

## “We Are Children of the River”

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### Toronto’s lost Métis history

*This essay investigates how Toronto was connected to the French river system fur trade emanating from Montreal via the Toronto Carrying Place and how that connection gave rise to a proto-Métis population between the years 1620 and 1821. The takeover of New France in 1760, and the merger of the Hudson’s Bay Company with the North West Company in 1821, among other geopolitical factors, ended Toronto’s 175 year involvement with the fur trade, yet an impression of Métis presence remained in the city until the 1880s. The British agricultural and treaty era in Ontario, beginning in 1793 and lasting until the 1850s, was so rapid and absolute that, I contend, it erased the older French and proto-Métis history from the city’s historiographical memory and imagination. Remnants of it do nevertheless exist in archives and older primary and secondary literature, and it is an erasure that wrongly assumes that the city had no Métis history.*

**Keywords:** Toronto, Métis history, fur trade, French river system, Upper Canada, Toronto Carrying Place

The senior governing body of the Métis Nation of Canada, the Métis National Council (MNC), defines the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historic homeland of the Métis as the area now encompassed by the three prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, portions of Ontario northeast of Sault St. Marie up along the Quebec border and westward to the Manitoba border, areas of British Columbia, the southern geographic strip of the Northwest Territories, and the north-central United States (Métis National Council). The Toronto area has been left out of the MNC-designated historic homeland. The modern political border of the MNC’s Métis homeland, however, is not representative of the historic Métis homeland, which was *not* a bounded territory but was rather a fluid system of overland and river transport and portage routes that stretched across North America (St.-Onge & Podruchny, 2012, p. 82). By looking at how Toronto was at one time connected to the fur-trade river system, and then tracking a rise in racism towards the Métis across the

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nineteenth century in the city, it is possible to show that Métis once lived in Toronto but were erased from the city's historical memory. Because the erasure has been so absolute, the MNC and many scholars—Métis and otherwise—believe that Toronto has no Métis history (Anderson, 2011, p. 39). In the first era, 1609-1760—the French Regime—we see that the area now known as Toronto was a transport route in the fur trade that brought together the ancestors of Toronto's later proto-Métis (see definition below). In the second, 1760-1818, we see the fall of the French Regime and the British takeover of Upper Canada, with proto-Métis visible in city life. In the third, a rising intolerance of "half-breeds" begins to articulate itself in Toronto by 1818 and peaks in 1885, by which date no Métis are visible in the historic record of the city. By understanding Toronto's geographic position in the French river system and then tracking Toronto's nineteenth-century "half-breed" racism, we can show that the Métis were once present but vanished from the city, which will explain why some scholars, and the MNC, believe Toronto had no Métis history (Anderson, 2011, p. 19).

The first era that we will evaluate to understand how Métis were once in Toronto but disappeared by the late nineteenth century is the French Regime, 1609-1760. In this period, we see the European and First Nation ancestors of the Toronto area's proto-Métis intermingling with each other in the French fur-trade river world. Métis scholar Brenda Macdougall (2010) defines "proto-Métis" as mixed-blood ancestors of the western Métis Nation who practiced endogamy and created the first generation of truly Métis progeny, after whom a rise of Métis culture occurred—Métis ethnogenesis (p. 18). The French river system prior to 1760 covered an immense tract of land that stretched from Quebec and Montreal on the St. Lawrence River in the east, the Upper and Lower Great Lakes regions, south and northwest of Lake Superior, down through the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys, and into the southern Louisiana Territory emitting at New Orleans (Sleeper-Smith, 2011, pp. 12-13). Early-twentieth-century historian Percy Robinson (1933) found that the Toronto region had successive French-First Nations contact from the early 1600s to the time of fur trader Jean-Baptiste Rousseau in the late 1700s, a "record [that] is scarcely broken and runs back three centuries to the arrival of white man in Canada" (p. 219). Indeed, contact between First Nations and Europeans remained constant around Toronto chiefly because of the Toronto Carrying Place—a portage route long used by First Nations, and later the French, and to some extent the English—which connected the north shore of Lake Ontario at the mouth of the Humber River (a secondary route in the Carrying Place also began at the mouth of the Rouge River) to the southern tip of Georgian Bay and Lake Huron (Robinson, 1933, pp. iii-iv). The Carrying Place was a shorter and safer, albeit more difficult, thirty-mile portage into North America's rich Northwest fur lands for voyageurs from Montreal, as opposed to the longer, mainly aquatic, southern Niagara communication which traversed Lake Erie, up through the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers, and into Lake Huron; or along the complex and dangerous French River System that went along the Ottawa and French Rivers into

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Lake Huron (Robinson, 1933, p. 20). Between the years 1610-1650, according to Robinson (1933), “there were many [documented and undocumented] Frenchmen in Ontario,” an observation he qualifies with reference to the 1640-1641 *Jesuit Relations* diary of Father Jérôme Lalemant, who noted, “plusieurs de nos François qui ont esté icy, ont fait autrefois voyagé en ce pais de la Natiõ Neutre, pour en tirer les profits & les avantages de pelleterie, & autres petites denrées qu’on en peut esperer” [“Many of our Frenchmen who have been here have, in the past, made journeys in this country of the Neutral Nation for the sake of reaping profit and advantage from furs and other little wares that one might look for”] (Robinson, 1933, p. 10; the French original and the English translation cited here are drawn from Thwaites, 1898, pp. 202-203).<sup>1</sup> Sulpician missionary François Vachon de Belmont recorded in *Histoire de l’eau-de-vie en Canada* (written around 1705 [Belmont, 1840, p. ii]) the first definitively documented visit of white men to the Toronto area in the Haudenosaunee village of Teiaiagon (located on what is now Baby Point in Toronto) in the 1670s:

Le Carnaval de l’année 167 . . . [sic] six traiteurs du Fort de Katarak8y [sic], nommés Duplessis, Ptolémée, Dautru, Lamouche, Colin et Cascaret, enyvèrent tout le Village de Taheyagon, dont tous les Sauvages furent saouls trois jours durant. Les vieillards, les femmes et les enfans s’enyvrèrent tous ; après quoy, les six traiteurs firent la débauche que les Sauvages appellent Gan8ary [sic], courans tous nuds avec un baril d’Eau-de-Vie sous le bras [The Carnival of the year 167{0}—six traders from Katarak8y {sic} named Duplessis, Ptolemee, Dautru, Lamouche, Colin and Cascaret made the whole village drunk for three days; the old men, the women and the children got drunk; after which six traders engaged in the debauch which the savages call Gan8ary {sic}, running about naked with a keg of brandy under the arm]. (Belmont, 1840, p. 19; English translation drawn from Robinson, 1933, p. 31)

Belmont’s quote possibly records the first known sexual contact between First Nations and Europeans at Toronto which could have produced the city’s first mixed-bloods—that is, if “debauch” and “Gan8ary” can be qualified to mean sexual intercourse (Robinson, 1933, p. 31). Surely these Teiaiagon mixed-bloods, if any were produced, would have been raised and known as Haudenosaunee. Raising mixed-blood children as First Nation citizens, by First Nations people, was an enculturation practice that would persist in the Toronto area right up until the founding of York in 1793 and beyond (Peterson, 2012, p. 30). Peter Jones, among others, is a good later example of a Toronto area mixed-blood that was raised and believed himself to be First Nations (D. B. Smith, 2013a, p. 31; Peterson, 2012, p. 27). Sexual intercourse between incoming French voyageurs, coureurs de bois (the former were the legal class of the French fur traders, the latter illegal, and both were

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notorious “adulterers” according to Jesuit missionaries [Sleeper-Smith, 2001, p. 40]), and First Nations women was, according to Susan Sleeper-Smith (2001), a “common strategy” used by First Nations to draw European men into a “reciprocal economic relationship” so as to “ensure steady access to European trade goods” and “secure military alliances” (p. 5). As well, Richard White (1991) notes that sex was used by First Nations in the Great Lakes to “level the playing field” with Europeans by physical “negotiation, where neither could win through force” (p. 52). The north shore of Lake Ontario in the seventeenth and early part of the eighteenth century was certainly an inhospitable and level playing field for both European traders and First Nations people as power transferred from Haudenosaunee to Anishinaabe-Mississauga between 1700-1710, and French-English belligerence steadily increased from 1718 through to 1760; thus, it was advantageous for all parties vying for control of the Carrying Place’s martial and economic benefits to engage in alliance-making via sex at Toronto (Robinson, 1933, pp. 61-62). A Jesuit Priest expresses his moral revulsion at the sexual alliance-making practiced widely across the seventeenth century fur-trade river world, remarking that to secure allegiance and goods, Indigenous female bodies “pouvoient tenir lieu de marchandises, et q<sup>l</sup>s. y seroient encore mieux receus que le Castor” [“might serve in lieu of merchandise and would be still better received than Beaver-skins”] (Sleeper-Smith, 2001, p. 51; the French original and the English translation cited here are drawn from Thwaites, 1900, pp. 196-197).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Sleeper-Smith (2001) estimates that, by the 1680s, around 800 coureurs de bois were active in the Great Lakes region, and it can be assumed that many used the Toronto Carrying Place to reach the Illinois Country to avoid detection and capture along the well-monitored and garrisoned southern Niagara-Detroit portage (p. 5; see also Robinson, 1933, pp. iii-iv). Moreover, and apart from a covert communication, Robinson (1933) asserted that “there was *regular* [legal] trading at Toronto as early as 1715, and . . . with the exception of a short period between 1687 and 1715, there was continuous trading at Toronto from Pere in 1668 to Simcoe in 1793” (p. 62). The length of illegal and legal trade along the Toronto Carrying Place (1620s-1759), when combined with the logic of sexual alliance-making, allows one to assume that intermixing between Europeans and First Nations could have occurred and created a generation of proto-Métis around Toronto just as it had elsewhere in the French fur-trade river world, even though it is undocumented.

The second era we examine to see how Métis were once present in Toronto but disappeared occurs at the fall of the French Regime and the beginnings of colonial York: 1760-1818. This epoch in Toronto’s history shows a shift away from the fur trade to a British agricultural society. To start, the 1760 defeat of New France effectively transferred control of France’s North American possessions to Britain,<sup>3</sup> and with it came the extensive inland fur-trade river system based in Montreal (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, pp. 133, 161). British elites at Montreal who had been wise enough to implant themselves as heads of the old French fur trade soon

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began reaping vast amounts of capital, but with newfound wealth came increased economic and military competition from the Hudson's Bay Company based in the north, which effectively restricted the Montreal fur trade to the south along the Great Lakes (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, pp. 133, 161). Furthermore, the Old Toronto Carrying Place in the years 1760-1783 saw a decline in use as traders from Montreal passed over the ancient route in favour of the shorter Niagara portage to the Illinois country or the aquatic Ottawa River system to the Northwest (Firth, 1962, i); this, however, changed with the defeat of the British in the American Revolution (1775–1783) (Robinson, 1933, pp. 167-183). Threatened from the south and cut off from the rich fur-lands of the Illinois, Lower and Upper Canada after 1783 began looking for a new capital city (Niagara-on-the-Lake/Newark, located on the U.S.-Canadian border, was the old capital of Upper Canada but was vulnerable to U.S. attack) with a suitable overland military communication to protect against American invasion; it was an anxiety, when coupled with the economic need to exploit the Northwest fur-lands, that reinvigorated interest in the Old Toronto Carrying Place (Firth, 1962, i). The Scottish merchants of the North West Company (NWC), who after 1771 absorbed the lion's share of the Montreal fur trade, had long known of the Carrying Place's martial and economic potential consequent of their older inherited French fur-trade connections (Robinson, 1933, pp. 174-175). Frenchman Pierre de Rastel de Rocheblave, the last British Commander of the Illinois country and founding member of NWC (himself a remnant of the old French fur trade with ties to powerful French and mixed-blood families at Detroit: the Caldwells, Harrisons, Askins, and Babys), suggested the harbour of Toronto as the site of the new Upper Canada capital to Governor General Lord Dorchester in 1787 because, as noted by Robinson, he "knew the history [of Toronto] and value of the route" (Robinson, 1933, p. 175). Robinson goes on to state that Dorchester listened to Rocheblave's suggestion and made "moves" to declare Toronto the new Upper Canadian capital because "Dorchester, in touch with [NWC] merchants from Quebec [Montreal], wished the new capital to command the new route to the great northwest and the fur trade there" (Robinson, 1933, p. 175). Dorchester's plans for Toronto were, however, overthrown by Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada John Graves Simcoe in 1791 (Robinson, 1933, p. 175). Even so, on 27 August 1793, Simcoe reversed his earlier position on Toronto and declared York the capital of Upper Canada and opened the land for survey and settlement upon seeing Toronto harbour and the Toronto Carrying Place and their unique military and fur trade possibilities (Robinson, 1933, p. 175).

By February 1799, a letter from Chief Justice of Upper Canada John Elmsley to York administrator Peter Russell confirmed Simcoe's and the NWC's use of the Toronto Carrying Place, which was "henceforth" seen to have "regular [NWC] winter voyages up to Fort Joseph in Matchedash Bay on Georgian Bay" (Robinson, 1943, pp. 256-257). It can be assumed that at the turn of the nineteenth century, all overland lugging of heavy transport related to the fur trade up and down the Toronto

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Carrying Place was undertaken by NWC engagés—the lowest fur-trade labour class consisting of mainly proto-Métis and Frenchmen (Podruchny, 2006, pp. xi, 2). Proto-Métis John Askin Jr., appointed Indian interpreter at St. Joseph's Fort, and husband of mixed-blood Madeline Peltier, verified the NWC's regular use of the Toronto Carrying Place in an 1807 letter he wrote to his mixed-blood parents in Detroit:

Every winter an Express leaves this in Jany. for York and returns from York that is to say leaves York about the 1st of Feby for this. Should you condescend to write After this Winter (this being to [sic] late for you) you can address your Letters to the Care of Mr. Dn. Cameron or Capt Givens [in York] & they will see them forwarded. (Robinson, 1943, p. 256)

On 17 June 1808, John Askin again wrote home and verified more NWC and Métis activity along the Toronto Carrying Place: "Messrs McGilvery & Thain [and their Métis/French entourage] passed here a few days ago for Montreal via York" (Robinson, 1933, p. 25). During the winter of 1808 John Askin Jr. lost his interpreter position at St. Joseph's, whereupon he sent his mixed-blood son (no name given) to York to plead for vocational reconsideration (Robinson, 1943, p. 256). The young lad, now in York in 1809, wrote to "Dear Grand Papa in Sandwich" (John Askin Sr.), stating that "he had arrived in York on the 20<sup>th</sup> in fifteen days from the Island of St. Joseph with despatches from his father for His Excellency Governor Gore" (Robinson, 1943, p. 257). The letter must have worked, as by 1811 John Askin Jr. wrote from St. Joseph's in his old position of clerk to his brother at Queenston, Upper Canada:

My Dear Brother A Messrs. Gilivray, Gregory and McKay leave this for Montreal tomorrow via York (along the Toronto Carrying Place) for the purpose of making some arrangements respecting the portage they mean to establish from Yonge Street to Matchedash Bay. I avail myself of their conveyance . . . . Should the N.W. Gentlemen establish the road as is proposed from York to Matchedash it will be the making of the Country and will injure Mr. McIntosh very much which I'm sorry for, he having a large family and a worthy man. His son Alexr. left this about 12 o'clock on the *Nancy* loaded with [fur] Packs for Fort Erie. (Robinson, 1943, pp. 257-258)

From the paper record, it appears that the future NWC Yonge Street that Askins wrote about in 1811 is the same portage memory Dr. Scadding wrote about in 1873, which he stated his elder Toronto informants reported seeing in the earliest years of colonial York, 1793-1818:

As stated already in another connection, we have conversed with those who had seen the cavalcade of the North-West Company's boats, mounted on wheels, on

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their way up Yonge Street. It used to be supposed by some that the tree across the notch through which the road passed had been purposely felled in that position as a part of the apparatus for helping the boats up the hill. (p. 426)

John Askin Jr.'s letters detailing the NWC's voyages with engagés along the Toronto Carrying Place and young Askin sending letters to Sandwich from York in 1809 confirms a proto-Métis presence in Toronto at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Another mixed-blood with ties to York and Detroit at the turn of the nineteenth century was Thomas McKee. McKee also had ties to the Askin clan and was the proto-Métis husband of mixed-blood Therese Askin (Barkwell, 2012, p. 42; Botsford, 1985, p. 109; Robinson, 1943, p. 257). Therese was sister to Askin Jr., the interpreter at Fort St. Joseph and daughter of "Grand Papa in Sandwich" John Askin Sr. (Barkwell, 2012, p. 42; Botsford, 1985, p. 109; Robinson, 1943, p. 257; Macdougall, 2010, p. 18). The mixed-blood marriage of Thomas McKee and Therese Askin also fulfills two of Macdougall's specifications for Métis ethnogenesis—endogamy and procreation—as they married and had three first-generation wholly Métis children at Detroit: Catherine, Marie Ann, and Johnny (Botsford, 1985, p. 3). Furthermore, Therese is confirmed to be mixed-blood at least three generations back (Barkwell, 2012, p. 42; Botsford, 1985, p. 109; Robinson, 1943, p. 257). Getting back to McKee: Thomas McKee was the interracial proto-Métis/Shawnee/Chaouanon son of British Colonel Alexander McKee (proto-Métis) and Sarah "Sewatha" Opessa (Shawnee/Chaouanon) (Barkwell, 2012, p. 41). He was elected to and sat in the Upper Canada Legislature in York for the riding of Kent in 1797, and Essex in 1800—although it is well known that because of his alcoholism he periodically missed sitting at York during the summer months (Clarke, 2003). Like all other mixed-bloods in Upper Canada at that time, McKee lacked concrete racial terminology to define his *Métissage*—interraciality, or at least that's what the non-use of the term "half-breed" in the *Upper Canada Gazette (UCG)* newspaper between the years 1793-1817 suggests.<sup>4</sup> Thus, he and other Upper Canadian mixed-bloods at that time identified as "Indian" even though they could be considered proto-Métis as their patronyms appear in the classically defined western Métis a generation later (Devine, 2004, pp. 53-74; Botsford, 1985, p. 1).

Another extensively connected fur-trade man at York was Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Rousseau who was a contemporary business associate of Frenchman Laurent Quetton St. George before 1800. St. George is counted as one of colonial York's wealthiest merchants at the turn of the nineteenth century who, as illustrated by historian Edith Firth (1962), received his furs from Amherstburg and the narrows at Lake Couchiching. Firth (1962) also details that St. George was a well-connected man who in 1802 "fur traded extensively with Indians" at various Upper Canada posts, among which Queenston, Fort Erie, Lundy's Lane, Dundas, Kingston, and Niagara (p. 124). Thus St. George was tied into the northern fur trade through the

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NWC and the Toronto Carrying Place and in the south through the old French mixed-bloods along the Detroit and Niagara portage. Rousseau, on the other hand, is remembered by Robinson (1933) as “the last citizen of the old French Regime and the first citizen of York” (p. 209). Robinson (1933) also states that Rousseau was known in his day as “the Chief Factor of the Humber” and was linked into the Toronto-area fur trade in multiple ways through “Col. Bouchette, Frobisher and the North-West fur-traders, and [the Six Nations Haudenosaunee through] the great Chief Brant (Rousseau was married to Brant’s adopted daughter Margaret Clyne)” (pp. 146, 210, 214). Rousseau may have also been connected to the mixed-blood Baby family at Detroit through the Hon. James Baby, as James lived on Baby Point while Rousseau lived downstream at the mouth of the Humber during the latter half of the eighteenth century—this, however, remains only speculation and cannot be proven without further research (Robinson, 1933, p. 146).

When the War of 1812 broke out, the last remaining segment of Yonge from Willow Creek portage to the Nottawasaga River and Penetanguishene remained unfinished, during which time all NWC fur trade was diverted along the safer Ottawa and French river system far from the U.S. border (Robinson, 1933, p. 146). Yonge between the years 1812 and 1814 may have temporarily lost its mantle as the NWC’s fur express but it took on an even greater role becoming the military supply chain that secured both York and Fort Michilimackinac (Robinson, 1943, p. 262). On 12 June 1813, a letter sent by Mrs. Powell from York to Colonel W. D. Powell in Kingston recounts the arrival of the Corps of Canadian Voyageurs (Métis)—later the Provincial Commissariat Voyageurs—by way of Yonge Street (I would note here two things to remember: 1) at this time, Métis and “half-breeds” are known in the Upper Canadian imagination by the homogenizing term “Indians”; and 2) the upper portage at Nottawasaga River and Penetanguishene was not yet complete, so they needed experienced *engagés* to traverse the northern gate):

[A] Boat is just coming round the point; its Colors cannot yet be ascertained; I sicken at the Idea of its being 13 Strips . . . the Boat is gone past, apparently to the Head of the Lake . . . 2 o’clock, Dr. Strachan and Mr. Allan called before dinner to tell me of the reinforcements at hand . . . the Bank was covered with people and foremost just at the corner of our Street was D Cameron with a party of Indians just come from Lake Simcoe; [with] several of our own Soldiers. (Firth, 1962, p. 313)

By February 1814, the U.S. was in a position to take back Fort Michilimackinac, an attack that seemed imminent given the fact that America controlled the Upper Great Lakes and all southern portage routes after the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813 (Barkwell, 2009, p. 5; Grodzinski, 2014; Robinson, 1943, p. 263). Robinson (1943) stated that on 22 April 1814, a relief force of 250 officers and soldiers was



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dispatched from Kingston for Michilimackinac via York up Yonge Street, whereupon they completed the Nottawasaga portage: “twenty-nine large batteaux were constructed from pine timber cut on the ground, and the expedition embarked . . . reaching Michilimackinac after nineteen days of hazardous voyaging in time to frustrate the American attack” (p. 263). The arrival of a fresh cohort of British soldiers and reinforcements up Yonge had startled the American warships *Tigress* and *Scorpio*, which had been docked at the mouth of the Nottawasaga, and, after being put to flight towards Fort St. Joseph, the U.S. crews were captured, taken prisoner, and escorted to Kingston by way of Yonge and York (Robinson, 1943, p. 263). Ironically, Simcoe’s dream of making York wealthy via the Toronto Carrying Place and defending the town with its protected naval harbour had been reversed in reality: Yonge had become the defensive bastion and the Toronto harbour the economic windfall after the war (Robinson, 1943, p. 263).

The years leading up to 1821 marked a critical turning point in York’s connection to the fur trade. To start, the Louisiana purchase of 1803 had destroyed the old French fur trade south of the border as Anglo-American pioneers rushed to agriculturally settle the Illinois Country and the tributary lands draining into the Mississippi (Englebert, 2010, p. ii). As well, the U.S. Embargo Act of 1807 limited cross-border trade between the U.S. and Canada, which made access to the Illinois-Mississippi fur-shed difficult from Montreal (Embargo Act, 2014). Moreover, John Jacob Astor established the American Fur Company on 6 April 1808, which diverted all U.S. fur products to New York, away from Detroit, York, and Montreal (Englebert, 2010, p. 163). Scholar Robert Englebert (2010) says the embargo, the shift in American land use, and Astor’s redirection, strangled the old French system, and by the 1830s the old Illinois French trade had slowed greatly—but it still existed (p. ii). Meanwhile, the 1814 Treaty of Ghent signed between Britain and the U.S. ended the War of 1812 and secured the U.S.-Canadian border for the first time, further impeding cross-border trade (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, pp. 146-147). Cut off from the south, the old half-breed fur-trade connections that had once supplied York via Forts Niagara, Detroit, Amherstburg, and Malden, from the Illinois, no longer existed (Robinson, 1943, pp. 261-262; Englebert, 2010, p. ii). Furthermore, the increased conflict that raged between the NWC and the HBC north of the border peaked between the years 1815-1820, which made trading in fur in Canada very expensive for both enterprises (Robinson, 1943, pp. 261-262). Faced with failing legers and debt, both companies decided to merge in 1821 forming the northern mono-conglomerate HBC (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 133). The new HBC then diverted all its fur northeast towards Hudson’s Bay, where it had established coastal forts with ocean access to European markets (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 133). Consequently, the Toronto Carrying Place/Yonge as a route to the northwest was no longer used—it was too expensive, time-consuming, and dangerous to ship furs to European markets via the old French river system from Montreal (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, p. 146).

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Thus, cut off from its north and south fur trade communications, York's long history in the fur trade ended within the span of two decades—1803-1821 (Robinson, 1943, pp. 261-262). Moreover, the sustained peace that came with the 1814 Treaty of Ghent saw a massive surge of British immigration to Canada and America (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, p. 146). In Upper Canada alone between the years 1821 and 1851 the population swelled from 750,000 to 1 million British-Canadians, while south of the border the population of Euro-descended Americans increased tenfold (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, p. 146). Fulfilling this demand, land plots in Upper Canada were then surveyed and cut into agricultural lots for incoming settlers; soon the majority of the arable farmland on the Ontario peninsula was occupied, virtually all the land around Toronto (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, p. 146). Jaqueline Peterson (2012) notes the effect that the Great Lakes treaty and settlement era had on the area's proto-Métis: "The multiethnic Great Lakes fur trade communities, sufficiently populous and connected by regional kinship networks, might have been on the verge of a Métis ethnogenesis by 1815. However . . . fur trade society, always centrifugal [connected to the river system], was snuffed out in the treaty era, its individual members transformed and reinvented as old [agricultural land] settlers" (pp. 30-31). Indeed, the proto-Métis who had once traversed and traded at and through York were arrested from achieving Métis ethnogenesis by three impinging factors: 1) treaty making; 2) agricultural land settlement; and 3) amputation from the old French fur-trade network.

By looking at how Toronto was at one time connected to the fur-trade river system, we have established that proto-Métis did use the town of York as a transportation node. In the second half of this essay we will track a rise in Toronto's half-breed racism across the nineteenth century, which will show why Métis are no longer found in the city by 1900. Olive Dickason and William Newbigging (2010) note that between 1821 and 1851, Indigenous people in the Great Lakes region (then ten percent of the population) became a problematized "ethnic minority" in need of "civilizing, re-education, and assimilation" (p. 147). It is little wonder when we look at the *UCG* articles directly after the 1814 Treaty of Ghent that we find the racialized term "half-breed" articulated for the first time in York's printing history (Communications, 1818). A *UCG* article "Offences in the Indian Territories" dated 29 October 1818, describes the Selkirk trail wherein Métis Paul Brown and François Fermin Boucher stood trial in York at Old Montgomery's Court House (the modern day northwest corner of Richmond and Victoria Streets just east of Yonge Street in Toronto) where they were found not guilty of the murder of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Governor Robert Semple, who was killed at the Battle of Seven Oaks on 19 June 1816, in the Selkirk Settlement in what is now Winnipeg (Offences, 1818; Mulvaney, 1884, pp. 19-29; Scadding, 1873, p. 298). Also accused but not present were "Bostonionas" Peter Pangman and Cuthbert Grant (both Métis), and twelve other senior Lower Canadian-Scot wintering partners of the NWC who, according to

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the HBC, had maliciously attacked the Selkirk Colony on 19 June 1816, killing Gov. Semple and 21 of his men (Offences, 1818). All of the accused were found not guilty by the York jury (Offences, 1818; Seven Oaks, 2013). The NWC then successfully countersued the HBC for illegal seizure of Fort William following the Battle of Seven Oaks and the unjust holding and persecution of Boucher and Brown who were detained for two years on unspecified charges (Bumsted, 2009, p. 403).

In a published letter about the trial in the same *UGC* 29 October 1818 issue, a York citizen known simply as “Z” articulates the first known use of the word “half-breed” in Toronto’s printing history, specifically describing Métis as “half breeds” alongside “Indians”: “Mr. McDonell and his party, therefore halted a few miles above Fort Douglas and sent a party of Indians and *half breeds* (half Indians) with Mr. Boucher, Mr. Brown was also with them and is a *half breed* (Communications, 1818; italics and parentheses verbatim). The fact that Z describes Métis as “half breeds” in italics and then qualifies what it means in parentheses—“(half Indians)” —is significant and denotes three things: 1) the term “half-breed” was relatively new and needed to be explained to the general audience at York; 2) “half-breeds” are not “Indians” (this is also a first for Toronto publishing history, as the distinction between half-breed and Indian had never been specified in print); and 3) there were a few people in 1818 York who already knew Métis by the term “half-breed”—Z, for instance.

Moving along, one prominent half-breed in Toronto during the 1830s and ’40s was Anishinaabee Peter “Kahkewaquonaby” Jones or “Sacred Feathers,” and it is by examining how city press treated his marriage to Eliza Field that we understand Toronto’s increasing Métis racism via its disdain for interracial marriage. Dickason and Newbigging (2010) describe Jones as “a Mississauga-Welsh,” which is an accurate depiction of how he self-identified, i.e. as a Methodist *and* Mississauga person negotiating two very opposite and conflicting worlds—Euro “civilization” and “Indian savagery” (p. 150; Wyatt, 2009, p. 168). It should be noted that this essay does not wish to conceptualize Jones as a Métis person, merely to highlight his internal and external polarity—clearly, he was a proud Anishinaabee Mississauga and remains remembered as such (Wyatt, 2009, p. 154). Indeed, cultural ambivalence defined Jones’s identity throughout his life, which, as noted by scholar Kyle Carsten Wyatt (2009), made him physically appear like “the heathen . . . fused with the evangelist” wrapped in a Métis sash (p. 167). Jones’s cultural ambivalence is best encapsulated by the wife he chose: Eliza Field (D. B. Smith, 2013b, p. 130). Despite being warned by Jones that their poly-ethnic union would not be accepted at York, Field travelled from her native England to wed Jones. Jones cautiously wrote: “The fact is my beloved Eliza, it is that feeling of prejudice which is so prevalent among the . . . settlers (not Indians in this country). They think it is not right for the whites to intermarry with Indians” (D. B. Smith, 2013b, p. 130). What is more, white women marrying Indigenous men during Jones’s time was inconceivable to Anglo-settlers because of the British Imperial cult of womanhood, which believed European

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women pious and pure, and the domestic conduits of “civilization,” whilst Natives were socially inferior and, as noted by Victoria Freeman (2012), “a sexual threat to white society” (p. 209; D. B. Smith, 2013b, p. 130). Regardless of Jones’s apprehensions and the Anglo cult of womanhood, the pair did wed on 8 September 1833, in New York City, and in line with the racial sentiments of the day, on 12 September 1833, *The New York Commercial Advisor* inked a hateful article dubbed “Romance in Real Life.” The article was quickly snatched up and reprinted by a York newspaper *The Patriot and Farmer’s Monitor* on 27 September 1833 (D. B. Smith, 2013a, p. 31).

Donald B. Smith (2013b) states that in Toronto during the 1830s and ’40s, interracial unions hardly ever occurred, consequent of “a [British] colonial world rife with racial prejudice” towards interracial marriage (p. 130). Accordingly, he then goes on to quote Peter Jones who observes that in urban Upper Canada in the 1840s “only three or four Indian men were married to white women, and only three or four Indian women to white men” (p. 130). Jones’s tiny estimation of only six to eight mixed couples must be remembered in the Upper Canadian demographic context of its time, mentioned earlier in the last subsection—1 million British settlers following the 1814 Treaty of Ghent.

By 1850, the old mixed-blood families of York’s colonial period had faded into obscurity—consequent of Toronto’s shift away from the fur trade—replaced demographically by HBC elite families who between the 1830s and 1850s sent their “country born” (British-First Nations ethno-mix) Métis sons to Upper Canada to be educated (Brown, 1977-1978, pp. 4-7). These young Métis men, small in number, were schooled at St. Thomas, Cobourg, Grafton, Port Hope, Lindsey, and many other southern Ontario towns and villages (Brown, 1977-1978, pp. 4-7; Brown, 1980, p. 193). The majority of these country-born sons sent east carried the patronyms of their NWC fathers or grandfathers—Ross, Cameron, Ermatinger, MacDonald, Cameron, McIntosh, and McKenzie—many of whom had concrete historical connections to Yonge Street and Toronto.

NWC-Métis daughters were also sent east prior to 1850, among whom Margaret Cameron, the daughter of former NWC Chief Factor John Dugald Cameron. Cameron places Margaret in Toronto in a letter he wrote to James Hargrave dated 5 May 1843: “Clouston [Orkney husband of Cameron’s Métis daughter Elizabeth] is going down to settle on his farm at Cobourg . . . . My [Métis] daughter Margaret lives with her Aunt at Toronto” (Glazebrook, 1938, pp. 435-437; as cited in Brown, 1980, p. 193, with the exception of my addition of “Métis” in brackets in the last sentence). Of the many young Métis sent east around 1850, almost all were persuaded to marry “white,” a trend that was in line with the Social Darwinist logic of the day, which believed that miscegenation “polluted” one’s race and produced degenerate half-breed progeny (Brown, 1977-1978, pp. 4-7; Freeman, 2012, p. 204).

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In 1865 the Métis couples of Sandy Ross (Métis) and Catherine Murray (Métis), and William Coldwell (Caucasian) and Jemima Ross (Métis), moved to Toronto after being convinced by brother James Ross to move to “civilization” (Van Kirk, 1985, p. 213). Upon arrival, both couples had been shut out of Toronto’s Anglo society, despite the fact that they were wealthy homeowners and successful business people (Van Kirk, 1985, p. 213). Accordingly, and because of homesickness, by year’s end Sandy and Catherine headed back to Red River, where they were accepted, while Jemima and William remained in Toronto, and, as noted by Van Kirk (1985), because of “increasing melancholy, Jemima died in 1867” (p. 213).

Apart from the Ross siblings and in-laws, the epoch between 1850 and 1885 sees almost no prominent public Métis citizens of Toronto, except one: their aforementioned brother, James Ross (W. D. Smith, 2003). Ross’s history in Toronto is well documented and does not need to be reiterated here. What we do need to note is that after he and his siblings leave, no known Métis are left in nineteenth-century Toronto—half-breeds vanish from the city’s historical record (W. D. Smith, 2003; Van Kirk, 1985, pp. 204-205).

Lastly, in 1869, the Métis under the leadership of Louis Riel challenged and defeated the Dominion of Canada during the Red River Resistance, thus securing Manitoba as a homeland province for half-breeds. Riel’s win was, however, short-lived as settlers from Ontario flooded Manitoba during the 1870s and drove the majority of Métis westward into Saskatchewan by the 1880s (Dickason & Newbigging, 2010, pp. 181-182). The Red River victory had enraged Anglo-Protestant Toronto, which felt, as expounded by the 22 August 1872 *Globe* article titled “The Metis of Manitoba,” that “British Protestant supremacy” was the rightful purveyor of North America and that the mongrel Métis had, just by virtue of opposing Canada, violated British law as well as every Briton who wished to push his fortune in the Northwest. To most Toronto citizens it was unheard-of for “dirty” half-breed “squatters” to challenge the might of Anglo-Saxony, much less defeat it and steal away its “divinely promised” inheritance (Le Metis, 1871). Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald was equally enraged as Torontonians at the half-breed triumph, and in an official correspondence addressed to Finance Minister Sir John Rose dated 11 March 1870, he expresses his Métis hatred and what he planned to do to avenge the loss: “It will never do to leave the future Government of the Country [the Northwest] at the mercy of these impulsive half breeds and our object should be to get a Force into the Country [to rule it]” (Berger & Aldridge, 2001, p. 46). Telling indeed, and when the Métis rose up again in 1885 to defend against Canadian settler-state expansion, Toronto’s half-breed racism in the press turned dark and dehumanizing. Illustrations of Métis as deranged and violent bison charging Sir John A. Macdonald coloured the pages of *The Toronto Evening News (TEN)*, and violent poems about “yelping half-breed hell hounds” with calls for their “victorious” slaughter by way of “Gatling guns” graced the pages of *The Globe* (Million, 1885, p. 4; Mulvaney, 1885).

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Finally, in the *TEN*, 25 March 1885, in an article simply named “Comments Section,” we see the Métis reduced to bumbling alcoholics, a stereotype that lingers to this day: “If Riel’s Rebellion doesn’t end in a big drunk like his last insurrection some 14 years ago, Col. Williams M. P. and his fellow fire-eaters will not require to go to Egypt . . . [and] Judging by their [Métis] last miserable performance [at Red River], it will be much safer to tackle the Métis than the Sudanese” (Comments, 1885; Fraser & Commito, 2012). Yes, the citizens and press of Toronto believed in 1885 that the Métis were “dirty drunken half breeds” in need of conquering and subjugation by a justified Anglo-Protestant Canada, and in understanding the city’s racism we come to see why Toronto’s Métis disappeared by the close of the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, while the MNC defines the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historic homeland of the Métis as territory bordered by Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, portions of Ontario, areas of British Columbia, the southern strip of the Northwest Territories, and the north-central United States (Métis National Council, 2014), to the exclusion of the Toronto area, the modern political borders of the MNC’s Métis homeland do not accurately represent the historic Métis homeland, which, as has been demonstrated here, was a fluid system of transport and portage routes that stretched across North America and included Toronto. When we look at how Toronto was once an integral part of this river trade system, then track a rise in the city’s half-breed racism across the nineteenth century, we see that the Métis were once in the city but disappeared from its historical memory. In the French Regime, we observe Toronto’s role in the fur trade where Europeans and First Nations people intermingled. Then, we see the fall of the French and the British takeover of Upper Canada with many proto-Métis active in city life. And, lastly, we follow Toronto’s growing nineteenth-century half-breed intolerance and come to understand why no Métis were present in the city after the 1870s. In closing, after much research and reassessment of primary and secondary documents through the process of writing this essay, I was led back to a street that I have walked my whole life, a street of whose importance I was completely unaware, and a street that follows a footpath that is many centuries older than Toronto itself: Yonge Street. And when I began walking the Carrying Place as my voyageur ancestors once did, and saw the land how they would see it—a land connected by waterways and portage routes—I rediscovered Toronto’s lost Métis history and came to a conclusion that echoed what an Elder had communicated to me many years previous when I asked her where our people had come from. Her response was: “We are children of the river, the river is our mother, what affects her, so in turn affects us.” Just how right she was in her assessment of Toronto’s Métis is, from my new historical perspective, astounding.

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<sup>1</sup> This passage is part of a larger communication from Jérôme Lalemant to Jacques Dinet, dated 1642, published in Thwaites (1898, pp. 126-265) as "Relation de ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable en la Mission des Peres de la Compagnie de Jesus aux Hurons pays de la Nouvelle France, depuis le mois de Juin de l'année mil six cens quarante, jusques au mois de Juin de l'année 1641/Relation of the most remarkable things that occurred in the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in the Huron country of New France, from the month of June in the year one thousand six hundred and forty, to the month of June in the year 1641."

<sup>2</sup> This passage is part of a larger communication from Étienne de Carheil to Louis Hector de Callières, dated 1702, published in Thwaites (1900, pp. 188-253) as "Lettre du R. P. Étienne de Carheil à M. Louis Hector de Callières, gouverneur. A Michilimakina le 30 daoust [sic] 1702/Letter by Reverend Father Étienne de Carheil to Monsieur Louis Hector de Callières, governor. At Michilimakina, the 30th of august [sic], 1702."

<sup>3</sup> The exception to this is the portion of Louisiana that lay west of the Mississippi, which was ceded to Spain. Spain would administer the territory from afar for the rest of the century and then return it to France, who, in turn, sold it to the United States in 1803.

<sup>4</sup> The *UCG* newspaper makes no mention of the word "half-breed" between the years 1793-1817 (I examined *UCG* literature and found no trace of the word until 1818), which implies that British Upper Canadians did not conceptualize the term until at least 1818 (Tobin, 1993, pp. 10-19).