

Debut Févres, An: Pages?

PRE-HISTORY

Man in the Geraldton District

The people who lived here prior to the advent of the European were too busy extracting sustenance from an improvident land to develop much of a culture. The land could not be farmed, which ruled out communal living so they built no durable stone temples such as record the life history of Indians of tropical America. Early man in the Geraldton District was represented by small family groups kept in constant motion by the change of seasons and animal populations, so there are none of the rich, revealing garbage dumps that tell the story of Iroquois and pre-Iroquois occupation of Southern Ontario. Fragmentary evidence - broken pottery, flint and copper tools and puzzling rock paintings show that people lived here before the whiteman came, but little archaeological investigation has been done. Probably the area was occupied discontinuously by different tribes, perhaps the weakest tribe of the moment driven to an unwanted part of the continent by stronger neighbours.

Recorded history shows that Ojibways were at Sault Ste. Marie when the French first reached that point in the 1660's and this segment of the Algonkian speaking nation, or a near-relative, probably included the southern portion of this District in their lands at that time. North of the height-of-land were the Crees, who probably were drawn to their present homes on the shore of Hudson and James Bays by the trading posts which appeared there later in the century. The search for furs, employment as canoemen for traders, and perhaps pressure from the Iroquois and Sioux

caused the Ojibway to expand into nearly all of Northern Ontario in the next one hundred years, so that now all of the Geraldton District Indians are Ojibways.

It is probable that the first white man to see this district was a French coureurs de bois seeking furs. The earliest of these to reach Lake Superior was Etienne Brule in 1623, but it is unlikely that his journey took him this far, nor is there any evidence that Pierre Esprit Radisson ever saw the north shore above Pigeon River in his explorations of the late 1650's. Whoever the man was, he can be credited with initiating the business of fur trading in the area and thus launching of the industrial age in the Geraldton District.

See p. 101

Fur Trade in the Albany watershed? Dulhut?

The Industrial Age - The Fur Trade

J. P. Bertrand in his book "The Highway of Destiny" suggests that the first killing of fur bearers for trading with the whiteman in this area may have been done by some Nipissing Indians, who, in flight from the Iroquois, took refuge on some Lake Nipigon islands. The French first operated their fur business by persuading Indians to carry their furs to the St. Lawrence River settlements, but the danger of ambush by Iroquois, increasing distances to the best fur areas, and competition among the French, and from the English on Hudson Bay, eventually resulted in the system of meeting the Indians part way at trading posts established in the interior. The first known post in this district was ~~Sieur~~ Dulhut's (fort a la Maune or Les Nepignons) at the mouth of the Ombabika River, built in 1684 to stop Indians from the Lake Nipigon region from descending the Albany to trade with the

Fort La Torche

Hudson's Bay Company. He must have succeeded in his purpose, for a few years later, it was said that the Lake Nipigon area was producing greater profits than any other for the French. The only trace remaining of Fort a la Maune is in the names of some geographical features in the Ombabika Bay region.

Although there was considerable bending of the boundary, it may be said that for the first hundred years the industry north of the height-of-land belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company while that to the south was French. As a counter-measure to French inland ports, the English began inching up the Albany in 1714, and reached this district in 1777 when Gloucester House was established at Washi Lake. It appears that this was in response to French incursion near the present Fort Hope. Martin's Falls was opened in 1794, continued at that site until 1923, then moved down river to Ogoki, where it continues in operation. Probably there have been fur trade posts of some description - most of them mere winterer's huts - on nearly every major lake and river in the district. The French had a post at the mouth of the Big Pic River from the middle of the 18th century at least, and the Northwest Company continued to use it after New France became British in 1763. They also ascended the Big Pic (the remains of a marine railway for taking boats around High Falls near Caramat still exist) to their post near the site of Longlac which may have been of French origin too.

Although Scots and New Englanders took over the Lake Superior fur trade after 1763, the pelts from the southern part of this district continued to reach Europe through Montreal. When the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company amalgamated,

under the name of the latter, in 1821, the next fifty years of district fur production went almost exclusively to the Hudson's Bay Company.

The coming of the railways late in the 19th century (1885) brought white settlement, and others besides the Ojibways and the Hudson's Bay Company began to get into trapping and fur trading. The most significant event in the 20th century was the institution of the registered trapline system. This involved the allocating of areas to trappers that were engaged in trapping at the time. Areas were arranged on a watershed basis and many time consuming discussions were necessary before final boundaries were established between adjacent trappers.

This program in the Geraldton District was put into effect in 1947 and other than small alterations in boundaries, the same registered traplines exist today. Those areas established south of the Canadian National Railway are relatively small and in most cases are trapped by individuals whereas in the northern portion, traplines are large and two or three Indian families trap together as they did in years past.

Treaty Indians still remain as the more active trappers with approximately 150 licenced as compared to 65 non-treaty participants. The northern Indians still consider trapping as their main means of livelihood, but further south other means of employment are available and trapping is considered only a part time means of employment. The logging industry has provided more lucrative employment for many and this has curtailed the trapping potential as experienced in the pre-logging days.