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## Sault Ste. Marie and the War of 1812: A World Turned Upside Down in the Old Northwest

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According to Wendell Phillips, the nineteenth-century anti-slavery leader, "Revolutions are not made; they come." So it must have seemed for the residents of Sault Ste. Marie when the revolution unleashed there by the War of 1812 turned their world upside down. After the American Revolution the settlement of Sault Ste. Marie on the south bank of the St. Mary's River, the river that marked the boundary between Canada and the United States, came under the jurisdiction of the United States and, after 1805, formed part of the new Territory of Michigan. Thus the War of 1812 did not represent an act of political liberation; instead it constituted a revolution of a different sort, one that brought changes in the social, political, and economic life of the community.<sup>2</sup>

Sault Ste. Marie straddled the St. Mary's River that emptied Lake Superior's waters into Lake Huron. The settlement lay just below the site where the river tumbled down a series of rapids. Because of the abundant fish, the Ojibwa and the Ottawa had long congregated at this site in the summer for fishing and for religious and social ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> The French early in the 1600s recognized the advantages of the location as a trade center, and so did the English who followed the French in exploiting the place as a prime spot to conduct

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Phillips, "Speech" (January 8, 1852) as quoted in John Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* (Fifteenth ed., Boston, 1968), 538.

<sup>2</sup> Aiding in the formulation of the thesis of this paper were the ideas of Clifford Geertz as put forth in *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), especially chapters 1, 2, and 6; and Paul Shankman, "The Thick and the Thin: On the Interpretive Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz," *Current Anthropology*, XXV (June, 1984), 261-80.

<sup>3</sup> George Johnston, "Reminiscences By George Johnston, Of Sault Ste. Marie, 1815" (*Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Historical Collections*, Vol. XII, 1887; reprint, Lansing, Mich., 1908), 606; Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and Their Neighbors: A Study in Ethnohistory* (New York, 1970), 39-40; Harold Hickerson, *The Southwestern Chippewa: An Ethnohistorical Study* (American Anthropological Association, *Memoir 92*; Menasha, Wis., 1962), 78-81 [issued as *American Anthropologist*, new ser., LXIV, (June, 1962)]; E. S. Rogers, "Southeastern Ojibwa," *Handbook of North American Indians*; Vol. 15, *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C., 1978), 761; Robert E. Bieder, *Native American Communities in Wisconsin, 1600-1960: A Study of Tradition and Change* (Madison, Wis., 1995), 32-33.

the fur trade.<sup>4</sup> Under the British the Sault became a trading center for the large North-West Fur Company and for a few lesser companies. Houses of the traders, fur warehouses, the huts occupied by their employees, and the wigwams of the Ojibwa stretched along both sides of the St. Mary's River just below the rapids.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the years of French and British occupation, Sault Ste. Marie survived despite the economic vagaries of the fur trade. To call the settlement a village would be an exaggeration.

The settlement, marked by a two-tiered class system, mimicked a seigneurial world. Fur traders, who constituted the elite, were Europeans of substance and exercised a paternalistic control over their lower-class laborers, extending them credit, providing them places to live, employment, and presents, and often serving as godfathers to their children. In return, traders expected loyalty and deference. In a volatile world governed more by custom than by law, trust was vital. The laborers, mainly lower-class French, Scots, and mixed-blood Ojibwa or Ottawa, filled positions as both employees and retainers; they not only worked for their benefactor but also fought his battles and pledged their allegiance. Although most of the Ojibwa shared a lower-class status with the European and mixed-blood laborers, some of the headmen, spiritual leaders, and band chiefs of the local Ojibwa community were accorded a higher ranking.<sup>6</sup> While such a society harkened back to seigneurial Europe, it was also compatible with the Ojibwa society, which was characterized by heavy kinship obligations and responsibilities. Indeed, in many ways, Sault society was more Ojibwa than European and proved superbly adapted to the severe environment and precarious economic situation.

In Sault Ste. Marie nearly all the traders married or cohabited with Indian women or women of mixed blood. Traders learned quickly to marry into important Ojibwa and Ottawa families. Kinship and ties of affinity proved more than merely useful to the traders. They were both a source of power and a necessity if one was to achieve success in the trade. One Sault trader, the Irishman John Johnston, courted and married the daughter of Waubejeeg, or the White Fisher. Because the White Fisher was a major band chief among the Ojibwa on the south shore of Lake Superior in the 1790s, Johnston greatly improved his opportunity for trade with the Ojibwa. He was not alone in gaining economic advantage through marriage. One of Johnston's rivals in the fur trade married another daughter of the same chief. Obviously, the White Fisher could also take out insurance. Other

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<sup>4</sup>Hickerson, *Southwestern Chippewa*, 82; Graham A. MacDonald, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie," *The Beaver*, CCCXII (Autumn, 1981), 19-20.

<sup>5</sup>A description of early Sault Ste. Marie can be found in MacDonald, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie," 19-24; *ibid.*, CCCXII (Winter, 1981), 52-59; Johnston, "Reminiscences," 605-11.

<sup>6</sup>MacDonald, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie," (Autumn, 1981), 19-24; Johnston, "Reminiscences," 606-11.

important traders, such as the French emigré Jean-Baptiste Nolin and the Swiss emigré Charles Oakes Ermatinger, likewise married Ojibwa women from important families.<sup>7</sup>

Children of these unions were distinguished from those of the lower-class French, Scots, and mixed-blood laborers by rank and education. Many of the traders' children, for example, were educated in Montreal, and Johnston even sent one of his daughters to Ireland for education.<sup>8</sup> Upper-class and educated mixed-blood males generally assumed positions as clerks or attained higher entrepreneurial status in the fur trade.

Kinship was only one social structure that could be manipulated to maintain status and create a functioning community. Exchanges of presents and the custom of generosity also proved important. In such a harsh environment wealth had to be shared and credit extended to assure survival. Trade was a product of alliances, not the reverse. Gaining allies for protection or for future wars proved of major importance to Indian groups who upon successfully negotiating alliances sealed them with presents and often with the exchange of both women and men in order to establish kinship bonds. The value of the objects traded was less important than the symbolic meaning of the exchange. Generosity insured loyalties.<sup>9</sup> Knowledge of the Ojibwa and French languages also proved useful not only for trade but also for the establishment of easy social rapport. With an understanding of Ojibwa one gained insight into those aspects of religion related through legends and tales and thus into culture and personality. An ability to speak Ojibwa also allowed joking relationships and the recounting of stories of physical stamina, both of which served cohesive symbolic functions in Sault society.

The community of Sault Ste. Marie ranked economics more important than politics. Both British and American political concerns were too distant to interest people in the settlement. British authorities were hard pressed in their attempts to enlist the residents of the Sault to take even rudimentary steps in their own defense as the War of 1812 approached.<sup>10</sup> When the traders and their armies of Ojib-

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<sup>7</sup> MacDonald, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie," (Autumn, 1981), 22; Donald Chaput, "The 'Misses Nolin' of Red River," *Beaver*, CCCVI (Winter, 1975), 14-15; Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers* (Philadelphia, 1851), 93, 107.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, "Memoirs of John Johnston" (*Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, Vol. XXXVI; Lansing, Mich., 1908), 61-62. See also Jennifer S. H. Brown, "Ultimate Respectability: Fur-trade Children in the 'Civilized World,'" *Beaver*, CCCVII (Winter, 1977), 4-10; *ibid.* (Spring, 1978), 48-55; Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in the Blood: Fur Trade Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, British Columbia, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": *Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, n.d.), chapter 7.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Kingston, Ontario, 1985), 185.

<sup>10</sup> As one official pointed out, the fur trade "is their sole study." "Extract of a Statement of the Province of Upper Canada Sent with Approbation of Lieut. General Hunter

wa and mixed-bloods carried out the attack on Fort Mackinac, they did so not for the defense of country but out of anger stemming from the 1806 revision of the Jay Treaty of 1794 that restricted British fur trade activities to Canada. Both the Ojibwa and the traders wished to return to the old system that allowed Indians living in what was now the United States to trade freely with British traders and allowed British traders access to territory in the United States.<sup>11</sup> The army that attacked Fort Mackinac was not recruited by British officials but by the traders themselves.

The war, and the events shortly thereafter, brought about the transformation of the Sault community by undercutting and replacing its old seigneurial society. In reprisal for the attack on Fort Mackinac, American forces in 1814 sacked and destroyed the North-West Company's warehouse on the Canadian side of the Sault. Because Americans suspected Johnston of being one of the agitators urging the attack on Fort Mackinac, his warehouses were also destroyed.<sup>12</sup> These attacks seriously crippled the fur trade at the Sault.

With the end of the war, the old residents of the Sault, including many of the local Ojibwa, were apprehensive about the arrival of the Americans. Not knowing what to expect, they waited and were uneasy about the future of their community and feared being at the mercy of distant events and decisions.<sup>13</sup> After the war American fears of British attacks and British agitation of the Ojibwa in northern Michigan prompted the American government in 1819 to survey land for a fort at the Sault. In 1820 the government forced the Ojibwa to relinquish land for this structure, and in 1822 Fort Brady was built. That same year the government appointed Henry Rowe Schoolcraft Indian agent to the Sault.<sup>14</sup>

To the old residents of the Sault the American troops and officers represented more than a population increase and the extension of American power. Likewise, the arrival of an Indian agent represented more than the government's concern for Indians. Both events symbolized the loss of local control. The intrusion of external power and authority undercut the influence of the local elite and altered the social hierarchy. The new rules did not emerge from the community but originated in a distant center. For the local population this new circumstance symbolized momentous change. Both develop-

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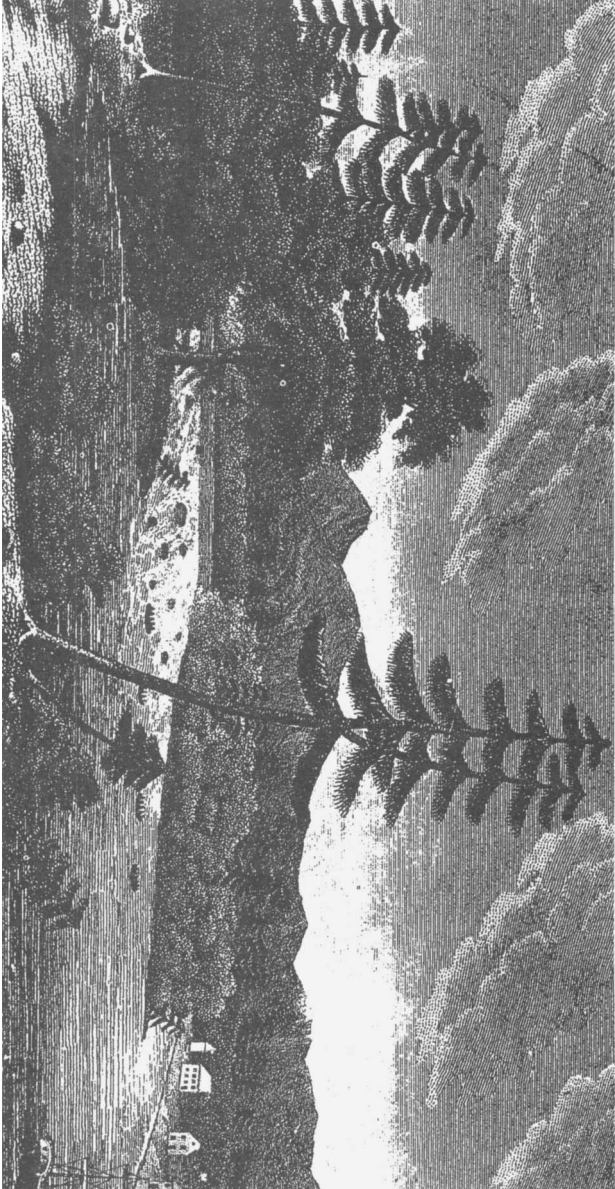
to Field Marshal His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent Commander in Chief of British N. America, in the Year 1800" (*Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Historical Collections*, Vol. XV; Lansing, Mich., 1890), 23.

<sup>11</sup> MacDonal, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie" (Autumn, 1981), 24. Despite coming under American rule after the Revolution, residents of the Sault continued to think of themselves as British subjects and to look to Canada for their political and economic ties.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; Schoolcraft, "Memoirs of John Johnston," 66-68.

<sup>13</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 128. See also Johnston, "Reminiscences," for other views.

<sup>14</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 87; Johnston, "Reminiscences," 608-11.



**SAULT STE. MARIE, ABOUT 1820**

Reproduced from H. R. Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal  
of Travels through the Northwestern Regions of the  
United States . . .* (Albany, 1821)

ments assured American control over the tribes and the region and initiated the rule of American law.<sup>15</sup>

The old settlers at the Sault recognized that not only did both Schoolcraft and the military draw their orders and their salaries from outside but that their authority derived now from law rather than custom. The new agents of power were responsible not to the old inhabitants but to distant authorities and interests; hence, they did not need to negotiate with the old residents, engage in community life, or subject themselves to the usual pressures that once tended to constrain community leaders. Nor were the newly arrived Americans overtly concerned with including the old populace in the process of change. As one fur trader noted regarding the construction of Fort Brady, "It could scarcely be credited the work they have done and well done too, all by themselves. Not an individual of the place was employed by them."<sup>16</sup> Such methods of operation clashed with the sense of shared responsibility and obligation that formerly prevailed among the people of Sault Ste. Marie.

The "colonial" situation that now characterized the Sault left an inherently unstable community. Only a weak sense of community involvement could be expected from the new arrivals. Although the institutions were permanent, the personnel were not. There were few attempts by the Americans after their arrival to enter actively into community functions. Except where called upon to administer the laws of the territory, the American military kept themselves separate from the old Sault residents.

Even Schoolcraft seemed to distance himself from the community and entered into its life only to the degree that proved necessary for the running of his office. When he did attend community engagements, he exhibited little enthusiasm for the residents. Schoolcraft especially had an antipathy for dinner parties and light conversations. Finding them dull and intellectually unstimulating, he recorded in his journal, "I do not recollect any wise or merry remark made during dinner, which is worth recording."<sup>17</sup> During the years that Schoolcraft spent at the Sault, he never adapted to the local society and was a bit of a social recluse. According to his journal, "The necessity of complying with times and occasions, by accepting the current invitations of the day, is an impediment to any system of intellectual employment; and whatever the world may think of it, the time devoted to public dinners and suppers, routs and parties, is little better than time thrown away."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 90, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in MacDonald, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie" (Winter, 1981), 54.

<sup>17</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* On another occasion Schoolcraft wrote: "At three o'clock went to dine with Mr. Siveright, at the North West Company House. . . . The evening was passed with the ordinary sources of amusement. I have for sometime felt that the time

Frequent replacement of commanders at the fort prevented their extended contact with the populace. This, however, was not Schoolcraft's problem. Although he was to remain at the Sault for eleven years, throughout his first year Schoolcraft sincerely believed that his assignment would be only temporary. At the end of that year, learning that the government opening he sought in Missouri would not be his, he stoically accepted that his position at the Sault—which he often called the American Siberia—would be permanent. He confided in his journal his sense of despair: "I do not, however, cease to hope that Providence has a more eligible situation in reserve for me."<sup>19</sup>

As Indian agent, Schoolcraft regulated the trade with the Ojibwa and Ottawa Indians. Since the economy of the Sault was the Indian trade, whatever Schoolcraft did to control the trade served to alienate the community. In order to discourage pro-British sympathy among the Ojibwa and Ottawa and at the same time prohibit British traders from entering the territory of the United States, Schoolcraft issued licenses only to American traders. This policy discriminated against the old trading firms and opened up the territory west of the Sault to independent American traders, the most significant of which was John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. Schoolcraft further manipulated the Indian trade by controlling who would receive presents. To punish those Indians traveling a few miles down river from the Sault to trade at the British post on Drummond Island, Schoolcraft gave presents only to those Ojibwa who could prove that they had not traded with the British.<sup>20</sup> Given the credit obligations in the fur trade, where traders made loans to Indians each fall in the form of supplies for the winter hunt and took their payments the following summer in the form of peltry, Schoolcraft's plan flew in the face of tradition. The Ojibwa took their debt obligations seriously and were bound by custom to pay them. Having accepted presents and other acts of generosity from the British in the past, the Ojibwa believed themselves obliged to maintain friendship and association with them.<sup>21</sup> Thus custom subverted Schoolcraft's orders. Although realities of the Indian trade defeated Schoolcraft's simplistic scheme, the new regulations did cause tensions. In the eyes of many, Schoolcraft's action appeared petty and spiteful rather than generous.

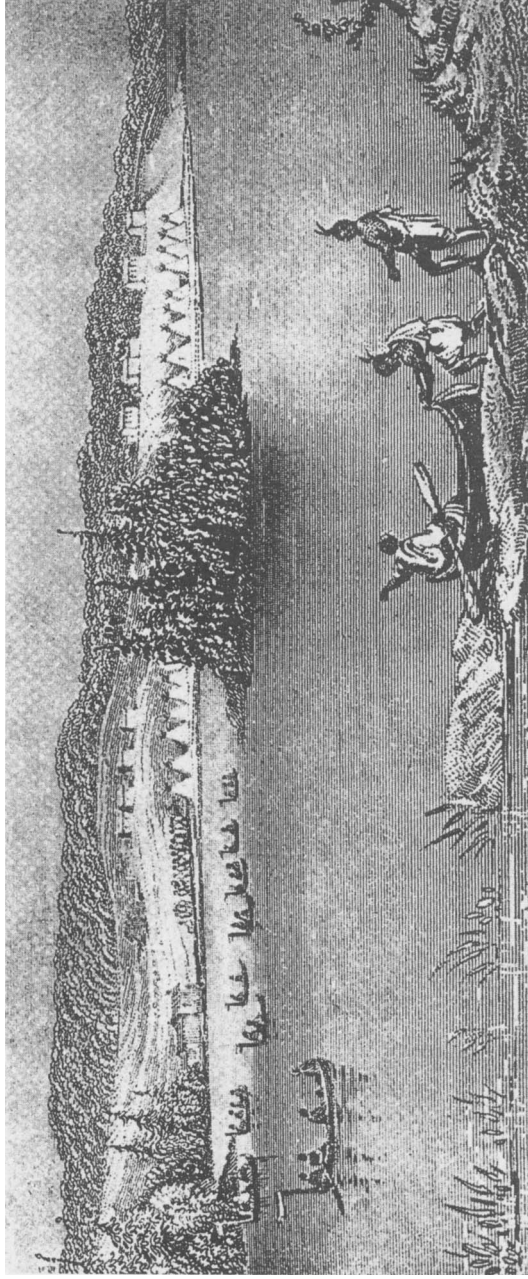
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devoted to these amusements, in which I never made much advance, would be better given up to reading, or some inquiry from which I might hope to derive advantage. An incident this evening impressed me with this truth, and I came home with a resolution that one source of them should no longer engross a moment of my time." *Ibid.*, 141-42.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 176, 130.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to Lewis Cass, July 18, 1822, Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-51, Roll 65, Letters Sent (National Archives, Washington, D.C.).

<sup>21</sup> Bieder, *Native American Communities*, 134.



## DRUMMOND ISLAND, 1820S

Reproduced from John J. Bigsby, *The Shoe and the Canoe* (London, 1850)



Other Americans who followed the army and Schoolcraft to Sault Ste. Marie—government blacksmiths, saloon- and storekeepers, missionaries—also rejected the customs and enjoyments of the old residents. They did not share the easy rapport between the old settlers at the Sault and the Indian and mixed-blood population. If the feelings of Schoolcraft and the missionaries are representative, there was a particular antipathy to Ojibwa religious ceremonies.

According to Schoolcraft, “an American is apt, either to take no pains to conceal his disgust for their [Ojibwa] superstitions, or to speak out bluntly against them.”<sup>22</sup> This antipathy also extended to the New Year’s custom of going door to door singing and requesting drinks, or as Schoolcraft noted with disdain, “the humblest individual is expected to make his appearance in the routine, and ‘has his claims [of a drink] allowed.’ The French custom of salutation prevails.”<sup>23</sup>

Recognizing that their interests and goals were different and being insensitive to or ignorant of the customs of the old settlers, the new American arrivals began to shape their own community based on the laws and regulations issued from Detroit and the customs that prevailed in the world they had left in the East. Built into these regulations was a dislike of people of mixed race, Catholics, and Indians. Within a decade and a half after the War of 1812, the recent arrivals controlled society at the Sault. Under governmental authority, which the fort symbolically represented, Americans manipulated laws that shortly resulted in the virtual disfranchisement of most of the old residents.<sup>24</sup> The settlers resisted in various ways but to little success. No pattern of collective behavior sprang up. Instead, different interest groups and individuals experimented with approaches to resistance that drew upon traditional patterns of behavior. These forms of attempted resistance can be clustered under three headings: militancy, ingratiating, and evasion.

Overt aggression, or militancy, proved ineffectual. Most of the traders recognized the futility of resistance, but there were numerous Ojibwa who refused to admit their defeat in the recent war and remained eager to resist American encroachment. In 1815 and 1816 they threatened to attack the American soldiers visiting the Sault, and in 1820 when Lewis Cass, governor of Michigan Territory, arrived to negotiate the land transactions for the future site of Fort Brady, a confrontation nearly occurred. Each time, it was difficult for the cooler heads in the community to keep the Ojibwa from launching an attack.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>24</sup> Clarence E. Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XI, Michigan Territory, 1820–1829* (Washington, D.C., 1943), 730.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis Cass to George Boyd, August 20, 1821, copy, George Johnston Papers (Bayliss Community Library, Sault Ste. Marie); Johnston, “Reminiscences,” 608-11.

Recognizing the utter futility of confrontation, several traders, such as John Johnston, Jean-Baptiste Nolin, William Holliday, and others, interceded to dissuade the Ojibwa from violence. By so doing, these traders hoped to curry favor with the Americans.<sup>26</sup> Ingratiation became a major alternative to aggression in meeting American challenges to the social and economic affairs of Sault Ste. Marie. The most adroit practitioner of this form of resistance proved to be John Johnston. Repeatedly he entertained and offered hospitality to official government parties visiting the Sault. He provided a building to agent Schoolcraft for use as an Indian office, let him board with his family, and—perhaps operating on the traditional assumption that kinship ties would prove useful—approved of his daughter's marriage to Schoolcraft.<sup>27</sup>

This approach did not always prove as useful as its advocates expected. Despite good deeds, neither Nolin nor Johnston was allowed to engage in the interior fur trade, and both were forced to restrict their activities to the Sault. As Johnston told his son in 1819, "I wrote to Governor Cass to know if from my length of residence in this country I might have liberty to send into the interior. I received his answer . . . in which he mentions unless I chose to become a citizen under Jay's treaty I could not have the liberty of trading beyond the established Post, therefore to this Post I shall restrict myself until the Almighty in Mercy enables me to quit their Territories forever."<sup>28</sup> Johnston was never allowed to trade in the interior again. Neither did his many kindnesses move American authorities to act favorably on his claims against the government for war damages or expedite his appeal to let his son George, who was born on the American side of the Sault, engage in the trade.<sup>29</sup>

There was, of course, an alternative open to Johnston, and that was to remove to Canada. Before the war Johnston had every intention of doing so, but age, the loss of his western trading territory, and the destruction of his property during the war left him financially ruined and prevented such a move. Others, including Shinguakongse, or the Little Pine, who planned the aborted attack on Cass in 1820, did choose this evasive alternative.<sup>30</sup> Nolin and his

<sup>26</sup> See note 25.

<sup>27</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 90-93; "Grandfather John Johnston's History, written by Archdeacon McMurray, Rector of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario," typescript, George Johnston Papers.

<sup>28</sup> John Johnston to George Johnston, January 12, 1819, George Johnston Papers (Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library). In another letter written on January 15, 1817, John Johnston wrote to his son, "The Americans are going to pass a bill that will entirely exclude all British subjects from the Indian Trade so that what is to become of us in the future—God alone knows. I fear there is no other alternative, but to become American Citizens or to abandon the trade and Country . . ." *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> John Johnston to George Johnston, [1819 or 1820] George Johnston Papers (Bayliss Community Library).

<sup>30</sup> Johann G. Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami: Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibway* (1860; reprint, St. Paul, Minn., 1985), 378-79.

sons, also unable to trade without becoming citizens, sold their extensive tracts of land at the Sault and removed to Lord Selkirk's Red River colony in Canada.<sup>31</sup> Others followed Nolin's example. Some like Johnston's oldest son, Lewis, elected to remain in Canada rather than return home and live under American rule.<sup>32</sup> Some traders sought to avoid American trade restrictions through an early example of off-shore trading. With the British still claiming Drummond Island, several traders, including Johnston, established posts there and thus evaded for a while American regulations.<sup>33</sup>

Removal to Canada was but one strategy; another was simply ignoring American laws and regulations, a path taken by many Ojibwa and Ottawa who continued to visit Drummond Island much to the consternation of Schoolcraft and Cass. There the tribes were able to obtain better trade goods and liquor in exchange for furs and information on American activity. In this way tribes carried liquor and British influence back into the Lake Superior country despite Schoolcraft's efforts to stem both activities among the western tribes. Cass and Schoolcraft were perhaps paranoid about British influence and intentions. They moved quickly to implement policies curtailing such influence, policies that served only to aggravate the division between the Americans and the old residents. For example, Schoolcraft, who believed that many voyageurs and traders were really British, denied them permits to enter the interior. He was probably correct in his suspicions regarding their political allegiances, but the result of his policy led to greater friction between him and the old residents at the Sault.<sup>34</sup>

After 1822, with the completion of Fort Brady, the community of Sault Ste. Marie began the slow political process of redefining itself. The new community emerged in incremental steps expressed through actions, symbols, and institutions. Whereas before the war the social polarities at the Sault were between the haves and have-nots, after 1822 they were between Americans and old residents. Standing as it did for the extension of Yankee civilization into the wilderness, the fort represented the new American Sault. Johnston's trading post and the dwellings of the mixed-bloods and Ojibwa symbolized the older Sault. In this polarization the new arrivals derogatively defined mixed-bloods as blacks, half-breeds, or Indians.<sup>35</sup> By

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<sup>31</sup> Chaput, "The 'Misses Nolin' of Red River," 14-15.

<sup>32</sup> John J. Bigsby, *The Shoe and the Canoe* (2 vols., London, 1850), II, 128.

<sup>33</sup> John Johnston to George Johnston, October 30, 1819, George Johnston Papers (Burton Historical Collection); MacDonald, "Commerce, Civility and Old Sault Ste. Marie" (Autumn, 1981), 24.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to Lewis Cass, July 22, 1822, Records of the Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1814-51.

<sup>35</sup> For evidence of such views see William Aitkins to Ramsey Crooks, November 4, 1836, American Fur Company Papers, no. 2119, reel 24 (New York Historical Society, New York); George Johnston to Walter Lowie, June 22, 1842, George Johnston Letterbook (Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor); George

the late 1820s, as John Johnston's son George discovered, there was little opportunity for an educated person of mixed race in Sault Ste. Marie. While John Johnston lived, he still commanded some respect; after his death his children (especially the males) commanded none. Once the elite, the Johnstons were now just another family of "half-breeds."<sup>36</sup>

In social and political behavior Americans were oriented toward Mackinac, Detroit, and Washington. Town meetings, elections, courts, and the territorial legislature stood for civilization and progress. So also mission activity, evening prayer meetings, temperance societies, marriage to white women, schools, frame houses, and churches marked the advent of a true American settlement. For the old residents few political or economic roles were available in the new Sault, and what remained of their old social life shifted to the Canadian Sault.<sup>37</sup>

The Sault of the Americans and the Sault of the old residents presented contrasting policies of development. The first was entrepreneurial and individualistic. The latter was seigneurial and collective. The Sault of the old settlers was out of step with the ethos of the times. Built around the fur trade—which suffered a major depression in the early 1820s and was by that time already in decline at the Sault—the world of old Sault Ste. Marie was entering its last days.

The old inhabitants did not welcome the Americans and resisted the new life that their arrival represented. Through various actions—sometimes militant, sometimes evasive, sometimes ingratiating—they tried to maintain control of a world slipping away and to make sense of the changes that surrounded them. Little survived of this old world except in weakened form in marginal segments of the population.

When a German "ethnologist" traveling through the Sault in the 1850s asked a voyageur to sing some of the famous voyageur songs, the man responded with a shrug that those songs were no longer sung. According to him, too many Americans now traveled with the voyageurs, and when a voyageur started to sing, no one knew the words. So the singing stopped. When this same ethnologist asked an elderly Ojibwa woman to tell some of the old stories, she replied:

I have lost my memory. The Ojibbeways have all lost their memory. The Americans have made them weak. Our people do not talk so much about their own affairs now as they used to do. They no longer feel the same pleasure in telling the old stories, and they are being forgotten and the traditions and fables rooted out. You often ask after

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Johnston to the Reverend Peter Dougherty, June 29, 1842, *ibid.* This issue is discussed more extensively in Robert E. Bieder, "Power Without Glory: The Role of Mixed-Bloods in Indian-White Relations" (Paper presented at the American Studies Association annual meeting, Minneapolis, September, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Bieder, "Power Without Glory."

<sup>37</sup> Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XI, 730-31.

them, but you seldom find any one who can give you the right answer. Our nation is fallen; and this came quite suddenly, since the . . . “Long Knives” entered our country.

To this Ojibwa woman the days of the French and the British represented the “Good Old Days” and the arrival of the Americans signified only ruin.<sup>38</sup>

Social, economic, and political revolutions similar to those at Sault Ste. Marie were occurring at other trading places in the Old Northwest, in places like Fort Wayne, Green Bay, Prairie du Chien, and Chicago.<sup>39</sup> The War of 1812 proved a revolution that the old residents in these frontier settlements were unable to withstand and to which they were unprepared to adapt. At the Sault, within two decades after the war, most of the old ways were forgotten; the old residents were largely supplanted by the incoming Americans, and a new Sault Ste. Marie sat on the south bank of the St. Mary’s River.

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<sup>38</sup> Recorded in Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 261, 367.

<sup>39</sup> Bieder, *Native American Communities*, 148.