



Travels and Adventures In Canada and the Indian Territories

Between the Years 1760 and 1776

By
ALEXANDER HENRY
Fur Trader

*Edited with Notes, Illustrative and
Biographical, by*

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Saint-Pierre, in the country of the Nadowessies,⁵ into Lake Superior, among the Chipeways, and to the Grand Portage, for the north-west.⁶ Everything was ready for their departure, when new dangers sprung up, and threatened to overwhelm me.

At the entrance of Lake Michigan, and at about twenty miles to the west of Fort Michilimackinac, is the village of L'Arbre Croche, inhabited by a band of Ottawas, boasting of two hundred and fifty fighting men. L'Arbre Croche's is the seat of the Jesuit mission of Saint Ignace de Michilimackinac, and the people are partly baptized, and partly not. The missionary resides on a farm, attached to the mission, and situated between the village and the fort, both of which are under his care.

⁵ Dakota or Sioux Indians—the latter name is said by Trumbull to be an abbreviation of Nadowessieux, which is a corruption of Nadowessi-way, "the snake-like ones." They have always been war-like tribes, hostile to both whites and other Indians.

⁶ Henry here gives some idea of the extent of country over which the Canadian fur traders carried on their operations. His employees were to travel through the countries of the Menomones, Winnebagos, Saukies, Ojibgunnies, until they reached the Mississippi in the neighbourhood of St. Paul's, where they were to cross into the country of the Sioux. Another party had for its district the southern side of Lake Superior and a third among the nations between the west end of Lake Superior and the Saskatchewan.

⁷ After the death of Marquette, and the desertion by the traders of the mission station of St. Ignace, on the north side of the straits, the mission was removed to the Ottawa village of L'Arbre Croche.

The Ottawas of L'Arbre Croche, who, when compared with the Chipeways, appear to be much advanced in civilization, grow maize, for the market of Michilimackinac, where this commodity is depended upon, for provisioning the canoes.

The new dangers, which presented themselves, came from this village of Ottawas. Every thing, as I have said, was in readiness, for the departure of my goods, when accounts arrived of its approach; and shortly after two hundred warriors entered the fort, and billeted themselves in the several houses, among the Canadian inhabitants. The next morning, they assembled in the house which was built for the commandant, or governor, and ordered the attendance of myself, and of two other merchants, still later from Montréal, namely, Messrs. Stanley Goddard and Ezekiel Solomons.

After our entering the council-room, and taking our seats, one of the chiefs commenced an address: "Englishmen," said he, "we, the Ottawas, were some time since informed of your arrival in this country, and of your having brought with you the goods of which we have need. At this news, we were greatly pleased, believing that through your assistance, our wives and children would be enabled to pass another winter; but, what was our surprise, when, a few days ago, we were again informed, that the goods which, as we had expected, were intended for us were, on the eve of departure, for distant countries, of which some are inhabited by our enemies! These accounts being spread, our wives and children came to us, crying, and desiring that we should go to the fort, to learn, with

“our own ears, their truth or falsehood. We accordingly embarked, almost naked, as you see; and on our arrival here, we have inquired into the accounts, and found them true. We see your canoes ready to depart, and find your men engaged for the Mississippi, and other distant regions.

“Under these circumstances, we have considered the affair; and you are now sent for, that you may hear our determination, which is, that you shall give to our men, young and old, merchandise and ammunition, to the amount of fifty beaver-skins, on credit, and for which I have no doubt of their paying you in the summer, on their return from their wintering.”

A compliance with this demand would have stripped me and my fellow-merchants of all our merchandise; and, what rendered the affair still more serious, we even learned that these Otawas were never accustomed to pay for what they received on credit. In reply, therefore, to the speech which we had heard, we requested that the demand contained in it might be diminished; but we were answered, that the Otawas had nothing further to say, except that they would allow till the next day for reflection; after which, if compliance was not given, they would make no further application, but take into their own hands the property, which they already regarded as their own, as having been brought into their country, before the conclusion of any peace, between themselves and the English.

We now returned, to consider of our situation; and, in the evening, Farley, the interpreter, paid us a visit,

and assured us that it was the intention of the Otawas to put us, that night, to death. He advised us, as our only means of safety, to comply with the demands which had been made; but, we suspected our informant of a disposition to prey upon our fears, with a view to induce us to abandon the Indian trade, and resolved, however this might be, rather to stand on the defensive, than submit. We trusted to the house, in which I lived, as a fort; and armed ourselves, and about thirty of our men, with muskets. Whether or not the Otawas ever intended violence, we never had an opportunity of knowing; but the night passed quietly.

Early the next morning, a second council was held, and the merchants were again summoned to attend. Believing that every hope of resistance would be lost, should we commit our persons into the hands of our enemies, we sent only a refusal. There was none without, in whom we had any confidence, except Cannon. From him we learned, from time to time, whatever was rumoured among the Canadian inhabitants, as to the designs of the Otawas; and, from him, toward sunset, we received the gratifying intelligence, that a detachment of British soldiery, sent to garrison Michillimackinac, was distant only five miles, and would enter the fort early the next morning.

Near at hand, however, as relief was reported to be, our anxiety could not but be great; for a long night was to be passed, and our fate might be decided before the morning. To increase our apprehensions, about midnight we were informed, that the