting with Chiefs and Métis leaders. Chief Shinguakonce made a speech to Anderson about the encroachments of the miners on Aboriginal territory. Anderson reported that Shinguakonce stated that:

"This land, where lie the bones of our ancestors, is ours! We have never sold it, nor has it ever been taken from us by conquest, or by any other way."\(^{31}\)

(DOCUMENT 22)

On 4 August 1849, Alexander Vidal and Thomas G. Anderson were appointed by Order in Council to investigate the willingness of the Aboriginal people in the Lake Huron and Lake Superior regions to enter into a treaty with the British Crown for the surrender of some of their territory. Vidal arrived at Sault Ste. Marie on 6 September 1849, and he spent eight days interviewing people and reading documents. On 11 September 1849, Vidal met with William Ermatinger, a member of the prominent Ermatinger Métis family, who presented a claim to land based on his family’s linkages to a hereditary Chief. On 14 September 1849, Anderson arrived at Sault Ste. Marie and he also met with Ermatinger. Anderson’s diary recorded the following:

"At his house [Joseph Wilson, Collector of Customs at Sault Ste. Marie] we found Mr. Wm. Ermatinger who professes to have a claim to lands on Lake Superior, but this cannot be, as his Mother and her relations were originally from Lac La Pluie and his Grand Father or Uncle Kaw-te-waw-be-tai are or were American Indians - but it is not possible to describe the many claims

attempted to be set forth, or to explain the great excitement which prevails on this subject at the Sault.\textsuperscript{32} \textbf{(DOCUMENT 23)}

William Mactavish, manager of the Hudson’s Bay Company post at Sault Ste. Marie also reported on the claims made by the Ermatinger family. In a letter to Governor Simpson dated 14 September 1849, Mactavish wrote:

“One of the Ermatingers (James) is up here just now bothering and causing all shades of faces. He brought from Lapointe an Indian Chief, a brother of his mother, to speak to the Chiefs here for himself and family in the expectation of a payment being made this autumn, he claims for his family all the land from a point below the stone house to a considerable distance above (Point aux Pins). The Chief of this place repudiated the claim and distinctly says none hold land here from the Indians except the HBCo., it is said that the Ermatingers have petitioned the Government against forming a treaty with the Indians on some grounds connected with their own claims which when it comes out at the Council will injure them with the Indians; but it is not yet known what claim they have to this part of the Country as their mother comes from Sandy Lake, however be that as it may their struggle after the loaves and fishes are pretty fair.”\textsuperscript{33} \textbf{(DOCUMENT 24)}

No corroboration of Mactavish’s statement that Ermatinger’s claim had been “repudiated” by the Chief (presumably Shinguakonce) in favour of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s claim. However, it should be noted that the Company aggressively lobbied for land at Sault Ste. Marie and elsewhere in the Lake Huron and Lake Superior districts.

Vidal and Anderson were transported and guided by a Métis and Ojibway crew from Sault Ste. Marie. They included: François Mezai, Louis Piquette, Peter Bell, Pierre Crocheir, Louis Corbirr, Paw-kauke, Waw-be-ma-ma and Waw-saung-gais. At different places


\textsuperscript{33} Letter from W. Mactavish, Sault Ste Marie, to George Simpson, 14 September 1849, HBCA, D.5/26, folio 77.
along the route, the Sault Métis met with other Métis communities. For example, at Michipicoten, Anderson wrote:

"Our men gave a ball to their half-breed brethren and enjoyed themselves first rate."34 (DOCUMENT 23)

At Fort William, Vidal and Anderson met in Council with the local Ojibway Chiefs and principal men. The Council meeting was pre-arranged by John Mackenzie, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Chief Trader at Fort William. Mackenzie was responsible for drawing up the list of people who were to attend the Council meeting. Father Nicolas Frémiot, a Jesuit missionary at Fort William, reported that Mackenzie had purposely omitted the Fort William Métis. Frémiot explained that:

The meeting began with a roll call from the list prepared the evening before by Mr. Mackenzie. The half-breeds were passed by in silence, for they have not the right to speak at such gatherings. Is this wise? Do some people fear that they, better informed than the Indians themselves, might be in a better position to defend their rights?35 (DOCUMENT 25)

Vidal and Anderson returned to Sault Ste. Marie on their way back, and a Council meeting was held on 15 and 16 October 1849. At this meeting the Métis attended, possibly at the insistence of Chief Shinguakonce. Vidal and Anderson failed to gain approval for a proposed treaty with the Crown to purchase their lands. Allan Macdonell, a non-Aboriginal speculator attended the meeting and spoke against the proposed purchase. He pointed out that he and others had already negotiated lease agreements for

tracts of land in the area, and that these agreements could not be superseded by a purchase made by the Crown. Vidal and Anderson’s notes on the meeting recorded the following:

“Mr. Macdonell then rose, and said that the Government had no power over the land, that the Indians had a perfect right to work the mines, cultivate the land or employ any Agent or servant to do it for them, that they were partners with him, - that he had good legal advice on the subject and the Indians were not regarded as minors in Law, and that he would hold his lease and maintain the right of the Indians to give it, in spite of the Government.”\(^{36}\) (DOCUMENT 26)

William Mactavish, who attended the meeting as an observer for the Hudson’s Bay Company, also noted the influence of the Métis in rejecting the proposals made by Vidal and Anderson. Mactavish wrote:

“Mr. James N. Ermatinger is at present here vowing to give the Government trouble, but in what way is not very clear, he says that if the treaty be formed up the Lake he will bring there a Band of American Indians who will make the Indians on this side listen to reason, he proposes that instead of cash payments, - schools, etc., to be formed and small presents be given half yearly.”\(^{37}\) (DOCUMENT 27)

Vidal and Anderson refused to negotiate with anyone except the Ojibway Chiefs. When Macdonell attempted to speak again, Vidal and Anderson abruptly closed the meeting.

Vidal and Anderson’s notes explained that:

“The Commissioners then stated that they were sent to speak with the Indians, not the Whites, that the questions though important were quite simple and might be easily answered, - that the answers were required from themselves, - and that they could express their desires as well to the Commissioners as they could to Mr. Macdonell.

Mr. Macdonell then commenced a speech, and though requested to remain silent for a time, persisted, when it was judged necessary to close the


conference; it was therefore done, by explaining to the Indians that it was rendered unavoidable by their refusal to speak to the Commissioners.

The Council being formally closed Mr. Vidal left the room, Captain Anderson remaining as a spectator. Mr. Macdonell continued to address the Indians in a most inflammatory style. (DOCUMENT 26)

Allan Macdonell’s description of the events at the Sault Ste. Marie Council was significantly different from that reported by Vidal and Anderson. According to Macdonell, after Vidal and Anderson refused to continue the meeting they admitted that they were not authorized to negotiate and they refused to recognize Métis rights.

Macdonell explained that:

“The Council was dissolved and the Commissioners admitted that they were not authorized to offer one shilling for the Indian lands. After the Council had thus broken up, Mr. Vidal, in my hearing, addressed himself to a most intelligent and respectable halfbreed by the name of Canosh [Pierre Etienne Jolliet39], said now the Indians shall not receive anything for their Lands; and this language was used subsequently on other occasions by the Commissioners, who likewise stated that the halfbreeds should not receive anything.” (DOCUMENT 28)

Despite the failed Council Meeting at Sault Ste. Marie, Vidal and Anderson reported that there was a general willingness among the Ojibway of Lake Huron and Lake Superior to accept a treaty with the British Crown. Their report stated:

“There is a general wish expressed by the Indians to cede their territory to the Government provided they are not required to remove from their present places of abode, - their hunting and fishing not interfered with, and that the compensation given them be a perpetual annuity; but some diversity of opinion exists as to the amount and mode of payment desired. Were they not influenced by the counsels of designing whites, the Chiefs candidly declare their perfect ignorance of the value of their lands and are quite contented to

40 British Colonist (Toronto newspaper), 18 December 1849: 2.
different companies, relying on being settled with at the time appointed.”

(DOCUMENT 35)

Robinson's formal treaty expedition departed from Toronto on 14 August 1850, and arrived at Sault Ste. Marie four days later. The next several days were spent meeting with local chiefs and visiting chiefs. On August 25th, Colonel Robert Bruce, Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, arrived at Sault Ste. Marie. Bruce and Robinson held preliminary meetings with some of the chiefs. On August 30th Bruce departed, and his brother, Governor-General Lord Elgin arrived. Robinson noted that he “saw the Governor-General, told him my intentions as to the treaty, which he approved of.”

(DOCUMENT 35) On 1 September 1850, Robinson and Governor-General Lord Elgin met with some of the Lake Superior chiefs. Chief Joseph, La Peau de Chat, from Fort William, although gravely ill, spoke of his “attachment to the Queen and her representatives.”

(DOCUMENT 35) On September 3rd, a meeting was held at Garden River with the Lake Huron Chiefs. Chief Tagawinini from Manitoulin Island and Chief Shinguakonce from Garden River made speeches expressing confidence that a treaty could be reached with Robinson. Lord Elgin then departed and the business of treaty negotiations was scheduled for the next day.

A driving rainstorm on 4 September 1850 postponed the treaty negotiations. The next day a treaty council meeting was held, and Robinson's diary noted his opening remarks:

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54 Diary of William B. Robinson, 1850, Archives of Ontario, Robinson Papers, MU 5906: 12.
“Addressed them, explaining my appointment to them, and finished by proposing to pay them $16,000 (£4,000) down in specie and an annuity forever of $1,000. Explained to them the benefit of a perpetual annuity instead of a present payment only. Also told them they might make reasonable reservations for their own use for farming etc. etc., and that they would still have the free use of all the territory ceded to Her Majesty, to hunt and fish over as heretofore, except such places as were sold to white people and others by the Government and occupied in such a manner to prevent such hunting.”\(^{56}\) (DOCUMENT 35)

The Lake Superior Chiefs Joseph, Le Peau de Chat (Fort William), and Chief Totomenaise (Michipicoten) indicated a willingness to accept the terms offered by Robinson. The Lake Huron Chiefs, led by Shinguakonce (Garden River) declined to give an immediate response.

The treaty council reconvened on 6 September 1850, and Chief Shinguakonce gave a list of demands that included an annuity of $10 per person and a reserve area of 15 miles frontage on Lake Huron. Robinson replied that his demands were too high, but reassured him that “they would have the same privileges as ever of hunting and fishing over the whole territory.”\(^{57}\) (DOCUMENT 35)

On 7 September 1850, Robinson produced two copies of the treaty that he had prepared the previous night. The treaty was read and translated by interpreters George Johnston and John W. Keating. Chief Joseph, Le Peau de Chat, acting as spokesman for the Lake Superior Chiefs, agreed to the treaty. Robinson met a very different response from Chief Shinguakonce, who repeated his earlier demands. Robinson replied that he would give the Lake Huron chiefs two days to think the

\(^{55}\) Diary of William B. Robinson, 1850, Archives of Ontario, Robinson Papers, MU 5906: 12.
\(^{56}\) Diary of William B. Robinson, 1850, Archives of Ontario, Robinson Papers, MU 5906: 16-17.
matter over again. Using a veiled threat to terminate negotiations and take back the treaty money, Robinson stated:

"I would not press anyone to sign. Those who signed would get the money for their tribes and those who did not sign would get none, and I should take the remainder of the money back to Toronto, give it to the government to take no further trouble about the treaty matter." \(^{58}\) (DOCUMENT 35)

On 9 September 1850, Robinson again had the treaty read and translated for a partial delegation of the Lake Huron Chiefs. Robinson noted that the chiefs who were present evidenced a willingness to sign the treaty. Chief Shinguakonce and Chief Nebenaigoching arrived later, and the business of treaty reading and translation was conducted a second time. The newly arrived Chiefs persisted in their original demands, and added a further demand that the Métis lands be protected. Robinson reported that they:

"Also insisted That I should insert in the treaty a condition securing to some sixty half-breeds a free grant of one hundred acres of land each." \(^{59}\) (DOCUMENT 36)

Historian James Morrison has pointed out that Chiefs Shinguakonce and Nebenaigoching were familiar with the terms of the U.S. Treaty at Fond du Lac in

\(^{57}\) Diary of William B. Robinson, 1850, Archives of Ontario, Robinson Papers, MU 5906: 18.

\(^{58}\) Diary of William B. Robinson, 1850, Archives of Ontario, Robinson Papers, MU 5906: 22-23.

\(^{59}\) Report of Mr. William B. Robinson to the Honourable Colonel Bruce, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 24 September 1850, NAC, RG 10, vol. 191: 111,699-111,700. In 1893, Chief Nebenaigoching of Batchewana recalled that "we wanted the Halfbreeds that were living with us at that time to be included as Members of our Bands and to shear [sic] with us in the Payments." Archives of Ontario, Irving Papers, F 1027-1-2: n.p. Also in 1893, Paywatchinini of Garden River recalled that "I was present at the Meeting in council when the demand was made [sic] by Chief Shinguacoose. I did not here him say one hundred acres, he the chief said there clames thos that has houses and land cleare and finched in that are living in the Soo vilege he meant thos Halfbreeds and french canadeans that were living in the Soo that had houses at that time only, and wished that there clames be given them as a free grant." ibid.
1826. 60 (DOCUMENT 37) That Treaty recognized Métis rights, and protected Métis lands near Sault Ste. Marie on the American side. Morrison also noted that the Chiefs had obtained a written statement drafted by Allan Macdonell that they wanted inserted into the Treaty. That statement, which was virtually identical to the Métis clause in the 1826 Fond du Lac Treaty, was recorded as follows:

"It being deemed important that the halfbreeds scattered through this extensive country shall be stimulated to exertion and improvement by the possession of permanent property and fixed residences, the Odjibewa nation, in consideration thereof and the affection they bear these people and their children and the interest they feel in their welfare, grant to each of the persons described in the schedule hereto annexed, one hundred acres of land to be located upon some part of the lands ceded by this treaty, and that free patents for each hundred acres, shall be granted by the Government to the undersigned respectively and their heirs forever, so soon as the persons therein referred to, shall have made the location they desire respectively." 61 (DOCUMENT 37)

Robinson explained that he did not have the power to make concessions. 62 In his report to Colonel Bruce, Robinson explained that he had been authorized only to deal with the Chiefs and that he considered the issue of Métis claims to be the domain of the Chiefs. Robinson wrote:

As the half-breeds of Sault Ste. Marie and other places may seek to be recognized by the Government in future payments, it may be well that I should state here the answer that I gave to their demands on the present occasion. I told them that I came to treat with the chiefs who were present, that the money would be paid to them – and their receipt was sufficient for me – that

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62 In 1893, John Mashkayosh of Batchewana would recall that Robinson said: “he did no' come here for Halfbreeds nor Whites he came to make a Treaty with the Indian Chiefs and there [sic] Bands.” Archives of Ontario, Irving Papers, F 1027-1-2: n.p. Also in 1893, Chief Nebenaigoching of Batchewana recalled that “we wanted the Halfbreeds that were living with us at that time to be included as Members of our Bands and to shear [sic] with us in the Payments.” Ibid.
leave it to the Government to determine what shall be given them, expressing their confidence in the wisdom and justice of their Great Father.\textsuperscript{41} (DOCUMENT 26)

The report also commented on the rights of the Métis. Vidal and Anderson pointed out that the rights of the Métis could not be distinguished from the other Aboriginal people in the region. They explained that:

"Another subject which may involve a difficulty is that of determining how far the Half-breds are to be regarded as having a claim to share in the remuneration awarded to the Indians, and (as they can scarcely be altogether excluded without injustice to some) where and how the distinction should be made between them: many of these are so closely connected with some of the bands, and being generally better informed exercise such an influence over them, that it may be found scarcely possible to make a separation, especially as a great number have been already recognized as Indians, as to have presents issued to them by the Government at the annual distribution at Manitouaning.\textsuperscript{42,43} (DOCUMENT 26)

The general air of optimism in the report by Vidal and Anderson masked a serious rupture in relations between themselves and the Aboriginal people who attended the Sault Ste. Marie Council meeting. On 9 November 1849, an armed party of Métis and Ojibway from the Sault took over a mining camp at Mica Bay on Lake Superior. Allan Macdonell and two partners (Angus Macdonell and Wharton Metcalfe) accompanied the Métis and Ojibway and participated in the take-over of the mine. The mine was taken without bloodshed, and within a week the miners were safely evacuated. The government sent a

\textsuperscript{41} Report of Commissioners A. Vidal & T. Anderson on a visit to Indians, North Shores Lakes Huron & Superior for purpose of investigating their claims to territory bordering those Lakes, 5 December 1849, typescript copy in Archives of Ontario.

\textsuperscript{42} As noted above, the government sought to eliminate the Métis from the annual distribution of presents from the British Crown. However, a few Métis continued to receive presents directly and others probably obtained a share of presents given to the Chiefs.

\textsuperscript{43} Report of Commissioners A. Vidal & T. Anderson on a visit to Indians, North Shores Lakes Huron & Superior for purpose of investigating their claims to territory bordering those Lakes, 5 December 1849, typescript copy in Archives of Ontario.
detachment of soldiers to Sault Ste. Marie, but before the arrival of the troops the alleged
ringleaders voluntarily turned themselves in and were arrested and sent to Toronto to
stand trial. These included Pierrot Lesage and Charles Boyer, two influential Métis
leaders from Sault Ste. Marie. The trial did not proceed, however, as Chief Justice John
Beverly Robinson ruled against the charges on procedural grounds. The people were
allowed to return home to the Sault after William Benjamin Robinson, brother of the Chief
Justice and an opposition member of the Legislative assembly filed an intervention.

While events unfolded in the Toronto courtroom, the situation at Sault Ste. Marie
remained tense. William Mactavish reported that news of the Mica Bay affair had spread
widely and rapidly, and that other Métis were rallying to come to the aid of their
countrymen. In a letter to Sir George Simpson dated 14 December 1849, Mactavish
wrote:

"...the latest news is that 2,000 Red River half breeds are to be down in spring
to act as allies of Shingwakoncel, having sent him a wampum belt with a
message to that effect this autumn."44 (DOCUMENT 29)

William Benjamin Robinson45, who had earlier intervened on behalf of the Mica Bay
ringleaders, was appointed Treaty Commissioner by the Executive Council of the Province
of Canada on 11 January 1850. He was advised that his job be to:

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44 Letter from W. Mactavish, Sault Ste Marie, to George Simpson, 14 December 1849, HBCA, D.5/26,
folio 693.
45 Robinson was a member of the provincial legislature for Simcoe County, and former member of the
Executive Council. He had been removed from the Executive Council in 1848, after the formation of the
Baldwin-La Fontaine administration. At the same time he lost his job as Commissioner of Public Works.
However, he soon found a new job as Superintendent of the Montreal Mining Company that had an
active operation at Bruce Mines on the north shore of Lake Huron. As superintendent, he was engaged in
overseeing the Bruce Mines operation and in visiting other locations of interest to the Montreal Mining
Company. Robinson's employment with the Montreal Mining Company also brought him into close
association with Executive Council members Francis Hincks and W.H. Merritt, who were shareholders in
"Negotiate with the several Tribes for the adjustment of their claims to the occupation of all lands in the vicinity of Lakes Huron and Superior, portions of which have been occupied for mining purposes. ...[and] Communicate to the Indians the fact of your appointment and that it is your intention to proceed to Lake Superior at such time as may be found most convenient for meeting the Chiefs and that you should impress the minds of the Indians that they ought not to expect excessive remuneration for the partial occupation of the territory heretofore used as hunting grounds by persons who have been engaged in developing sources of wealth [mines] which they had themselves entirely neglected." (DOCUMENT 30)

The Executive Council issued additional instructions to Robinson by an Order in Council dated 16 April 1850. These instructions explained that he was to:

"endeavour to negotiate for the extinction of the Indian title to the whole territory on the North and North Eastern coasts of Lakes Huron and Superior." (DOCUMENT 31)

On 3 May 1850, Robinson wrote to Hudson’s Bay Company Governor Simpson and informed him about the importance of the Company in his plans to negotiate the treaty. He stated:

"I have taken the liberty of writing to some of your Gentlemen on Lake Superior respecting the arrangements I have made for meeting the Indians in August and trust in doing so I have not 'sinned against the Charter'." (DOCUMENT 32)

the Company. During the 1820s, Robinson had been engaged with his brother in the fur trade business in the Lake Huron area. He competed against the HBC, but later became a friend of HBC officials including Governor George Simpson. The many letters exchanged between Robinson and Simpson indicate that they were close personal friends as well as business associates. Robinson obtained loans from the HBC to purchase properties. He also sought favours from the Company to hire friends and family members.

47 Order in Council, 16 April 1850, NAC, RG 10, vol. 266: 163,165.
In another letter dated 8 May 1850, Robinson confided with Simpson about his views on the future importance of mining on the north shore of Lake Superior. Robinson wrote:

"I should like to know how far such a scheme would in any way interfere (if at all) with your rights and privileges before I say more about it." 49

(Document 33)

As noted above, much of Robinson's pre-treaty arrangements depended on the cooperation and help of the HBC. The Company's posts were expected to contribute lodging, food and other supplies. Robinson requested that the HBC post managers give food to the Ojibway Chiefs so that "it may keep them in good humour." 50

(Document 33) William Mactavish reported to Governor Simpson that: "Mr. Robinson has spoken to me about supplying them and other Indians with provisions from the Cos. stores here during their stay at the Sault, and as we have a large quantity of flour, rough corn and pork on hand, I told him I could do it." 51

(Document 34)

Robinson made a preliminary trip to Sault Ste. Marie in the spring of 1850. On 1 May 1850, he held a Council meeting at Garden River and explained his plans to return in August to negotiate a treaty. Robinson noted in his diary that:

"They all expressed themselves satisfied and promised in presence of Capt. Ermatinger 52 and others to offer no opposition to mining operations by the

52 This was probably Charles Oakes Ermatinger Jr., who was a captain of the Royal Montreal Cavalry during the 1840s. The Ermatinger family was well known at Sault Ste. Marie. Charles Oakes Ermatinger sr. was a partner in the North West Company and active in the Sault Ste. Marie fur trade. In the early 1800s he married Charlotte Kattawabide, a daughter of a local Anishnawbe chief.
when in their possession they might give as much or as little to that class of claimants as they pleased. 63 (DOCUMENT 36)

After splitting the Lake Huron Chiefs, and settling with the Lake Superior Chiefs, there was little bargaining power left. Reluctantly, on 9 September 1850, the Lake Huron Chiefs placed their marks on the treaty document.

A.W. Buchanan, HBC post manager at La Cloche was at Sault Ste. Marie at the time of the treaty and he made a report of the proceedings to Governor Simpson. In a letter dated 11 September 1850, Buchanan reported:

"The treaty was held on the 5th inst. by Mr. Robinson at the Company's store at the upper end of the portage, and continued till the day before yesterday when all was settled. The Indians of Lakes Superior and Huron agreed at once to the terms proposed, but those of this place, namely Jos. Sayer [also known as Chief Nebenaigoaching] and Shingwaak declined the offers made, and caused a delay of two or three days, but at last, seeing there was a large majority against them, and that they were likely to be set aside altogether, gave in and signed the paper. Macdonell had nothing to say for himself indeed he would not have been allowed to speak, and is completely defeated.

The terms of the treaty are that the Indians are to receive £4,000 now to be divided amongst the whole of them, and £1,000 are to be paid them annually forever, liable to be increased until the sum amounts to £1 for each Indian should sales of land be made to afford that sum, and in return they are to give up the whole of the country to the height of land, including Michipicoton Island etc., reserving a small portion at various places for each Chief's party, the largest reserve by far being at Garden River, and the Indians of Lake Superior are to receive their presents and annual payment for their lands at Michipicoton....Mr. Robinson's management of this whole business seems to have been good and has given satisfaction to all except Macdonell and his allies among whom may be included the Ermatingers and who seem grievously disappointed at the issue of the treaty." 64 (DOCUMENT 38)

Buchanan provided a second report on the treaty proceedings in a letter to Simpson dated 21 September 1850. Buchanan noted:

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"By my letter of the 11th inst. I gave you all the information I had regarding the Indian treaty which was at that time concluded all but the payment at Garden River which was then in progress. The Halfbreeds of the Sault are the only parties I believe dissatisfied with the issue, as they are of opinion that their chief (Nebenagogon [Nebenaigoching]) who arranged about the distribution of the sum paid this party of Indians should have given them all a share, but with a few exceptions he has given it to the Indians only to the disappointment of those who assisted him and Macdonell last winter in driving the miners from Mica Bay, and who expected to have been liberally paid for that exploit.

Shingwaak was talking about giving $200 as a recompense to Macdonell for his 'Agency' and Nebanagogun was also talking about doing the same, but I believe neither have paid him anything as yet. He, on his part is talking of making a trip to England to appeal for justice to the Indians from a higher quarter but I believe is rather short of means at present.

Mr. Robinson did not take so much provisions for the Indians as I expected - there were not many assembled and they soon dispersed; the supplies he got amounted to £42 which he paid before leaving."65

(DOCUMENT 39)

As noted above, the Chiefs who negotiated the 1850 Treaty sought to protect the rights of the Métis, which they considered equal to their own. While Robinson refused to agree to the stipulation that Métis lands be protected, the Chiefs who signed the Treaty continued to believe that the Métis had equal rights. This is evident in the petition of the Ojibway Chiefs to the Earl of Elgin shortly after the Treaty in September 1850. That petition stated:

"...with scarce one exception, all have married Indian women, and by them have families, with these exceptions the whole of the inhabitants of the Sault are what are termed 'half breeds,' very many of them, the children of the sisters and the daughters of your memorialists. Thus having an inheritance in the country equal to our own, and bound to it by as strong and heartfelt ties as we ourselves."66 (DOCUMENT 40)

66 Petition, NAC, RG1, L3, vol. 182B, Petitions E Bundle 6, no. 21.
While Robinson refused to treat with the Métis, he did guarantee that the lands which they had cleared and improved would not be taken away. His diary on 9 September 1850, noted that: "I confirmed certain old residents in the free and full possession of their lands on which they now reside."67 (DOCUMENT 35)

Robinson elaborated on this confirmation in his report to the government. He wrote:

"The Canadians resident on the lands just surrendered at Sault Ste. Marie are very anxious to obtain titles to the lands on which they have long resided and made improvements; they applied to me after the treaty and I advised them to memorialize the Government the usual way, setting forth the manner in which they were put in possession by the military authorities of the time, and that I had little doubt that the Government would do them justice. I think the survey of the treaty should be made so as to interfere as little as possible with their respective clearings and that those who can show a fair claim to the favorable consideration of the Government should be liberally dealt with."68 (DOCUMENT 36)

Robinson's advice was heeded, and shortly afterward a memorial was prepared, signed by 55 petitioners, and sent to the Governor General, the Earl of Elgin. Robinson personally submitted the memorial on 21 October 1850. The Métis petitioners clearly explained that they considered themselves entitled to the land because of their Aboriginal heritage. They stated:

"Your Excellency's Petitioners, with the exception of some five or six, are all of mixed Indian Blood and have been born upon the soil that each of them has held, occupied and cultivated the land, wherein they now reside for very many years, most of them having inherited their possessions from their mothers, and the residue having purchased from half-breeds or Indians."69 (DOCUMENT 40)

69 Petition, NAC, RG1, L3, vol. 182B, Petitions B Bundle 6, no. 21.
Métis Lands at Sault Ste. Marie after the 1850 Treaty:

One of the objectives of William B. Robinson as Treaty Commissioner for the British Crown was to obtain land in order to allow mining, timber and other development to occur in the Lake Huron and Lake Superior regions. These development plans also included a town at Sault Ste. Marie. As noted above, a town-plot survey had been done in 1846. In 1847, the Crown Lands Department had advertised town lots for sale at Sault Ste. Marie.\(^70\) (DOCUMENT 41) William B. Robinson purchased a lot of 50 acres (lot 12, Con. 3) in the townplot of Sault Ste. Marie. The purchase price is not known, but on 10 December 1854, Robinson sold the lot to Henry C.R. Beecher for the sum of £50.\(^71\) (DOCUMENT 42)

Other participants in the 1850 Treaty were also interested in land speculation at Sault Ste. Marie. For example, Wemyss Simpson, HBC trader and friend of Robinson, received land at Sault Ste. Marie (SW quarter of Sec. 21, Twp. 1, North Range 25 West) in 1859 from Joseph Bassineau (probably Boissineau) Sr. The consideration for this transfer of land was “value received” by Boissineau, probably indicating that it was intended to clear some debt owed to Simpson.\(^72\) (DOCUMENT 43)

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\(^{72}\) Transfer of a Lot at Sault Ste. Marie from Joseph Bassineau to Wemyss Mackenzie Simpson, Archives of Ontario, RG 1, C-IV, MS 658-466: 10.
The Hudson’s Bay Company aggressively lobbied the government for a free grant of 1,200 acres in and around the site of its trading post at Sault Ste. Marie. Negotiations between Company and government officials were protracted, with the Company eventually settling for only 68 acres.\(^{73}\) (DOCUMENT 44)

As noted above, the Métis also petitioned the government for their own lands. Their petition was reviewed and the Commissioner of Crown Lands in November 1851 made a report. That report, prepared by Chief Clerk William Spragge, recommended that the Métis be allowed 50 acre grants for a nominal fee of one shilling per acre. The report was approved by the Executive Council on 20 February 1852.\(^{74}\) (DOCUMENT 45)

Historian James Morrison has traced some of the property transactions at Sault Ste. Marie, and he concluded that the Métis obtained only a few patents to their lands. Morrison wrote:

"An 1855 map of the town of Sault Ste. Marie shows the first concession divided into narrow riverfront lots in the French manner, with dots marking the existing canadien and métis holdings. It appears, however, that few métis obtained patents. By the time the first Registry Office for Algoma District opened in 1858, the first Concession – now part of downtown Sault Ste. Marie – was already the focus of intense property speculation. And between 1858 and 1871, when the municipality of Sault Ste. Marie was created, there were 114 property transactions in the first Concession. Métis people were involved in only 18 of them – in all cases as seller or mortgagee. Only a half dozen métis still owned property in Sault Ste. Marie by 1900, by which time their holdings had been reduced to the size of a standard municipal lot."\(^{75}\) (DOCUMENT 37)


Thus, it is evident that William B. Robinson’s assurance to the Métis that the Treaty would not alienate their lands proved false. Without the protection being written into the Treaty, the Métis memorial to the government proved ineffective in reserving their lands. The alienation of Métis lands at Sault Ste. Marie was caused in part by the rampant speculation in land that drove prices higher than the Métis could afford. With limited wage-earning capacities after 1850, the Métis sold their lands or their pre-emption rights to their lands to non-Aboriginal settlers and land speculators.

However, the Métis continued to live in the Sault Ste. Marie region. Some drifted into the Indian Reserves which had been set apart by the 1850 Treaty. Others lived in areas outside of the town, or in back concessions. The Métis continued to live in much the same manner as they had in the past - fishing, hunting, trapping and harvesting other resources for their livelihood.

Aboriginal Hunting and Fishing Rights not Interfered with by Treaty:

There is little doubt that both the Aboriginal people and William B. Robinson understood that the 1850 Treaty was not to interfere with hunting and fishing rights. This point was elucidated one year earlier in Vidal’s 1849 report. Vidal wrote that a treaty was possible if the Crown met a number of pre-conditions. These included the condition that “hunting and fishing are not interfered with.”76 (DOCUMENT 26) Robinson’s report to Colonel Bruce on 24 September 1850, explained that:

76 Report of Commissioners A. Vidal and T.G. Anderson on visit to Indians, North Shores Lakes Huron and Superior for Purposes of Investigating their Claims and Territory Bordering on those Lakes, Archives of Ontario, Irving Papers, MU 1464, 26/31/04.
“In allowing the Indians the right to retain reservations of land for their own use I was governed by the fact that they in most cases asked for such tracts as they had heretofore been in the habit of using for cultivation, and by securing these to them and the right of hunting and fishing over the ceded territory, they cannot say that the Government takes from [them] their usual means of subsistence.”

(DOCUMENT 36)

The 1850 Treaty was also plain and clear on the subject. It stated that:

“...and further, to allow the said Chiefs and their tribes the full and free privilege to hunt over the territory now ceded by them, and to fish in the waters thereof, as they have heretofore been in the habit of doing, saving and excepting such portions of the said territory as may from time to time be sold or leased to individuals or companies of individuals and occupied by them with the consent of the Provincial Government.”

(DOCUMENT 46)

While the language in the Treaty specifies “Chiefs and tribes,” it is evident that the Métis were understood to be included within that definition. This can be seen in the reports of Vidal and Anderson, and Robinson noted above.

The Métis continued to exercise their traditional resource harvesting rights after the 1850 Treaty. They were involved in the commercial fishery as well as the commercial fur trade. In addition, wild food resources continued to be a major part of their livelihood.

Although the Métis lost much of their traditional land base at Sault Ste. Marie, they continued to live in the region and gain their livelihood from the resources of the land and waters. This can be seen by examining the census rolls beginning with the first census for Algoma District in 1861.

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77 Report of Mr. William B. Robinson to the Honourable Colonel Bruce, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 24 September 1850, NAC, RG 10, vol. 191: 111,701.
The census data from 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 indicate that the Métis continued to live in much the same way as they had before 1850.\(^{79}\) \textbf{(DOCUMENT 47)} The occupations listed for Métis heads of households continued to include fishermen, hunters, trappers, boatmen, boat-builders and traders. Those who were identified specifically as hunters included Joseph Lepointe (1871 Census – Batchewana), John Lewis and Benjamin Boyer (1891 Census – Garden River), Peter John and John Jourdain (1891 Census – Goulais Bay). \textbf{(DOCUMENT 49)}

Outside of the census data, few historical records provide information about the Métis in the Sault Ste. Marie area. One reason for the lack of information about the Métis is their removal to the peripheries of the town. Another reason may be their own disinclination to be identified as Métis. This was especially the case after the Riel rebellions in the west. In Ontario, the public opinion was against Métis rights. This opinion was fuelled by government actions and by the media. For example, an advertisement published in \textit{The Globe} on 20 May 1885 included a cartoon showing General Middleton picking up Louis Riel by his neck, with the following caption below:

\begin{quote}
"The announcement of THE CAPTURE OF RIEL in Saturday morning's Globe created the wildest joy and excitement throughout the whole of Ontario, and many a Canadian home was made happy by the joyful news."\(^{80}\)
\end{quote}

\textbf{(DOCUMENT 48)}

Despite the anti-Métis sentiment espoused in newspaper accounts, it is evident that some Métis in the Sault Ste. Marie area continued to dress in traditional clothing. This can be seen in a sketch made by Rev. E.F. Wilson on 11 August 1881. Wilson, who was

\footnotesize
\(^{79}\) Extracts from the 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 Census, copy in Archives of Ontario.
\(^{80}\) \textit{The Globe}, 20 May 1885.
stationed at Sault Ste. Marie, made a sketch of the preparation for a canoe trip on Lake Jessie. The men depicted in the sketch carrying a canoe and baggage were dressed in distinctive Métis clothing, including the Red River sash (DOCUMENT 49).\textsuperscript{81}

Ironically, one of the best sources of information about Métis resource harvesting activities came from the pen of E.B. Borron who had been commissioned by the government of the Province of Ontario in 1891 to report on the Métis who received treaty annuity payments. Provincial government officials who were interested in striking Métis claimants from annuity paylists to avoid paying arrears instructed Borron. Borron’s first report on 31 December 1891, provided the following description of the Métis way of life:

“They lived in log houses and when not employed by the Hon. Hudson Bay company or others – as voyageurs, boatmen, couriers and labourers would eke out a subsistence by hunting and fishing or in various other ways. In early spring they and their families made considerable quantities of maple sugar. During the summer small patches of potatoes and corn were cultivated, and hay cut and made on the marshes, for their cattle, if they had any, in winter. In ‘the fall’ when white-fish and trout sought the shallow water to spawn – they would go to well known points on lakes Huron and Superior and if provided with a sufficient number of nets would generally catch and salt down an ample supply of fish for use during the winter. In the winter season – cutting and hauling cord-wood for their own use or for sale, and catching rabbits were the principal occupations – when as already said not employed by the Hudson’s Bay Company or others.”\textsuperscript{82} (DOCUMENT 50)

Borron tried to differentiate the Métis from the Indians in order to show that they were not entitled to receive treaty annuities. In his supplementary report of 27 October 1894, Borron emphasized that the Métis did not live like the Indians. (DOCUMENT 51) The

\textsuperscript{81} “Preparing to Start on Lake Jessie, August 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1881,” sketch by Rev. E.F. Wilson, Wilson Family Papers, Archives of Ontario, MS 24: n.p.

\textsuperscript{82} Report by E.B. Borron, 31 December 1891, Archives of Ontario, Irving Papers, F 1027-1-2, MS 1780.
Indians in the region were said to live a "tribal" way of life. The Métis, on the other hand, lived more like Euro-Canadians. Borron pointed out that the Métis were not entirely dependent on fish, game and fur-bearing animals for their livelihood. In fact, Borron described the diversified Métis way of life that has been noted above. The Métis did fish, hunt and trap, but they also cultivated plants, raised domestic farm animals, worked as voyageurs, boat-builders, canoe-builders, blacksmiths and traders. The Métis were portrayed as more entrepreneurial than the Indians. Borron pointed out that they sold fish, hay, cordwood, maple sugar, and furs. Thus, hunting and fishing were part of a diversified way of life that was based on traditional resource harvesting activities in the Sault Ste. Marie region. (DOCUMENT 51)

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5. Letter from William Nourse, Sault St. Marys, to Louis Denis Laronde, Batchewana Bay, 27 October 1834, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, B.194/b/9, p. 27.


47. Extracts from the 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891 Census, copy in Archives of Ontario.


