



Rupert's March of Time

By MAUD WATT

Today's Sanctuary was
the First Fort on the Bay



"Upon a simmer Sunday morn,
 When nature's face is fair,
 I walked forth to view the corn
 And snuff the caller air.
 The Rising Sun ower Galston muirs
 Wi glorious light was glinting;
 The hares were hirplin down the furs
 The lavrocks, they were chantin'
 Fu sweet that day."

THERE is no corn at Rupert's House, though plenty caller air, yet somehow Burns's poem describes well a fall day at the old post, one of those Indian summer days, geese flying overhead, Indian children honking and in the evening the sun going down over Poplar Point.

Usually I had a fishing camp near the wreck of the old *Mink*, and if we did not stay overnight, would walk down, often with old Mrs. Morrison, overhaul the nets, clean and salt the fish, picnic by the fire and listen to Mrs. Morrison's tales of long ago. Sometimes I would go alone and dream of early days in the Company's history.

Time has dealt gently with Rupert's House. The ancient river, Poplar Point, salt water marshes and dark pine forests have changed not at all since Henry Hudson wintered in the Bay three hundred years ago. For a thousand years, more or less, the Indians, down on the coast for the goose hunt, must have camped on the present post site, and at night camp fires would gleam and flicker just as they do today. Indian braves would paddle home their birch-bark canoes laden with geese; the squaws, dressed in deerskin robes, would be, like Martha of old, "cumbered with many things." Later in the evening the Indian lads and lasses would rendezvous on Lover's Lane, the path along Boat Creek beaten hard by generations of moccasined feet. Light springing feet of youths and maidens would make little impression on the tough bushes of Indian Tea. The same path is used by squaws carrying heavy

loads of wood on their backs and the same feet that tripped along so lightly made many a weary trip as the years rolled on.

Imagine the excitement when news came that white men with a great ship were wintering in the Bay. How many Indians visited Henry Hudson and his crew that long winter? The squaws, young and old, would peer at the white men from behind bushes, and the tales would travel far, the moccasin wireless working overtime.

Picture the greatest event of all, the arrival of the *Nonsuch*. The ship anchors off the mouth of Rupert River. Captain Gillam and Groseilliers row ashore, perhaps sounding the crooked channel as they come. One of the white men speaks Indian. Then follow days of excitement; the ship enters the river, drops anchor opposite the present post; buildings are erected, goods unloaded, a safe place is found to winter the ship. A trading post is established, the first in the Bay. Radisson will not arrive for many a day, but Mr. "Gooseberry" is equal to all emergencies. What tales he tells the listening Indians; some of the cargo is opened; guns, axes, knives, powder, shot, flints, needles and beads are shown. Now the moccasin wireless really goes into action. A new era dawns.

Two years pass. Three vessels arrive in the Bay—*Wavero*, *Shaftesbury Pink* and *Prince Rupert*. Our old friend Gillam commands the *Prince Rupert*. Gillam is first of a long line of splendid seamen who have commanded the Company's ships for two hundred and sixty-eight years. With Gillam comes the first Governor, Charles Bayly, Mr. "Gooseberry," and Radisson, Pierre Esprit Radisson. I always picture Bayly as a hard-drinking, pig-headed individual, jealous of his authority and difficult, but undoubtedly courageous in a bull-headed way. I can see Bayly seated by a roaring fire in the new log fort with his companions, Gorst the secretary and Romulus the surgeon, and cursing the country. Groseilliers must have been quite different. He was as courageous as Bayly, but cautious and



Above left: The old "Mink" in Rupert's River before canvas canoes had taken the place of birch-bark.

Lower left: High and dry among bushes lies the wrecked barquentine "Mink."

Centre: Rupert's House from the air.

Below: Natives no longer bring brigades from interior posts, and the only Indians now camping at Rupert's are families of Beaver Sanctuary game wardens.



tactful, a born Indian trader. So far as we know there was little or no friction between him and Bayly during the long winter. One can imagine Groseilliers returning from a trip, his Indian bush-runners loaded with furs, and Governor Bayly with his fiery red face coming out to welcome him, honestly glad to see old "Gooseberry" back again.

Another two years roll by and bring a different scene. A crowd of Indians on the beach watches a small canoe coming down from the portage. Manteos! Manteos! Strangers these to James Bay. The canoe nears the landing, the crowd falls silent; the canoe runs up on the beach, and out steps "a little ould man," the Jesuit Albanel. Poor old man, a chilly welcome awaits him at the fort after his long hard trip from Quebec. Like Brébeuf and his comrades, he is prepared to face torture and death, but this chilly welcome daunts him just a little.

Time brings yet another picture to this scene: a small company of men dressed in capots with long-barrelled guns on their shoulders, plunging through the swamps of Cabbage Willows, hauling their canoes along, now up to the waist, now up to the neck in mire and water. Who can this be but young Pierre LeMoyne d'Iberville and his party of bush-rangers on his way to attack Rupert's House. They have already captured Moose Factory. The nominal leader of this party is the old Chevalier de Troyes, who follows in a sailing sloop too slow for the fiery soul of young Pierre, just turned twenty-three. Here my fancy takes me to Longueuil on the St. Lawrence, to the small seignory of Charles LeMoyne and his wife Catherine Primot, of Rouen, and their ten sons. It takes no effort of imagination to picture the family of wild young rascals playing with the Indians, hunting, shooting. Ah Catherine, make the most of your sons the few short years you have them, for soon they will wander, and wander far, most of them never to return. Instead of sleeping peacefully on the green banks of the St. Lawrence, their bones lie scattered from far off Hudson Bay to Havana. What countries they viewed and what deeds they did! Pierre,

the greatest of them all. Jean Baptiste, founder of New Orleans and governor of Louisiana. Antoine, governor of French Guiana. Charles, first Baron de Longueuil. I picture Catherine, a stout matronly figure, her hair turned grey, busy as all early Canadian housewives had to be—spinning, probably, and thinking. Thinking of all the bright young faces that used to throng the home; thinking, perhaps, of poor young Louis, killed in the Battle of the Bay, young Louis, just turned eighteen.

Back to Rupert's House again, now named Fort St. Jacques. Bayly and his English serving men have returned to England. From the Indian point of view, Fort St. Jacques is a brighter place than the English Rupert's House. The fort is filled with gay young French-Canadians in red tuques, coloured sashes, beaded leggings, and they all talk Cree. In this brief interlude of French dominion, what gay times, what dancing, what love making. For the Indian girls, time passes all too quickly, but perhaps the young braves and old Papa Indian are glad to see the fleur-de-lis hauled down and the red ensign of old England again flutter from the flagstaff.

Here the procession slows up and fancy grows dim. Who took over Rupert's House from its French masters? The archives are far off, and I am still at Rupert's House seated near the wreck of the old *Mink*. Fancy cannot fill the gap until the nineteenth century brings the Christies, Gladmans, Cloustons, Vincents, Cotters, and the McTavishes, George and Donald.

The Christies lost a small son, buried in the old graveyard early in the century. Old Chief Factor Gladman died at Eastmain in 1820, the year the sloop *Diligent* wintered there. His great-grandchildren are still going strong in the Bay. Of the Cloustons I remember a letter to Sir George Simpson. Sir George wanted to know what maintenance of wives and dependents cost the Company. Mr. Clouston replied in a beautiful copperplate:

"On leaving Rupert's House to take charge of Nitchequan four years ago Mr. Biauly, then in charge,



very handsomely presented my wife with a four-pound loaf, since then they have depended on their fish nets and snares, and have cost the Company nothing."

Chief Factor Vincent built fine houses at Albany and Rupert's. The Vincents inter-married with the Gladmans. One son, Archdeacon Vincent, figured in the early Church of England mission in the Bay.

Chief Factor Cotter's memory is kept alive by his two sons, H. M. S. Cotter, retired in British Columbia, and George Sackville Cotter, of Moosonee.

The first McTavish was George, afterwards an inspecting Chief Factor, chiefly remembered because his boat upset entering the Eastmain river and several men were drowned, including Thomas Chilton the blacksmith. The second McTavish was Donald, and tradition still keeps his memory green. He was succeeded by Alan Nicolson, last of the old-timers, who maintained the traditions of the post for another nineteen years.

We came in 1920 from Fort Chimo, and found Rupert's House a queer, old-fashioned place. English was spoken with a Scottish accent. The Indians had inter-married with Scots for nearly two hundred years, and may well be what Skipper Neilson calls them, improved Scotsmen. Time seems to have stood still at Rupert's House, and post life in the century had varied little. Besides the clerks, there was a large staff of servants, carpenters, blacksmith, cooper, canoe builders, cattle keepers, labourers. There were sixteen head of cattle and two horses. All the Indians were employed in summer, the able bodied men freighting and the old men and boys haymaking. The post had two hayboats. Hay was cut in the saltwater marsh across the river, boated home, and made in two fields, haymakers marching from one field to the other with their pitchforks on their shoulders.

Rupert's House in those days supplied four inland posts—Nemaska, Neoskweskau, Mistassini and Woswonaby. Special cases were made by the carpenters, and packing commenced early in April. Inland packing was then almost an art. Medicines and glass were

wrapped in handkerchiefs. The tiniest cranny would hold a cake of toilet soap.

Freighting began as soon as the Indians arrived early in June. Then the post would come briskly to life. Freight brigades would come and go, the store would be crowded with Indians, men, women, and children. The canoe shed, blacksmith's and carpenter's shops worked overtime. Indian women and girls flitted about in bright or sombre coloured shawls carrying home their purchases in sacks and handkerchiefs. Trading in the store went on all day with fun and laughter. The provision store was a separate building run by the steward. Clerks were too busy to pack heavy groceries like flour and pork. They wrote the order for the provision store to fill.

The great events of the summer would be the arrivals of the supply steamer, the *Ineneu*, and the inland post brigades. The steamer was usually sighted by someone on the coast. Then the shout would go up, "Cheman, Cheman, Papio Cheman!" The flag would be run up, and everyone hurried to the river bank until the steamer moored at the wharf. Willing workers unloaded and supplies came ashore as quickly as hoisted out of the hold. After the steamer left, the next great excitement would be opening the new supplies. New patterns in prints, muslins, sweaters, blouses and handkerchiefs.

With the coming of the inland brigades, the rush season began in earnest. The Mistassini brigade and the Woswonaby brigade had special camping places. Feasting and dancing were the order of the day. Although local people were supposed to stay out while the brigades were at the post, the store would be very



Left: Leaving Rupert's House the Mistassini brigade is heavy laden with a year's supplies.

Centre: With a line to men on land, Indians pole an HBC canoe up rapids, while supplies are portaged safely along the shore.

Above: On their way from Rupert's House Sanctuary to Agamiski Island these beavers amuse all comers, and Indian children spend hours watching them.

crowded. In four or five days the brigades were ready to leave. Then the beach came alive again. What loads they stowed in those thirty-foot canoes. Old Solomon Voyager, chief of the Mistassini brigade, prided himself on the biggest loads of all. How the Mistassini canoes ever made the long three-hundred-mile trip loaded as they were, I never could understand. Leave-taking took a long time. The voyagers commenced with the manager, his wife and staff, and then shook hands with everyone else, but at last they got off.

Time would fail to tell all the other activities of the summer—the arrival and departure of the inland Indians, fine old fellows most of them: Big Philip, John Cannishish, and Sam Gull, and their wives were as good as themselves. Then the weddings, and the wedding cakes. I wonder how many wedding cakes I made in seventeen years. The weddings were amusing. The bridegroom would be well dressed and modern looking in a blue serge suit and, what they call in the Bay, English boots. The bride donned a fancy muslin dress, ornamented with bows of ribbon. The amusing part was the hat. The same hat did duty at every wedding, and most of the brides seemed to have trouble keeping it balanced on their heads. After the ceremony the pair strolled around the post hand in hand, and shook hands with everyone. In the evening the fiddles and drums would play dance music all night and the dance hall was crowded with Indians of all ages, from the baby in arms to the oldest inhabitant.

The summer always vanished like a dream, and the fall brought the goose hunt. When the waxies commenced to fly overhead, work practically came to a standstill. The Indians had all departed, and the post staff had a week or ten days of hunting. I don't think the "Happy Hunting Ground" can be much of a place unless there is a goose hunt to look forward to.

New Year was the busiest time. Cakes and buns would be baked ahead by the barrelful, and early on New Year's Day huge kettles of coffee and tea were on the stove. Commencing with the post servants, everyone visits the post house today to wish us a happy New Year and to be regaled, to use the old-fashioned term, with coffee, tea and cakes. No one eats very much, but they all bring a handkerchief to take some home. Women are busy washing dishes and serving tea all day. Early New Year's morning, perhaps as early as three o'clock, and in possibly twenty below zero, a band of Indians armed with guns goes the rounds, accompanied by fiddle and drum, wishing everyone a happy New Year. They commence with the manager's house. First the fiddle and drum play the "White Cockade," then Andrew Moar, who has always been spokesman in our time, shouts, "Mr. and Mrs. Watt, we wish you a happy New Year;" then bang, bang go the guns. No matter how cold, fiddle and drum go the rounds until everyone is visited.

After nearly a century, change came quick and fast. For economic reasons the inland posts were detached from the parent post and their supplies freighted in by easier and cheaper methods. Rupert's House had now to stand on its own feet, and its resources were small. Even before our time the cariboo had disappeared; moose were never plentiful in this part of the country, and beaver were disappearing fast. What a lot I have heard about beaver, mostly from the women lamenting the good old days when beaver were plentiful. Roast beef was never so important to the English as beaver meat to the Indian. Sometimes rabbits, partridge, and fish would be plentiful, but still the old

women would lament. One old woman said, "My, my stomach does get ticklish for a bit of beaver meat!"

Beaver are and always have been the Indian's capital. When foxes, marten and other migratory animals were plentiful, the Indian allowed his capital to accumulate. When migratory fur-bearing animals were scarce, he killed sufficient beaver for his needs, but left his capital stock intact. Indians formerly maintained a right to their hunting lands, and actually farmed their beaver. While the Company was the great power in the Indian country, those rights were maintained as far as possible. The Indian rights to his hunting lands were never very secure, and in the old days accounted for tribal wars. In the last two decades hunting ground rights seem to have lapsed entirely, and it is hard to blame the Indian for the extermination of the beaver. Why should he protect beaver, with no legal title to his lands, more especially when he knows the beaver he protects may be killed off by his next door neighbour? I remember an Indian saving a few beaver lodges, and his brother killing them off, and no one could do anything about it.

The day came when traders and Indians awoke to the fact that in the rich James Bay country, beaver had almost vanished. Had the Company been an ordinary business concern, the fiddles and drums would have played the old tune "Bundle and Go." The post would close and my story end here. But in the dark days of the depression Company men took stock of their resources, considered the question from all angles and declared a "new deal." This was a long term of beaver conservation on entirely new lines, with Indians trained to be beaver guardians.

The scene is changed again. The canoe brigades, the haymaking, the "old hat" weddings are things of the past, but at the ancient post things go on much as usual, but with new hopes and new interests. Today, a poster in the store shows progress in conservation, and the results of the year's beaver survey are of as much interest to the Indian as stock market reports to many people outside. The "Beaver Feast" is the great event of the year. The district manager's speech is read and the year's progress reported. The fiddles and drums beat and throb merrily as they did in days of old, and until dawn ushers in another day the dancing and fun is fast and furious.

Today Charlton Island is also a beaver reserve, and Agamiski Island has been partly restocked from the Rupert's House beaver reserve. The beaver for re-stocking purposes are not trapped, but taken from the lodges alive early in April, and are kept at the post until it is possible to transport them in June. The post has a specially built beaver house with running water, but when the first live beaver were brought in they had to be kept in an old building fitted with wooden tanks. They made a lot of trouble; they chewed the tanks; they excavated the floor; they did everything but escape. The Indians never tired of watching them. The beaver were very fond of stale bread, and sat up like monkeys eating it. On Sundays all the women, young and old, used to turn out to see them fed.

Several young beaver were born in captivity, and they are very funny and playful, diving and swimming about just like the big ones. En route to Agamiski the beaver were stored over night in the Moosonee warehouse. One escaped and started to chew the pillars which support the roof. Luckily it must have been almost morning when he escaped, for had he escaped earlier the roof would have been down before morning.