



## Shared Technology - Ojibwe and European



Paddlers en Route

Carl Gawboy

### Introduction

With the appearance of Europeans in the Great Lakes region and the subsequent fur trade era, change occurred rapidly for both the Europeans and native peoples. Long before the formal organization of the British-Canadian North West Company (NWC) at Grand Portage in 1784 native peoples exchanged commerce, culture and religion with the French. Native peoples guided early explorers and traders to the north shore of Lake Superior. These newcomers quickly learned that they had to depend on the native peoples for the essential elements of their success: food, transportation, access to established trade routes, acquisition of furs and trade relations through kinship. Without the support of the native peoples the North American fur trade could not have existed. The sharing of technologies by both cultures, through adaptation and adoption helped assure that success.

### North American and European Technologies

The ability of the European to travel and explore year around was made possible by the use of two significant native technological contributions: the birch bark canoe and snowshoes.

for hunting, fishing, travel, collecting wild rice and later for fur trading. European explorers and fur traders adopted and adapted the birch bark canoe for their commercial needs.



Ojibwe Camp Scene

Carl Gawboy

Birch bark canoes are light and very maneuverable and were used when the waterways were not frozen. They were built and used in the areas of the Great Lakes region that supported the growth of the white birch. The thickness of the birch bark determined its use. Bark peeled in the spring is heavier and is strong enough to use for canoes. Other materials needed for canoe building are white cedar for the ribs (skeleton) gunwales, bow pieces and flooring; ash for the thwarts; and spruce roots for the sewing and lashing elements of the canoe. The seams were caulked with a watertight mixture of spruce pitch, bear grease and ground charcoal. Native peoples found birch bark canoes practical

Snowshoes were invented by the North American Indian. They were indispensable to men on long winter hunts in deep snow. The most common type of snowshoe consisted of a strip of green ash wood that had been bent, either over a fire or in hot water, to form a rounded front end. The cut ends were tied together at the rear. Two wooden cross bars were added for strength, and open sections were filled in with rawhide thongs woven hexagonally with a needle made of wood or bone. A strip of leather across the top of the foot and another strip of leather around the heel held the snowshoe onto the foot. For the European explorer, trader or prospector this technology allowed access to unfamiliar territory in the winter, thereby increasing their sphere of influence and knowledge.



Native peoples also adapted and adopted technologies. In many areas Native peoples soon became as dependent on trade

goods as traders were on native labor. Native peoples adopted European fire-arms for hunting and war but developed different tactics for their use. Native peoples welcomed the ease and convenience of metal pans, knives and English wool. One of the most damaging de-

pendencies for the native peoples was created by the introduction of alcohol into their culture. Conversely however, Old World dietary and social habits were positively changed by the importation of corn, potatoes, beans and tobacco from native peoples of the New World.

## Diet and Fashion Across Cultures



Metis Wedding

Carl Gawboy

Changes in clothing and diet were common to both cultures. In the mid and late 1700s, particularly in the New England colonies where the manufacture of textiles was prohibited, Europeans in the New World adopted various styles of dress and dining. Many people dressed in buckskin, wore moccasins instead of shoes, breech cloths and leggings instead of trousers, and relied on hunting and farming for their food. Native peoples developed a liking for the English wool blankets and broadcloth as well as East Indian cottons and Irish linen. Native methods of food preservation such as us-

ing animal tallow to make pemmican, boiling maple sap into maple sugar, and caching food, saved the Europeans valuable time. Time that did not have to be spent hunting and farming could be spent building and exploring.

As the European people traveled, often they suffered many health problems caused mainly by a poor diet. On his second voyage of exploration in 1535, Jacques Cartier was forced to winter at a site that is near present-day Montreal. His crew of 110 men was suffering greatly from a disease that was later named scurvy. Only 10 men were fit for duty and 25 had died. They knew of no cure for their ailment. Cartier noticed that affected native peoples quickly cured themselves of the malady by using a boiled tea from portions of a plant which he called the *annedda* (white cedar). The French acquired this knowledge from the native peoples and the remaining crew was cured within a week. This remedy was passed on to the *Canadien coureurs* and then to the English traders.

## Conclusion

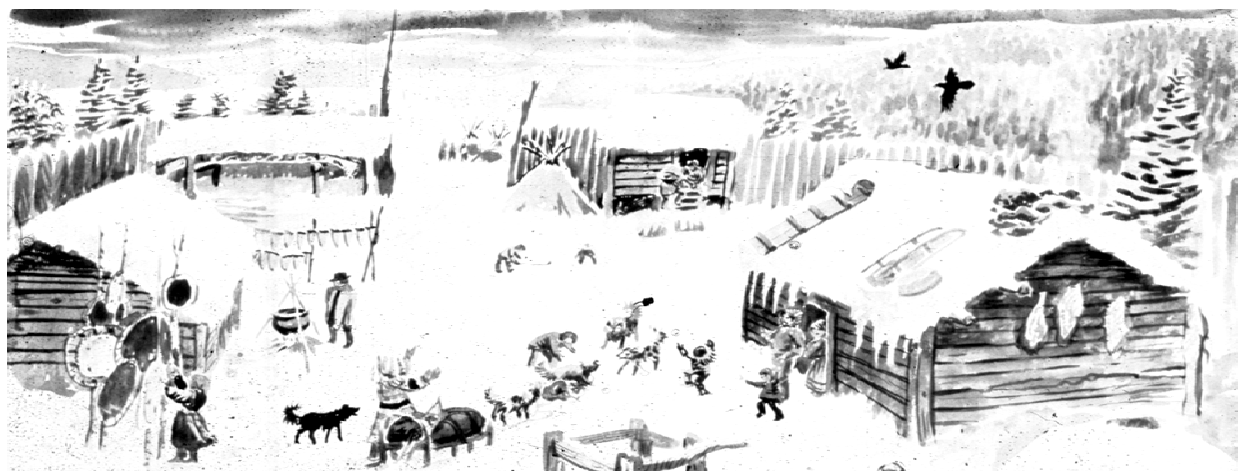
The meeting of civilizations always involves an exchange of ideas, objects, materials, and ways of doing things that are later adapted to the tastes and needs of each culture. It was the native culture and way of life that underwent the most change. These changes were sometimes negative, resulting in a breakdown of native society. The Europeans adopted native customs and were taught how to survive in the woods. They learned how to make warm winter clothing from furs and moccasins from buckskin; how to use canoes, snow shoes, and toboggans for travel; how to preserve food; and how to use plants for medicinal purposes. The native peoples were introduced to new foods like peas and salt;



Three Sisters

Carl Gawboy

wool cloth and blankets; iron tools; manufactured fish nets; weapons; and European diseases like smallpox and measles.



Winter at the Fur Post

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