

A TIME OF CHANGE: GREEN BAY, 1815-1834

By JOHN D. HAEGER

I have no very agreeable news to relate to you my Dear Friend but if it is not tiring your patience too much I will give you a little detail of my situation in life. I will commence in saying that the first Year after the War was the last year I saved myself for every year since I have been loosing money & not a little in that cursed Indian trade that I have always persisted and do Still persist to continue which will soon put me a beggar (but you may well say or ask the question why do you still continue since you find it a loosing business.) I will say I do not know what to do else as I am not capable of doing or following any other kind of business. I always lived in hopes but I am at last beginning to despair the old times is no more that pleasant reign is over & never to return any more. . . .¹

THIS CRY of anguish represented the feelings of many French and British inhabitants of Green Bay in the period between 1815 and 1834. These people were the original settlers of the Old Northwest who, for over a hundred years, had traded with the Indians and had constructed a simple, communal society which was disturbed only by the periodic contests of France, England, and the United States for control of the territory. The War of 1812 was the final struggle marking the emergence of American control over the Old Northwest and the decline of the simple frontier life known by hundreds of residents at small outposts such as Green Bay. In the process of Americanization, which took place from 1815 to 1834, the French and British citizens of Green Bay found their lives severely altered. By 1834, when farmers

began to arrive, the fur traders were a broken and destitute people, a casualty of America's frontier expansion. What happened at Green Bay probably occurred time and again as America moved swiftly across the continent.²

In the decades immediately preceding 1815, Green Bay had been a wilderness village with the fur trade as the inhabitants' principal occupation. The outpost was theoretically under British control, with settlers of British and French lineage. The foremost residents of the community included Jacques Porlier, a native of Montreal, who settled at the Bay in 1791, and John Lawe, who first traded at Mackinac and then moved to the Bay in 1797. Equally prominent were the Grignon brothers, especially

¹ John Lawe to Mrs. Hamilton, September 12, 1824, in "The Fur Trade in Wisconsin, 1812-1825," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* (Madison, 1911), XX: 351. Hereinafter cited as *WHC*. Original punctuation and spelling have been retained in all quotations.

² The contention that the Green Bay fur traders were exploited by American society during the frontier period is an attempt to answer the call of Wilbur Jacobs for a new look at the fur-trade period in American history. See Wilbur Jacobs, "Frontiersmen, Fur Traders, and Other Varmints, An Ecological Appraisal of the Frontier in American History," in the *American Historical Association Newsletter*, VIII: 5-11 (November, 1970).

Augustin and Pierre. The traders received manufactured products from British firms in Canada to exchange for the animal pelts collected by the Indians. There were few pressures concerning profit and loss and minimal conflicts between Indian and white civilizations as the two races freely intermarried and shared the economic benefits of the trade.³ But the War of 1812 abruptly changed this idyllic life style. During the war, the Green Bay residents had assisted the British cause against the Americans.⁴ When the war ended and the British supposedly relinquished all territorial and trade rights in the Old Northwest, the Green Bay traders suddenly faced the eagerness of the Americans to bring the area under their control.

As officials of the American government set to work to devise military and Indian policies for the Old Northwest which would affect the society at Green Bay, many officials harbored hostile feelings toward the fur traders and Indians because of their complicity with the British during the war. General Jacob Brown, commander of the Northern Division of Military Departments recommended, for example, the wholesale exclusion of all British nationals from the territory.⁵ Governor Ninian Edwards of the Illinois Territory specifically cited Green Bay as a British stronghold and recommended the forceful removal of all traders and their replacement by American citizens.⁶ Governor Lewis Cass of the Michigan Territory also perceived a British threat and urged the establishment of military posts at Green Bay, Chicago,

³ Information on the early history of Green Bay can be found in the following: William Francis Roney, *Wisconsin: A Story of Progress* (New York, 1940), 56; Augustin Grignon, "Seventy-Two Years' Recollections of Wisconsin," *WHC*, III: 242-245; Louise P. Kellogg, *The British Regime In Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison, 1935). Studies which highlight the differences between Green Bay before and after 1815 include Albert G. Ellis, "Fifty-Four Years' Recollections of Men and Events in Wisconsin," *WHC*, VIII: 217-221; Henry S. Baird, "Recollections of the Early History of Northern Wisconsin," *WHC*, IV: 205. An excellent secondary source is Alice Smith, *James Duane Doty, Frontier Promoter* (Madison, 1954), 63-66.

⁴ Reginald Horsman, "Wisconsin and the War of 1812," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XLVI: 3-15 (Autumn, 1962).

⁵ Henry P. Beers, *The Western Military Frontier, 1815-1846* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1935), 35n.

⁶ Governor Ninian Edwards to James Monroe, March 3, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 401-404.



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John Lawe, who settled in Green Bay in 1797.

and at the Grand Portage, thereby guarding the major communication arteries and preventing British infiltration into the Old Northwest.⁷ The War Department reacted to these suggestions and established a military post at Green Bay in 1816, convinced that the traders required careful supervision.

Military control, however, was not alone sufficient to guarantee frontier security, so the government also established an Indian agency at Green Bay under Colonel John Bowyer. The Secretary of War indicated that one of the reasons for this action was "that the menaces of the Indians throughout the Indian countries require immediate attention, and among the means which are proper for restoring harmony, preserving peace, and defeating the arts employed by intrusive traders to generate Indian hostilities, it is recommended that there be immediately established an Indian agency on the Fox River in the neighborhood of Green Bay. . . ."⁸

Colonel Bowyer's major responsibility, there-

⁷ Lewis Cass to Alexander J. Dallas, Acting Secretary of War, June 20, 1815, *ibid.*, 378.

⁸ Report of the Secretary of War to the President, June 19, 1815, Michigan Superintendency of Indian Affairs, Letters Received and Sent, I: 72-74. These records are a National Archives microfilm publication. Hereinafter cited as MSIA.

fore, was to curtail British influence among the Indians, an influence which the British had built up through years of involvement in the Indian trade. The Indian agent's lever of control was government legislation requiring all fur traders to possess a license to trade.⁹ Colonel Bowyer naturally would have had a tendency to withhold licenses from many Green Bay traders. After all, Bowyer needed only to remember their obvious British sympathies during the war.

Matthew Irwin joined this group of American officials in 1816 to direct the Green Bay factory, a system which had been established in 1795 to regulate the Indian trade. It was administered by the Superintendent of the Indian Trade who was responsible to the Secretary of War. The government provided the factory with money and supplies to exchange for the Indians' furs. Its most distinguished aim was humanitarian, for the factory hoped to eliminate the impoverishment which the Indians suffered in dealing with the supposedly unscrupulous fur traders.¹⁰ When Matthew Irwin arrived at Green Bay, the unscrupulous fur traders were by definition former British subjects, such as John Lawe, Jacques Porlier, and the Grignon brothers.

The fur traders' dilemma was only beginning, for at the very time that the government formulated policies in Washington, John Astor was building an even graver threat to the traders' economic and social lives. For several years before the War of 1812, Astor had worked to wrest control of the fur trade in the Old Northwest from British firms. In 1811 he entered into a partnership with a British company for the trade of the Old Northwest. With the conclusion of the war and the expulsion of British interests from the Old Northwest, the territory seemed open to wholesale exploitation by Astor's American Fur Company. Beginning in 1815, he organized the administrative details of his

firm, hiring two dynamic frontiersmen, Ramsay Crooks and Robert Stuart, to oversee the defining of trade territories, to recruit traders, and to stifle any opposition. A few years later the American Fur Company moved into the Green Bay region as a step toward securing a monopoly of the fur trade in the Old Northwest. The fur traders would soon learn that the methods of the American Fur Company bore little relation to the fur trade they had previously known.¹¹

IN 1816 the future looked dim indeed for Green Bay's residents. They faced the outright hostility of the military, the Indian agent, and the government factor, because government officials were convinced that the traders' British sympathies represented a threat to frontier security. The traders, moreover, were subjected to a government policy which was not only inconsistent but also possessed of startling contradictions which only added to the problems which they now faced.

A good example of the inconsistency of government policy and its effect on the traders was evident in the government's regulations for licensing fur traders. Especially sensitive to British influence in the Old Northwest, Congress passed a law in April, 1816, which stipulated that "Licenses to trade with the Indians within the territorial boundaries of the United States shall not be granted to any but citizens of the United States, unless by the express direction of the President of the United States, and upon such terms and conditions as the public interest in his opinion requires."¹²

The law was designed to encourage and to aid American business in capturing the fur trade from British firms. The national govern-

⁹ The Indian agent's role on the frontier has been discussed by Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834* (Cambridge, 1962), 52-57.

¹⁰ Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 84-93; Ora B. Peake, *A History of the United States Indian Factory System, 1795-1822* (Denver, 1954).

¹¹ A description of John Astor's tactics in organizing the American Fur Company can be found in Paul Phillips, *The Fur Trade* (Norman, 1961), II: 136-140; David Lavender, "Some American Characteristics of the American Fur Company," in Russell W. Fridley, ed., *Aspects of the Fur Trade* (St. Paul, 1967), 30-39. The literature on the fur trade is voluminous. Important works include: David Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness* (Garden City, New York, 1964); Kenneth W. Porter, *John Jacob Astor: Business Man* (2 vols., New York, 1931).

¹² U.S. Statutes at Large, III: 331-333.

ment never intended that all foreigners should be excluded, since there simply were not enough American citizens to carry on the business. Thus, the President delegated his authority to the Governor of the Michigan Territory and the Indian agents at Mackinac, Green Bay, and Chicago to exercise discretion in determining who and how many British traders should be licensed.¹³

The Green Bay traders must have waited anxiously on the local Indian agent for an interpretation of the law. Their answer came quickly. In June, 1816, Major William Puthuff, Indian agent at Mackinac, seized the furs of Jacques Porlier and Louis Grignon, claiming that they were trading without licenses. In certain respects, Puthuff had the strictest type of legality on his side. Porlier and Grignon were shipping furs to Drummond Island, center of British control on America's northwest boundary, and most likely were trading without licenses.¹⁴ On the other hand, Puthuff exercised little human understanding. The Green Bay traders had no other outlet for their furs in 1816 since American businesses, especially the American Fur Company, had not, as yet, entered the Green Bay region. The charge that the traders did not possess trading licenses was also harsh, because the law was passed in April, 1816, and the furs were seized in June, 1816. Considering the frontier's primitive communications system, this was not sufficient time to conform to the law's requirements. Major Puthuff was overzealous, perhaps because to him, as to many frontier officials schooled by a bloody war, Green Bay represented the very seat of British influence and therefore required a strict application of government legislation.¹⁵

Major Puthuff's rigorous enforcement of the law was soon tempered by instructions from Lewis Cass, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who pointed out that American businesses required the employment of some British traders.¹⁶ In April and May, 1817, the traders suddenly found that trading licenses from Colonel Bowyer were available for the asking. Louis Grignon appeared somewhat confused by this change in policy: "... In regard to the License After all the Trouble possible Col Bowyer has decided to give them to every person who asks for them. He has said Openly that if the matter was at his option no one should obtain a license, but Mr. Rouse, Mr. Lawe, & Mr. James. . . I believe there will be as many traders as Houses."¹⁷

Louis Grignon's confusion was understandable. It stemmed from the fact that government policy attempted to balance a number of conflicting interests, and its policies shifted from satisfaction of one interest and then the other. The War Department, which was responsible for the military posts, the Indian agencies, the factory system, and the enforcement of legislation relating to these institutions, had one primary goal—the elimination of British influence in American territory. A principal method of accomplishing this objective was to exclude the British from involvement in the fur trade. But the War Department also realized that if American businesses, especially the American Fur Company, captured the trade, then the British would lose their hold over the Indians. Thus, the War Department might at one point outlaw all foreign participation in the trade and then later permit a few exceptions, if such exceptions benefited the American fur trade companies in defeating their British competitors.¹⁸

Not all government officials agreed with this policy. Thomas L. McKenney, director of the

¹³ William H. Crawford to Governor Cass and Indian Agents, May 10, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 406. A discussion of the law of 1816 is contained in Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 77-80.

¹⁴ Pierre Rocheblave to Jacques Porlier, June 20, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 416; Pierre Rocheblave to Louis Grignon, June 20, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 417.

¹⁵ Major Puthuff to Governor Cass, May 14, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 408-409; Major Puthuff to Governor Cass, June 20, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 423-424. Both letters indicate Puthuff's great fear of the British influence in American territory. Numerous authors have mentioned Puthuff's policy. See Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 78; Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 236-245.

¹⁶ Governor Lewis Cass to Major Puthuff, July 20, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 427-428. Also see Cass to Puthuff, June 19, 1817, in the Lawe Family Papers, Letter Folder II, Chicago Historical Society.

¹⁷ Louis Grignon to M. Dousman, September 14, 1817, *WHC*, XIX: 475-476.

¹⁸ William Crawford to Governor Lewis Cass and Indian Agents, May 10, 1816, *WHC*, XIX: 406; George Graham, Acting Secretary of War, to Governor Cass, May 4, 1817, *WHC*, XIX: 457-458; Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 77.

factory system, and Matthew Irwin, the Green Bay factor, had a common interest with the Indian agents and the military in curtailing the influence of British traders, since they competed with the factory system. Shortly after arriving at Green Bay, for example, Matthew Irwin requested John Bowyer, the Indian agent, to withhold licenses from the traders at Green Bay because "whilst these and other British subjects are suffered to enter and continue in this Country as traders, It will be useless in the Government to continue this factory here; principally from the asendancy which an interrupted intercourse of many years has enabled them to acquire over the minds of the Indians, supported by extensive family connections with them."¹⁹

Matthew Irwin and Thomas McKenney, however, went one step farther, for they opposed the licensing of all traders, British or American. Their aim was to control the fur trade so that no trader could defraud the Indians. The War Department's policy of encouraging private enterprise through the licensing of traders was directly opposed to its factory system. Major Irwin accurately described these conflicting lines of authority between the Indian agent and the government factor at Green Bay:

There appears a palpable incongruity in the manner of conducting the Indian trade; the factors are sent to supply the wants of the Indians, and the Indian Agents can adopt such measures as to defeat all their plans to that end. It is very certain that the authority vested in them to issue licenses is well calculated to destroy all the benefits that might be expected from the factories. . . .²⁰

The national government's attempt to balance the interests of the American Fur Company, the

factory, the military, and the Indian agencies created a chaotic situation for several years at Green Bay. When the War Department did not stringently enforce the law of 1816 to exclude all foreigners from the fur trade, Thomas McKenney asked government officials for a stricter application of the law. McKenney had received the first accounts of the Green Bay factory which indicated that it had been unable to gain the Indians' business. Major Irwin claimed that the failure of the Green Bay factory was caused by the looseness of government policy which allowed British traders in the territory.²¹ McKenney appealed to higher officials in Washington, first to George Graham, Acting Secretary of War, and then to Henry Southard, chairman of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs. McKenney argued that government policy which allowed private traders in areas supplied by the factories hindered the effectiveness of the factories and permitted the British to maintain their influence with the Indians.²²

McKenney's appeals and a subsequent report of the House Committee on Indian Affairs forced a change in government policy. In January, 1818, War Department orders instructed Indian agents to exclude all foreigners without exception.²³ No sooner had the War Department's orders been issued than the American Fur Company indicated its strong objections to this policy. Two months later the national government changed its policy once again.²⁴ As of April, 1818, the War Department allowed foreigners to participate in the fur trade, but only as employees of an American citizen. This directive at least provided Porlier, Lawe, and the Grignons with the hope of obtaining licenses and pursuing the trade, although they, theoreti-

¹⁹ Major Irwin to Colonel John Bowyer, July 24, 1817, *WHC*, XIX: 470.

²⁰ Major Irwin to Colonel Thomas L. McKenney, September 29, 1817, *WHC*, VII: 274-275. Surprisingly few authors have detailed the confusion in government policy. Theoretically, the factory was to operate in areas where private traders could be or had been excluded. In actual fact, factories at Chicago and Green Bay were in the most competitive locations of the Old Northwest. Government policy was also affected by conflicting lines of authority within the War Department. The Secretary of War was directly responsible for both the factory system and the Indian agents.

²¹ Thomas McKenney to Matthew Irwin, January 6, 1817, *WHC*, XIX: 448; Irwin to McKenney, [1819], *WHC*, VII: 277-278; Irwin to McKenney, March 10, 1817, *WHC*, VII: 270-271.

²² Thomas McKenney to George Graham, Acting Secretary of War, September 30, 1817, *WHC*, XIX: 480-481; McKenney to Henry Southard, January 6, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 12-16. Southard was chairman of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs. On January 22, 1818, he reported a bill to establish additional factories. *WHC*, XX: 12n.

²³ Governor Lewis Cass to John Bowyer, January 22, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 16. Also see Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, 79-80.

²⁴ Ramsay Crooks and Robert Stuart to John Astor, January 24, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 18.



The J. Saintain oil portrait of Ramsay Crooks, owned by the Society.

cally, had to proceed to the Indian country under the direction of an American citizen. The local Indian agent, Colonel Bowyer, still possessed the prerogative of excluding any foreigner whom he judged to be dangerous to the United States.²⁵ Considering Bowyer's unfavorable view of the Green Bay traders, his subsequent decision to refuse licenses to the traders came as no surprise to the Green Bay residents.²⁶ The enormous difficulties and constant uncertainties surrounding his attempts to obtain a trading license led Jacques Porlier to comment that

... I cannot make out what is going to become of us, abandoned as we are not know-

ing our rights nor where we shall be attacked. In an obscure labyrinth, loaded incessantly with the most atrocious calumnies without means of unmasking them, what are we to do? I would never have believed that among any people it would be a title of reprobation to have been a British subject, to have belonged to a Government which has always seemed to me so kind to foreigners. I begin to perceive the word *liberty* in the language of politics or of the Governments does not mean the same thing as we commonly suppose.²⁷

If the traders became American citizens, however, they could escape the prejudice of American officials and national legislation toward British subjects. But the road leading to citizenship was a long and arduous one. In 1819 the Green Bay traders applied to Colonel Bowyer for American citizenship, a request which Bowyer denied. The acting governor of the Michigan Territory, William Woodbridge, however, granted the citizenship request on the grounds that Porlier and the other traders had resided in the territory since 1796 and fell under the provisions of the Jay Treaty which made citizenship all but automatic.²⁸ Some national and local officials, however, perceived a threat to frontier security from these "dangerous" traders and requested the Attorney General of the United States to review the decision. The Attorney General ruled that the Green Bay traders could not automatically become citizens under the Jay Treaty because recent legislation required prospective citizens to swear an oath before the proper official. On the basis of this technicality, Governor Lewis Cass was forced to revoke the traders' citizenship and trading licenses, which they had just recently secured.²⁹ The action of Cass plunged the traders into

²⁵ Governor Lewis Cass to the Indian agents at Chicago and Green Bay, April 23, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 43-46.

²⁶ Jacques Porlier to Forsyth, Richardson and Co., (no date, about 1818), *WHC*, XX: 93-94; John Lawe to Thomas C. Anderson, November 13, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 93. Bowyer clearly indicated his opinion of the Green Bay traders in a letter to Governor Cass, May 16, 1818, *MSIA*, Letters Received and Sent, II: 403-404.

²⁷ Jacques Porlier to Forsyth, Richardson, and Co., (no date, about 1818), *WHC*, XX: 94.

²⁸ Louis Grignon to Governor Cass, August 27, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 120; Adam Stewart to John Bowyer, September 3, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 120-121; Robert Stuart to Governor Cass, November 13, 1819, *WHC*, 135-136.

²⁹ William Wirt, Office of the Attorney General, to John Calhoun, Secretary of War, September 3, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 121-122; John Calhoun to Governor Cass, September 6, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 123; Governor Cass to Indian agents at Michilimackinac, Green Bay, Chicago, Fort Wayne, Piqua, October 11, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 127-128.

despair, for they had already accepted, on credit, a supply of goods for the trade. Without licenses, they had little hope of obtaining furs to pay their creditors.³⁰ One government official was extremely pleased by this development. Informing Matthew Irwin of the Attorney General's decision, Thomas McKenney's assistant commented, "This will rid you I hope of a number of the greatest enemies to your factory and enable you to carry on a much more advantageous trade in the future with the Indians."³¹

ONE CAN only express bewilderment at the American government's attitude during the licensing and citizenship controversies with the Green Bay traders. There was little doubt that John Lawe, Jacques Porlier, and the other Bay traders conducted business with British companies in the first years after the war, but they had little choice since American firms did not immediately enter the fur trade in the Green Bay area.³² The War Department was also correct in viewing the traders as British sympathizers, but what other attitude could be expected after the war? One fact which the national government never considered was that the traders were simple men, desirous of living free from political entanglements. The almost paranoid fear of the national government that the Green Bay residents would continue to further British interests prevented the formulation of a more reasonable policy which would have incorporated the traders into American society.

Not surprisingly, the traders' correspondence expressed their frustration with the American government. John Lawe lamented, "This is three years . . . since peace has been made and

I have been in Hell ever since, I wish I could sell out and leave this country forever."³³ At one point they seriously considered a move to land in the Red River district made available to them through a Canadian acquaintance, Lord Selkirk. His death, however, forced the traders to make the best of their plight at Green Bay.³⁴

Harassed by the frontier officials, plagued by the competition of the factory system, and beset by the necessity of obtaining licenses and citizenship, the Green Bay fur traders recognized the advantages of employment with the American Fur Company. The first years after the war, they had refused to join the American Fur Company, preferring instead to trade through an old British friend, Jacob Franks, then employed by a Detroit firm, David Stone and Company.³⁵ When they had failed to gain licenses and citizenship in 1818, they turned in desperation to the American Fur Company, hoping that its power would bring a quick resolution of their problems. There was justification for their decision. Since establishing headquarters at Mackinac, Ramsay Crooks and Robert Stuart had slowly fashioned a monopoly in the fur trade. Government policy had facilitated this development. The law of 1816 eliminating all foreigners allowed the American Fur Company to capture many areas previously supplied by the British. When the American Fur Company desired the employment of selected British traders, pressure was exerted on national and local officials to relax the laws. Indian agents, such as Major Puthuff at Mackinac, who opposed the granting of favors to the

³³ John Lawe to Captain Thomas Anderson, November 13, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 90-93.

³⁴ Louis Grignon to Robert Dickson, February 6, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 102-103; Robert Dickson to John Lawe, April 23, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 105-106; Lord Selkirk to Robert Dickson, May 21, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 110-111. Selkirk had been involved in the fur trade in the early nineteenth century and had just received a grant from the Hudson's Bay Company to begin a colony in the Red River district.

³⁵ Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 267; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, II: 372. Both authors believed that the traders' inability to obtain licenses drove them into the arms of the American Fur Company. Phillips claimed that Ramsay Crooks convinced the Secretary of War that the Green Bay traders should not receive licenses in order to destroy David Stone's Company in Detroit.

³⁰ Robert Stuart to Governor Cass, November 13, 1819, and November 21, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 135-137; O. N. Bostwick to John Lawe, September 10, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 125; John Lawe to Captain Thomas Anderson, November 13, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 90-93; Louis Grignon to Robert Dickson, February 6, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 102-103.

³¹ Jeremiah Bronaugh to Matthew Irwin, September 10, 1819, *WHC*, 123-124.

³² In 1816, the American Fur Company attempted to enclose Green Bay within its monopoly, but the traders then refused to join the Company. See the discussion in Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 267, 285, 301-302.

American Fur Company, found that the Company's influence superseded his own, even to the point of reversing his decisions or affecting his position. Matthew Irwin, government factor at Green Bay, once described the power of the American Fur Company:

... The agents of Mr. Astor held out an idea that they will ere long, be able to break the factories; and they menace the Indian agents, and others who may interfere with them, with dismission from office, through Mr. Astor. They say that a representation from Messrs. Crooks and Stewart [*sic*] (Mr. Astor's agents) led to the dismission of the Indian agent at Mackinac, and they also say that the Indian agent here is to be dismissed.³⁶

Once employed by the American Fur Company, the traders benefited from its power. Robert Stuart pledged to aid them in obtaining licenses and citizenship and seemed confident of success when he wrote to Governor Cass explaining the hardships suffered by the traders because of government policy.³⁷ By July, 1820, the members of the Green Bay community had received American citizenship.³⁸

The necessity of working with the American Fur Company was all the more imperative in their struggle with the factory. To the fur traders the factory was a business intending to eliminate their only source of economic livelihood. This attitude was shared by the American Fur Company, for it feared the competition of the factory in the fur trade. Employed now by the American Fur Company, the Green Bay traders had a powerful ally in the fight to end the factory system. Numerous authors have detailed the methods used by the American Fur Company in its struggle with the factory system. In Washington and in the offices of major

territorial officials, Astor, Crooks, and Stuart threatened, cajoled, and lobbied before the government, claiming that the factory was a business competing with private enterprise. In the actual trading territories, the competition was intense for the American Fur Company offered lower prices than the factory, utilized liquor as a means to gain the furs of the Indians, and hired all personnel in a particular area merely to cause a manpower shortage at the factory.³⁹

Granted that all the charges against the American Fur Company were true, it seems of little value to narrate a familiar story, for it only succeeds in hiding the real causes for the factory's failure. The government's inadequately conceived Indian policy, which permitted private traders to flourish in areas supplied by the factories, hindered the success of the factory system. Success for the factory system, moreover, depended upon its ability to obtain the trust and confidence of the Indians. Considering that the traders naturally opposed the system and also held the trust of the Indians stemming from years of intercourse, it was hardly surprising that the Green Bay factory was an unprofitable venture. Only after several years of intense warfare between the traders and the factory did the national government move to adopt a more realistic approach. As early as 1818 Governor Lewis Cass had urged the government to close the factories and to adopt a policy of regulation over private enterprise involved in the trade. John Calhoun as Secretary of War recommended just such a policy, but no action was taken. In 1820 the Reverend Jedidiah Morse suggested that the Indians were not maltreated by the traders. The Indians dealt with the traders, Morse observed,

³⁶ Matthew Irwin to Thomas McKenney, 1819, *WHC*, VII: 278; Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 276-280.

³⁷ [Robert Stuart] to Bernard Grignon, October 28, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 128-129; Robert Stuart to Governor Cass, November 13, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 135-136; Stuart to Cass, November 21, 1819, *WHC*, XX: 136-137; Stuart to Jacques Porlier, May 20, 1820, *WHC*, XX: 171-172.

³⁸ Naturalization papers of Charles Grignon, July 20, 1820, *WHC*, 177-178; Citizenship papers of John Lawe and Jacques Porlier, *WHC*, XV: 215-216.

³⁹ The fight between the American Fur Company and the factory system can be followed through the excellent collection of letters by Matthew Irwin, Thomas McKenney, Robert Stuart, and Ramsay Crooks in "Fur Trade and Factory System at Green Bay," *WHC*, VII: 269-288. Additional letters and documents are found in the National Archives microfilm publication of the Superintendent of Indian Trade, Letters Received and Sent, 1807-1824. Especially revealing concerning the tactics of the American Fur Company were the statements presented by Indian agents before the Committee on Indian Affairs. See *Documents Relative to the Indian Trade* (17 Congress, 1 session, Senate Document no. 60, serial 59, Washington, 1822).

because they lacked confidence in the government's factories.⁴⁰ In 1822 the national government responded to the overwhelming political pressure of the American Fur Company and abolished the factory system.

But the years between 1815 and 1822 had been critical for the Green Bay fur traders, for they discovered that their lives were severely restricted by government regulations and the outright hostility of the conquering power. Realistically they could not leave their homes at Green Bay; their only alternative was to join the American Fur Company. After all, Robert Stuart and Ramsay Crooks guaranteed them annual trading licenses, more supplies to compete with the factory, and a promise of richer rewards.⁴¹ The promise of rich rewards did not materialize. Twelve years later, when the traders' association with the American Fur Company ended, they were a destitute people.



Augustin Grignon, from an oil painting owned by the Society.

AFTER ACCEPTING employment with the American Fur Company, the traders were forced to alter their system of fur trading. In earlier years, when profits had not been of real concern except to provide the few necessities of life in the wilderness, the traders had roamed the length and breadth of present-day Wisconsin in their search for animal pelts.⁴² The American Fur Company, however, demanded profits, and with the increasing numbers of traders filtering into the territory, the Green Bay fur traders were forced to accept the more refined methods of business enterprise urged on them by the American Fur Company. The Company employed only the most respected

and powerful members of the French-British community: Louis, Pierre, and Augustin Grignon, John Lawe, and Jacques Porlier. To simplify accounting procedures, these traders operated under the title of the Green Bay Company, each trader agreeing to share one-fifth of the profits or to suffer one-fifth of the losses of the trade with the American Fur Company. The trade goods were to be obtained exclusively from the American Fur Company, thus preventing the Green Bay Company from buying goods or exchanging furs with any competing enterprise. The agreement was to last for three years. One signatory of the contract remained at Green Bay to handle administrative details, such as the packaging and shipment of furs to Mackinac. The remaining traders hired the necessary boatmen and clerks and journeyed to selected regions in the Indian country.⁴³ By establishing the Green Bay Company, the American Fur Company dropped from its accounts many other traders previously supplied on an individual basis. These traders probably obtained goods from competing firms, but

⁴⁰ Reverend Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War on Indian Affairs* (New Haven, 1822), 49; Governor Cass to John Calhoun, September 14, 1818, *WHC*, XX: 82-86; *Report of the Secretary of War of a System Providing for the Abolition of the Existing Indian Trade Establishments of the United States and Providing for the Opening of the Trade with the Indians to Private Individuals* (15 Congress, 2 session, House Report no. 25, serial 17, Washington, 1818).

⁴¹ The argument that the government's inconsistent policies aided the American Fur Company in capturing the allegiance of the traders has also been expressed by Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 301.

⁴² Louis Grignon to Charles Grignon, July 23, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 268-269. Also see "Porlier's Narrative," *WHC*, XV: 439.

⁴³ Agreement among Augustin Grignon, Pierre Grignon, Louis Grignon and John Lawe, August 24, 1821, *WHC*, XX: 206-210. Also see Ramsay Crooks to Jacques Porlier, August 24, 1821, *WHC*, XX: 211-212.

Crooks and Stuart seemed to feel that a centrally organized Green Bay Company could subdue rival interests.⁴⁴

The American Fur Company also assigned each trader a specific location, usually along the Fox and the Wisconsin rivers. Areas which the Green Bay traders had formerly visited were now allotted to traders from different regions. The Green Bay men, for example, had often journeyed up the Wisconsin River to the Mississippi in search of favorable trade. By 1822, however, this territory was controlled by other traders of the American Fur Company, notably Joseph Rolette operating from Prairie du Chien.⁴⁵

The Green Bay traders were never able to adjust to the regulations of the American Fur Company. The detailed accounting procedures and the restricted trading territories were unlike their earlier practices in the fur trade. During the next decade, the traders experienced year after year of unprofitable trade, partially because of the harsh economic practices of the American Fur Company.

Soon after the Green Bay Company was established, for example, Augustin Grignon of the Green Bay Company continued the practice of trading along the lower Wisconsin River, despite the American Fur Company's directions that this area belonged to Joseph Rolette. Ramsay Crooks considered Grignon's conduct symptomatic of a lack of principle.⁴⁶ In the winter of 1822, Grignon and Rolette bitterly fought for the Indian trade along the Wisconsin River, and Grignon's trading post was destroyed by the Indians. There seemed little doubt that Rolette had deliberately provoked the Indians into this act.⁴⁷ The American Fur Company, aware of Rolette's actions, refused to censure him, because he conducted one of its most profitable outfits, while the Green Bay Company struggled along year after year. Crooks did caution Rolette to be somewhat more moderate toward the Green Bay traders:

I am perfectly aware that the capital placed in your hands by the Company gives you the power to injure all your competitors, if not to destroy their business altogether, and I am not ignorant of the advantages which such a result would secure nor have I the smallest doubt that such is your aim—Still however obvious the benefit, *moderation toward those who derive their supplies from us*, must be the governing principle. . . .⁴⁸

Why did Crooks urge moderation toward the Green Bay traders even though he also admitted that "benefit" might accrue from ruining their trade? Crooks' position represented a carefully developed business strategy of the American Fur Company. Crooks realized that there was considerable competition for furs around Green Bay, for it was the first permanent settlement on the western shore of Lake Michigan and naturally the first place the vanguard of westward migration stopped en route to the opportunities of the West. This early migration included many merchants and lawyers who originally settled in the immediate neighborhood of Fort Howard, an area which came to be known as Shantytown. Two of these merchants, Daniel Whitney and Robert Irwin, were fairly typical. They opened general retail businesses, but since there were few settlers at Green Bay they needed other sources of income. Both Whitney and Irwin, therefore, entered the fur trade and provided competition for the American Fur Company. They were supplied with trade goods from Detroit and generally received a larger supply and wider assortment of goods than the personnel of the American Fur Company.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Louis Grignon to Augustin Grignon, February 19, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 243-246; Jacques Porlier to Lewis Cass, June 8, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 258-260; Governor Cass to John Calhoun, Secretary of War, July 9, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 265. Later, Grignon was informed that the government could take no action against Rolette because there was no definite proof. See James C. Souland to Augustin Grignon, July 29, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 274. Rolette was considered the most ruthless trader in the territory. See Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 321-325.

⁴⁸ Ramsay Crooks to Joseph Rolette, September 5, 1823, AFC Papers, III: 14; Ramsay Crooks to Robert Stuart, April 8, 1822, AFC Papers, II: 248.

⁴⁹ Henry S. Baird, "Recollections of the Early History of Northern Wisconsin," *WHC*, IV: 202; Alice Smith, "Daniel Whitney, Pioneer Wisconsin Businessman," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XXIV: 283-304 (March, 1941); John Lawe to Robert Stuart, January 4, 1823, Lawe Papers, IV.

⁴⁴ Ramsay Crooks to Louis Rouse, September 4, 1821, in the American Fur Company Papers, II: 133, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Hereinafter cited as AFC Papers.

⁴⁵ Ramsay Crooks to Joseph Rolette, September 4, 1821, *ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁶ Ramsay Crooks to Robert Stuart, January 4, 1822, *ibid.*, page number illegible.

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The Shantytown merchants were a serious threat to the members of the Green Bay Company. The traders often gave the Indians merchandise on credit before the winter's hunt, only to see the Indians later sell their furs to the Shantytown merchants. To prevent the Indians from dealing with Whitney and Irwin, John Lawe urged the traders to conduct all business with the Indians in the interior, away from Green Bay and the influence of Shantytown. At one point, Lawe considered spreading a rumor that smallpox was ravaging the Green Bay community to keep the Indians in the interior.⁵⁰

Realizing the intensity of the competition at Green Bay, Crooks and Stuart abandoned any hopes of ever attaining a monopoly. They were convinced that the Green Bay area would never yield a profit; the merchant businesses of men, such as Whitney, were just too solidly entrenched.⁵¹ The American Fur Company, however, maintained a token opposition at the Bay to prevent its competitors from ever gaining a real foothold in the trade, a base from which they might threaten more profitable trading areas along the lake shore or in the interior. The Company did not communicate this strategy to the traders. In fact, it allowed the Green Bay traders to believe that they were treated equally with all other employees. When informed of Daniel Whitney's presence by the Green Bay traders, Stuart led them to believe that Whitney would not affect their trade.⁵² Stuart also derided the efforts of another merchant, Robert Irwin, to hire traders at the Bay. Writing to Jacques Porlier, Stuart observed, "I believe the house of which Mr. Irwin is said to be agent will create more noise than effect; the Lord knows the trade is already bad enough; but if more fools will come, why we must welcome them."⁵³

Stuart's letters to the traders gave the im-

pression that he was singularly unconcerned about the opposition and had no doubts that the traders could still secure profits. At other times, however, when communicating with more favored traders of the Company, Stuart expressed his real policies regarding Green Bay:

For they [Green Bay traders] have got goods from Irwin at the bay, (which he got from Detroit) . . . besides I know that Lockwood made them a liberal offer to supply all their wants; and let the result be loss again, they would have strengthened his opposition so as to make it of serious consequence to your operation for there would be no restraint whatever; and it would be throwing them completely into the arms of our opponents which, as I have already stated, might be of no beneficial result to either of them but still must have turned out of serious detriment to us. . . .⁵⁴

Stuart accomplished his objective of maintaining a token resistance at Green Bay in a number of ways. Inadequate supplies were consistently sent to the Green Bay traders while more elaborate outfits were shipped to areas where the American Fur Company's monopoly was more secure, such as at Prairie du Chien. Although this was certainly a sound business procedure, it sealed the Green Bay traders' fate: they could not compete with the opposition, and consequently they lost money.⁵⁵

IN 1823 Stuart disbanded the Green Bay Company, but for the next decade he supplied traders on an individual basis.⁵⁶ When losses in the trade continued to grow, Stuart adopted additional financial measures to reduce the losses suffered by the American Fur Company. The traders were forbidden to advance credit

⁵⁴ Robert Stuart to Joseph Rolette, August 29, 1822, AFC Papers, II: 326.

⁵⁵ Ramsay Crooks to Pierre Grignon, October 2, 1821, AFC Papers, II: 152; I. Mason to Rolette, August 22, 1822, AFC Papers, II: 325; Stuart to Crooks, November 11, 1822, AFC Papers, II: 438.

⁵⁶ In 1823 the American Fur Company merged with Stone, Bostwick and Company, a Detroit firm. This merger necessitated a complete accounting of the Company's books. At this time, Stuart decided to terminate the Green Bay Company and establish new agreements with selected traders. See Robert Stuart to Ramsay Crooks, November, 1823, AFC Papers, III: 33; Stuart to Jacques Porlier, June 10, 1823, AFC Papers, II: 453; Stuart to Louis Rouse, May 10, 1823, AFC Papers, II: 449.

⁵⁰ John Lawe to Jacques Porlier, November 14, 1823, *WHC*, XX: 322; John Lawe to James Porlier, February 3, 1824, *WHC*, XX: 331-332.

⁵¹ Ramsay Crooks to Robert Stuart, January 4, 1822, AFC Papers, II: page number illegible; Crooks to Stuart, April 8, 1822, AFC Papers, II: 248; Stuart to Crooks, November 10, 1822, AFC Papers, II: 442.

⁵² Robert Stuart to John Lawe, October 10, 1821, *ibid.*, 120.

⁵³ Robert Stuart to Jacques Porlier, October 27, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 290.



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Daniel Whitney, pioneer Green Bay businessman, who settled there in 1819.

to the Indians for a winter's hunt in hopes of obtaining furs after the season.⁵⁷ The traders also were refused permission to reduce the price of their goods to compete with the merchants of Shantytown. As more and more settlers trickled into the frontier community, Stuart opposed cash sales to them because he feared that the traders would not devote their full attention to the trade in furs.⁵⁸ Such cost-cutting measures on the part of the American Fur Company were sound business procedures, but they were financially ruinous to the traders. Each year their losses increased and also their debts to the American Fur Company. If they could not advance credit to the Indians or lower prices, their chances of ever competing with the Shantytown merchants were nil. If they could not trade with the settlers, they were absolutely prevented from ever participating in the changing economic structure of the Green Bay community. The account books of the American Fur Company indicate the traders' fate. In 1822 the Green Bay Company was \$16,000 in debt, and each year thereafter the debt increased.⁵⁹

In 1826 and 1827 Green Bay experienced its worst trade years. But this time the economic

pinch also hit the Shantytown merchants, forcing Daniel Whitney to tender an offer to the American Fur Company to sell his interest in the trade. Always the master strategist, Stuart refused the offer. Conditions were now favorable to the American Fur Company, for a stalemate had been achieved at Green Bay. Commenting on Whitney's offer, Stuart observed, "Whitney must have suffered severely — and wished me to buy him out, but he may make the most of it for altho we cannot abandon that trade, I would rather he should supply some of the people, than we; for whether there is opposition or not, no money is to be made there."⁶⁰

From the beginning of their association with the American Fur Company, the traders had realized Stuart's strategy. In 1822 Jacques Porlier bitterly complained that the Company was supplying other traders with goods at cheaper prices and locating them in trading territories which, for years, he had occupied. In an amazingly accurate summary, John Lawe indicated the traders' knowledge of Stuart's tactics:

As I wrote you last year they made us form a Company at the Bay but it is a mere Burlesque for to throw us into misery & trouble they pretend it is for our own good it is true it would be if we had the privilege of others (that is to get our goods as low as they Could really give them and with a good profit) and . . . at least liberty to go where we please but no it is quite the contrary they don't wish I believe to ruin us for fear an opposition might form and come into the country.⁶¹

Many historians have claimed that the story is not complete without recognizing that the Green Bay traders contributed to their own difficulties.⁶² Certainly such charges hold some

⁵⁷ Robert Stuart to Michael Dousman, August 13, 1825, *WHC*, XX: 378.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* The American Fur Company had always been opposed to the sale of goods to settlers as a supplementary occupation for the traders. See J. Ward Ruckman, "Ramsay Crooks and the Fur Trade of the Northwest," in *Minnesota History*, VII: 27 (March, 1926).

⁵⁹ Robert Stuart to Ramsay Crooks, November 11, 1823, AFC Papers, II: 438; Stuart to Crooks, July 26, 1826, AFC Papers, III: 327.

⁶⁰ Robert Stuart to Ramsay Crooks, August 18, 1827, AFC Papers, III: 460-469.

⁶¹ John Lawe to Jacob Franks, August 26, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 277-278; Robert Stuart to Jacques Porlier, May 16, 1822, *WHC*, XX: 255.

⁶² This is also the position of Lavender, *The First*

truth. Often they refused to journey into the wilderness for trade. At other times, John Lawe freely dispensed credit to the Indians and fur traders alike, although he knew their ability to pay was doubtful.⁶³ Stuart once commented on such business habits: "There exists among the gentry of that district an unconquerable aversion to economy. and their only care seems to be to get into their profession the means of pampering their indolence. . . ."⁶⁴

Rather than view these faults as justifications for the American Fur Company's business policies, it seems more appropriate to say the fur traders were fairly consistent. They continued to follow the life and economic pattern they had known before the frontier entered a transitional period. This was the tragedy of the Green Bay community; both the government and the American Fur Company in their desire to exploit and develop the frontier economy took little notice of a segment of the population incapable of adapting to new conditions.

But why did the traders continue their affiliation with the American Fur Company for so long, even as their debts increased? The traders had few alternatives, for trading was their only skill. They were culturally and economically different from the "Yankee" migration exemplified by Daniel Whitney. Whitney, too, had entered the fur trade, but at the same time he was involved in purchasing land, in retail trade with the settlers, and in the supply of Fort Howard with beef and grain.⁶⁵ This economic diversity gave Whitney an enormous advantage over the traders. Where Whitney could trade with the settlers, the fur traders could not because of the rules of the American Fur Company against retail trade. While the military proved an economic advantage to merchants such as Whitney, it represented purely a regula-

tory body to the traders, since its duties involved the supervision of French and British traders. Government contracts for beef, oats, and grain, therefore, were rarely granted to the traders. They were primarily involved in fur trading with few opportunities for providing such products. Their reputation as British nationals, moreover, made it difficult to surmount the influence of the "Yankee" merchants.⁶⁶ Soldiers' payrolls also failed to benefit the traders because of the rule of the American Fur Company against sales to settlers and because of their inability to compete with the prices and influences of the Shantytown merchants.⁶⁷

It is not surprising, therefore, that the fur traders viewed the military as a threat, rather than as an economic boon to the Green Bay community. The traders must have been slightly amused when the military arrived in 1816 to protect them from the Indians, a race with whom the traders had lived for years in relative harmony. As the years passed, the traders' correspondence was filled with comments on the disastrous effect of the military on Green Bay. John Lawe once commented:

. . . There has been a great number of U.S. troops garrisoned or that [are] Stationed at Green Bay but what good does that do me it is only to assist in ruining of me & the Pilfering or general Stealing, Killing of Cat-

in the Wilderness, who first claimed that the Green Bay traders were used by the American Fur Company as a block to other fur trading interests. Laverder, however, tended to believe that the traders were indolent and lacked business skill. See Laverder, *The Fists in the Wilderness*, 345-346.

⁶³ Robert Stuart to Ramsay Crooks, November, 1823, AFC Papers, III: 33; Robert Stuart to John Lawe, September 10, 1826, AFC Papers, III: 356.

⁶⁴ Ramsay Crooks to Robert Stuart, January 4, 1822, AFC Papers, II: page number illegible.

⁶⁵ Smith, "Daniel Whitney," 283-304; Francis Paul Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet* (Lincoln, 1967), 161.

⁶⁶ This statement is at variance with most of the literature on the military and its effect on frontier communities. Prucha claimed that the military was an economic stimulus to Green Bay. Although this statement is true, it needs careful distinctions. Government contracts benefited men, such as Daniel Whitney, not the fur traders. My argument is impressionistic, derived from reading countless letters of the traders. Additional research, however, on the disposition of government contracts would substantiate these generalizations. In 1830, for example, only Daniel Whitney and John P. Arndt received government contracts for supplying Fort Howard. See *Letter from the Secretary of War Transmitting Statements of the Contracts Made by the War Department during the Year 1830* (21 Congress, 2 session, House Executive Document no. 73, serial 208, Washington, 1831). Also see Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet*, 161.

⁶⁷ John Lawe to Jacob Franks, September 5, 1823, *WHC*, XX: 308-310; John Lawe to Mrs. Hamilton, September 12, 1824, *WHC*, XX: 351-353; Ramsay Crooks to the Secretary of War, May 7, 1835, in Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. XII: *The Territory of Michigan* (Washington, 1934-), 909.

tle and committing every kind of depredation that they can. . . . They are a nuisance to Society and in place of being put there for the protection of the place they are the destruction of it.⁶⁸

THE FINAL BLOW to the Green Bay traders occurred in 1834 when John Astor sold his interest in the American Fur Company and it was reorganized under the direction of Ramsay Crooks. Crooks decided to close all affairs in Green Bay and required a final accounting. Since the 1820's, the traders had steadily lost money. To satisfy their debts, they mortgaged their land claims and deeds to the American Fur Company.⁶⁹ What, on the surface, seemed an equitable settlement, left the traders with little capital or a marketable commodity—land—in the 1830's as the fur trade died out.

As the American Fur Company acquired title to the traders' land in Green Bay, the land's value suddenly skyrocketed because thousands of farmers and town dwellers arrived to settle along the western shore of Lake Michigan. Astor, Stuart, and Crooks then plotted a town at Green Bay, appropriately named Astor. The land rose in value while the traders remained impoverished.⁷⁰ A contemporary resident described the conditions leading to the plotting of Astor:

. . . The land was originally owned by John Lawe and the Grignon family. Together with other real estate it was taken in payment of balance due the old Green Bay Company to the former Company; the debt having accrued by loss in the Indian trade—for in this business, it generally happened that the small traders who purchased their goods at higher prices, after years of toil and privation spent in the trade, came out with nothing leaving to the great monopoly the lion's share of the profits. The consideration received by the former owners, was trifling compared with the present value of the property.⁷¹

The traders did not suddenly leave Green Bay; many lived on there until the 1850's. John Lawe still received a few goods from the American Fur Company; others dabbled in land speculation and local politics. These activities, however, can not conceal the fact that few traders achieved material success and that Green Bay's history was now dominated by the restless American frontiersmen.⁷²

Thus, the frontier period in Green Bay from 1815 to approximately 1834 was transitional and with change came confusion, contradiction, and exploitation. The government experimented with suitable policies for military defense, the Indians, and the fur trade. Its initial efforts were often inconsistent, as indicated by the government's enforcement of the law of 1816 and the establishment of both Indian agencies and government factories. To the American Fur Company this period was both the heyday and the decline of the fur trade in the Old Northwest. Time was short, investment was great; the need for the close scrutiny of trade and traders was obvious. At first, the fur trader willingly attached himself to the American Fur Company as a refuge from what seemed the cruel and oppressive policies of the American government. Later, he discovered that his life with the Company was no better. Uninitiated in the methods of corporate enterprise, that is, defined trading territories, and his role as a block to other fur trading companies, he gradually compiled unpayable debts to the American Fur Company. As the frontier scene changed from fur trade to settlement, the fur trader had neither the skills nor the capital to enter fully into this new economic life. The American Fur Company refused to allow retail trade with the settlers and requisitioned his only other asset—land. As with the land and the Indians, the fur trader was exploited, sometimes intentionally, other times quite unconsciously, by a society in the process of change.

⁶⁸ John Lawe to Mrs. Hamilton, September 12, 1824, *WHC*, XX: 351-353. There are many letters of the traders expressing their opposition to the military. See, for example, John Lawe to Jacob Franks, September 5, 1823, *WHC*, XX: 310; John Lawe to (unknown), March 9, 1820, Lawe Papers, III; Jacques Porlier to Governor Cass, June 8, 1822, in Carter, ed., *The Territory of Michigan*, XI: 243.

⁶⁹ Smith, *James Doty*, 158-159. The transfer of deeds can be followed in the Lawe Papers, X-XX.

⁷⁰ Smith, *James Doty*, 158-173, describes in detail the establishment of Astor.

⁷¹ Baird, "Recollections of the Early History," *WHC*, IV: 215.

⁷² Many traders went on to local politics and to open small businesses, but the later history of Green Bay made it evident that the fur traders had relinquished community leadership to men such as James Doty and Daniel Whitney. As late as 1840, for example, John Lawe owed \$22,500 to the American Fur Company. Contract between Samuel Abbot and John Lawe, August 28, 1840, Lawe Papers, XXII.