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The Anishinabeg Point of View: The History of the Great Lakes Region to 1800 in Nineteenth-Century Mississauga, Odawa, and Ojibwa Historiography

D. PETER MacLEOD

A PROMINENT FEATURE of the history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America was the presence of several expanding powers that displaced the original inhabitants in region after region and established settlement colonies. Among the best known of these aggressive peoples are the Dutch, English, and French, who landed on the Atlantic littoral and pressed inland. Less familiar are Amerindian groups like the Algonquian bands of the Great Lakes region that referred to themselves as Anishinabeg but were known to whites as the Mississauga, Odawa, and Ojibwa.¹ The Anishinabeg flourished in the geopolitical and economic environment of postcontact North America, and greatly extended the territory under their direct control and economic influence.² No less than Europeans, these Amerindians had

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1 Peter S. Schmalz, 'The Role of the Ojibwa in the Conquest of Southern Ontario, 1650-1701,' *Ontario History* 76, 4 (Dec. 1984): 345; Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquaonaby) and the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987), 18; Smith, 'Who Are the Mississauga?' *Ontario History* 67, 4 (Dec. 1975): 211-12.

2 Charles A. Bishop, *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1974), 3-11, 308-35; Peter D. Elias, *The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: Lessons for Survival* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1988), 6; Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and Their Neighbours: A Study in Ethnohistory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1970), 13; Tim Holzkamm, 'Eastern Dakota Population Movements and the European

a keen historical sense, and created and preserved a record of the events of this period. This record, contained in their oral traditions, forms an independent history of the Great Lakes area that both complements and balances history based on contemporary documents, and that cannot be ignored by anyone wanting to produce a comprehensive account of the North American past.

The historiography of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America is predominantly Eurocentric. This is perhaps inevitable, given that so much research is based on written records. Notwithstanding the growing propensity of historians to accept and exploit new sources of data, nothing can compete with the power of the written word to convey large quantities of detailed information. In spite of the best efforts of historians, the greater part of the historiography of the native peoples of North America has remained a chronicle of their interaction with Europeans.

There are, however, both alternative sources and alternative histories. The events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not pass unremembered by tribal elders, who produced their own version of the history of the Great Lakes region. Transmitted orally for generations, this history was finally preserved in print in the nineteenth century.³ Although these books enjoyed considerable popular success, they were largely ignored or rejected by mainstream historians during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, and

Fur Trade: One More Time,' *Plains Anthropologist* 28, 101 (Aug. 1983): 225-33.

For a similar assessment of the Cree see Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur*

Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1974), 1-26.

3 Francis Assikinack, 'Legends and Traditions of the Odawah Indians,' *Canadian Journal of Industry, Science, and Art* 3, 14 (March 1858): 115-25; Assikinack, 'Social and Warlike Customs of the Odawah Indians,' *ibid.*, 3, 16 (July 1858): 297-309; Andrew J. Blackbird, (Mackawdebenessy), *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan: A Grammar of Their Language, and Personal and Family History of the Author* (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Ypsilantian Job Printing House 1887); George Copway (Kahgegahbowh), *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (London: Charles Gilpin 1850; reprinted Toronto: Coles Publishing Company 1972); Peter Jones, (Kahkewaquaonaby), *History of the Ojibway Indians: With Especial Reference to Their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A.W. Bennett 1861); reprinted Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries 1970); William Whipple Warren, *History of the Ojibways, Based upon Traditions and Oral Statements* (Minnesota Historical Society, 1885; reprinted as *History of the Ojibway People*, St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press 1984)

have only in recent years begun to be used extensively by historians.⁴

These narratives first appeared in print during one of the darkest periods of Anishinabeg history. By the mid-nineteenth century, much of the territory of the Anishinabeg had been occupied by Euramericans settlers, and many bands found themselves in danger of disintegration.⁵ Even their past was believed to be on the verge of disappearing forever: 'a change is so rapidly taking place, caused by a close contact with the white race, that ten years hence it will be too late to save the traditions of their forefathers from total oblivion. And even now, it is with great difficulty that genuine information can be obtained of them. Their aged men are fast falling into their graves, and they carry with them the records of the past history of their people.'⁶

Were this to happen, only Euramerican versions of the past would remain, a prospect that was unsatisfactory to at least one Odawa, who asserted that: 'I have seen a number of writings by different men who attempted to give an account of the [Anishinabeg] Indians ... But I see no very correct account of the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes of Indians, according to our knowledge of ourselves, past and present.'⁷ With acculturation and the threat of total assimilation, however, came literacy, which became one of the tools employed by individuals who

4 See, for example, W.J. Eccles, 'Sovereignty Association, 1500-1783,' *Canadian Historical Review* 65, 4 (Dec. 1984): 486; Holzkamm, 'Eastern Dakota Population Movements,' 226; Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (New York: W.W. Norton 1984), 21-2; Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991), passim; Schmalz, 'Role of the Ojibwa,' 327-8; Donald B. Smith, 'The Life of George Copway or Kah-gah-gah-bowh (1818-1869) - and a Review of His Writings,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 23, 3 (fall 1988): 5, 30 n3, 38 n128). The oral history of the James Bay Cree has been studied by Toby Morantz in 'Oral and Recorded History in James Bay,' in William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Fifteenth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University 1984), 171-92. For the place of Amerindians in Canadian historiography see Bruce G. Trigger, 'The Historians' Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present,' *Canadian Historical Review* 67, 3 (Sept. 1986): 315-42. In spite of recent developments, the possibility that Amerindians might have their own historical priorities is not yet a prominent feature of the historiography of North America.

5 Bishop, *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade*, 11-14; Smith, *Sacred Feathers*, 17-33, passim.; Schmalz, *Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 85-147

6 Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 25

7 Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 7

sought to preserve the Anishinabeg heritage by recording their historical narratives. Among these men were Francis Assikinack, Andrew J. Blackbird, George Copway, Peter Jones, and William W. Warren.

Francis Assikinack, an Ojibwa of Manitoulin Island, was born in 1824. When he enrolled at Upper Canada College at the age of sixteen, he spoke no English, but soon learned not only that language but Greek as well. Although 'retiring and generally reticent' at the college, he displayed deep pride in his heritage and was willing to 'relate to his friends the history of his people.' After graduation, he worked for the Indian Department as an interpreter, clerk, and teacher.⁸

Andrew J. Blackbird, or Mackawdebnessy, the son of a chief of the Odawa of Michilimackinac, was born around 1810 and 'brought up in a pure Indian style.'⁹ But in 1845, after spending several years working as a blacksmith, he was persuaded by a Protestant missionary to attend school in Ohio. Blackbird spent most of his life working for the American government, first as an interpreter for the Mackinac Indian Agency, then as postmaster of Little Traverse, Michigan.¹⁰

George Copway, or Kahgegahbowh, was born in 1818 among the Mississauga of Upper Canada. He followed a traditional lifestyle until his family converted to Christianity and he began to attend a Methodist school. Copway himself embarked on a career as a missionary, but left the church after a financial scandal and became a popular lecturer and best-selling author.¹¹

Peter Jones, or Kahkewaquaonaby, the son of Mississauga and Welsh parents, was born in 1802 and raised by his mother among Amerindians until his father sent him to school, where he first learned English. Jones considered a career as a clerk in the fur trade, but ultimately became both a leading Methodist minister and a Missis-

8 James C. Hamilton, *Osgoode Hall: Reminiscences of the Bench and Bar* (Toronto: Carswell 1904), 168-9; Douglas Leighton, 'Francis Assikinack,' in Frances G. Halpenny, ed., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. ix: 1861 to 1870 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1976), 10-11; Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 237

9 Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 24

10 Ibid., i; Bernd Peyer, *The Elders Wrote: An Anthology of Early Prose by North American Indians, 1768-1931* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag 1982), 126

11 Peyer, *The Elders Wrote*, 75; Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 152, 156; Smith, 'Life of George Copway,' 5-38; Donald B. Smith, 'Kahgegahbowh,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ix, 419-21; Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1984), 59-66

sauga chief, who forcefully advocated the adoption of Christianity and agriculture in response to the near-disintegration of the Mississauga in the nineteenth century.¹²

William Whipple Warren was born at La Pointe in 1825. The son of an American trader and a woman of mixed French-Ojibwa descent, Warren associated closely with his Amerindian relatives throughout his life. He was employed by the American government as an interpreter until 1850, when he was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives.¹³

Given that it would have been impossible for an unacculturated Amerindian to write a book in English and find a publisher, it is not surprising that these writers were not conventional Anishinabeg. William Warren was a Euramerican with close family ties to the Ojibwa. The others lived as Amerindians as children, but later in life established and maintained close contacts with white society. All four received a formal education and worked for or were associated with Euramerican institutions. Blackbird, Copway, and Jones were married to Euramericans.

Yet if not typical Anishinabeg, these authors were representative of those individuals who were able to function in both white and Amerindian society, and could attempt to bridge the gap between two very different cultures.¹⁴ As an Ojibwa elder told Warren in 1847: 'My Grandson ... You know how to write like the whites. You understand what we tell you. ... And we will tell you what we know of former times.'¹⁵

All of these authors, in fact, drew upon their Amerindian background and connections to obtain information regarding Anishinabeg history. Assikinack acquired his material 'entirely from what I have learned casually from the Indians themselves in my younger days.'¹⁶

12 Peyer, *The Elders Wrote*, 104; Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 151-2;

Smith, *Sacred Feathers*; Smith, 'Peter Jones,' in Frances G. Halpenny, ed., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. VIII, 1851 to 1860 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1985), 439-43; Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa*, 66-74

13 W. Roger Buffalohead, introduction to Warren, *History of the Ojibwa*, ix-xvii; J. Fletcher Williams, 'Memoir of William W. Warren,' *ibid.*, 9-20; Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa*, 56-9

14 Opportunities in white society for acculturated Anishinabeg were, however, quite limited. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 125-6, 151-7, 165

15 William W. Warren to Jonathan E. Fletcher, 1 May 1850, in 'General Correspondance and Related Matters, Henry R. Schoolcraft Papers,' cited in Buffalohead, introduction to Warren, *History of the Ojibwa*, xi

16 Assikinack, 'Legends and Traditions of the Odahwah,' 117

Blackbird wrote his history according to 'our traditions.'¹⁷ The others were more ambitious, and sought out the elders who preserved the traditional narratives of Anishinabeg. Prior to writing his history, Peter Jones consulted 'for several years past ... the aged sachems of the Ojibwa.'¹⁸ Copway questioned 'the chiefs [who] are the repositories of the history of their ancestors.'¹⁹ When asked how he became so well informed regarding Ojibwa history, Warren replied that he obtained his information 'from the old men of the tribe, and that he would go considerable distances sometimes to see them - that they always liked to talk with him about those matters, and that he would make notes of the principal points.'²⁰

Although based upon Amerindian narratives, their work was directed at Euramerican readers and shows evidence of their formal education and familiarity with Euramerican authors. Blackbird begins his history by denouncing the writer, probably Francis Parkman, of a history of Pontiac's War.²¹ Copway cites European authors and travelers for periods not covered by traditional sources.²² Assikinack and Jones agree with white authors who suggested that Amerindians were ultimately descended from Asians who came to North America from beyond the Bering strait.²³ Yet these authors carefully distinguish between information obtained from Euramerican printed sources and Anishinabeg narratives, and use the traditional material to produce coherent histories.

Of these histories, the most comprehensive is Warren's *History of the Ojibwas* which follows the fortunes of the Anishinabeg from their migration to the north shore of Lake Huron to the mid nineteenth century. In the works of the other four authors, historical chapters are interspersed with autobiography and descriptions of Amerindian

17 Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 6

18 Jones, *History of the Ojibwa*, 31

19 Copway continued: 'With these traditions there are rules to follow by which to determine whether they are true or false. By these rules I have been governed in my researches. The first is to inquire particularly into the leading points of every tradition narrated. The second is to notice whether the traditions are approved by the oldest chiefs and wise men. Such are most likely to be true, and if places or persons are mentioned, additional clue is given to their origin and proof obtained of their truth or falsity.' Copway, *Traditional History*, 19

20 Williams, 'Memoir of William W. Warren,' 15

21 Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 7-8

22 Copway, *Traditional History*, 205-52

23 Assikinack, 'Legends and Traditions of the Odahwah,' 116-17; Jones, *History of the Ojibwa*, 37-8

life and customs. Less sweeping than Warren, Assikinack, Blackbird, Copway, and Jones compensate by filling in gaps and by generally confirming the accuracy of his presentation of Anishinabeg oral tradition whenever comparison is possible.

Although Copway and Warren follow continued Anishinabeg warfare against the Dakota southwest of Lake Superior into the nineteenth century, the narratives used by these authors have little to say about one of the most critical periods of Anishinabeg history – the invasion of their homeland by Europeans. Indeed, the traditional history presented by these authors on the whole ends with the eighteenth century, since it is then that one enters the 'period in the history of the Ojibways, which is within the remembrance of aged chiefs,' and eyewitness accounts together with the personal knowledge of the author, rather than traditional lore, became the primary sources for Anishinabeg historians.²⁴

As far as the Anishinabeg were concerned, the history of the Great Lakes region prior to 1800 is the history of their wars and migrations, which were, for the most part, one and the same. Of all the incidents of this period, these were considered by the Anishinabeg to merit inclusion in their narratives.

Three great events dominate the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Anishinabeg historiography: their wars with the Mascouten and Winnebago,²⁵ with the Iroquois in southern Ontario,²⁶ and with the Dakota and Muskawiwuk (Fox),²⁷ which led, respectively, to Anishinabeg expansion into the Michigan peninsula, southern Ontario, and the area south and west of Lake Superior. The Mascouten war is described in fairly general terms, but the battles for southern Ontario are depicted minutely, and the southwestward advance of the Anishinabeg of Lake Superior is traced river by river and lake by lake from Sault Ste Marie to the headwaters of the Mississippi.

Other matters appear in the narratives, but receive much less attention. Of these, the most important are Anishinabeg expansion

northwest of Lake Superior and alliance with the Cree and Assiniboine,²⁸ contact and trade with the French,²⁹ Anishinabeg participation in the Seven Years' War³⁰ and Pontiac's War,³¹ the shifting of their alliance from the French to the British empire,³² the epidemics of the seventeenth century,³³ and the smallpox epidemic of 1757.³⁴

If these events are downplayed, others are barely mentioned or are ignored completely. The Anishinabeg enjoyed a longstanding alliance and commercial relationship with the Wendat (Huron) and Khionontateronon (Petun) prior to 1649. Commercial friction between the Anishinabeg and the Wendat, and the destruction of the Wendat confederacy by the Iroquois are mentioned in a confused chapter by Copway.³⁵ The Khionontateronon do not appear at all. The Anishinabeg relationship with the Dakota is depicted as exclusively adversarial. Only a reference to Anishinabeg living among, and intermarrying with, the Dakota hints at the intervals of peace when the Anishinabeg acted as middlemen between the Dakota and the French.³⁶ The role of the Anishinabeg as traders is, in fact, passed over almost completely.

Continuous expansion brought the Anishinabeg into conflict with other groups, which produced a history characterized by a strongly military orientation. Peaceful pursuits receive a few paragraphs or, at best, a page or two, but chapter after chapter is devoted to battles with the Dakota, Iroquois, Mascouten, and Muskawiwuk – or rather to victories over these nations. The Anishinabeg records admit to temporary, swiftly avenged setbacks, but are singularly silent when it comes to defeats.³⁷ Anishinabeg elders, like many recorders of events,

²⁸ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 83–6, 138–40, 179, 189

²⁹ Assikinack, 'Social and Warlike Customs of the Odahwah,' 307; Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 92–3; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 117, 122, 126, 130–5

³⁰ Assikinack, 'Legends and Traditions of the Odahwah,' 118; Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 9–10; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 195, 220

³¹ Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 7–9; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 199–204

³² Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 7–8; Jones, *History of the Ojibway*, 129; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 218–20

³³ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 108–12

³⁴ Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 9–10

³⁵ Copway, *Traditional History*, 68–76

³⁶ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 158

³⁷ This reticence was not unique to the Anishinabeg. 'The Dakotas,' wrote an American missionary in the nineteenth century, 'did not like to say much

²⁴ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 298

²⁵ Assikinack, 'Legends and Traditions of the Odahwah,' 115; Assikinack, 'Social and Warlike Customs of the Odahwah,' 307–8; Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 85–95

²⁶ Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa*, 81–2; Assikinack, 'Social and Warlike Customs of the Odahwah,' 308–9; Copway, *Traditional History*, 68–94; Jones, *History of the Ojibway*, 111–14; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 82–3, 124, 146–8; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, passim; Copway, *Traditional History*, 55–67;

²⁷ Jones, *History of the Ojibway*, 129

found war a more compelling subject than peace. Histories of war with the Mascouten and the Dakota were evidently considered more worthy of preservation and transmission to the younger generation than recollections of peaceful ties to the Wendat and Khionontateronon.

This focus on military affairs is, however, highly selective. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Anishinabeg were the leading power in the upper lakes area. As well as going to war on their own account, they fought consistently for over a century as allies of New France. Serving as French allies demanded a major effort on the part of the Anishinabeg, since it entailed the continuous presence of warriors in a theatre of war hundreds of kilometres from their homes for months at a time. But these campaigns do not command a prominent place in Anishinabeg historiography.

Copway and Jones do not mention a single intra-European war of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. All five authors, in fact, say nothing about the wars of the League of Augsburg, Spanish Succession, and Austrian Succession – conflicts in which Amerindians fighting alongside the French featured prominently – and devote scarcely more attention to the Seven Years' War. Assikinack cites the Anishinabeg role in the attack on pro-British Miami at Pickawillany in 1752.³⁸ When describing the smallpox epidemic of 1757 in great detail, Blackbird mentions the Seven Years' War in passing.³⁹ Warren gives only the name of the war chief who led a contingent to Quebec in 1759.⁴⁰

When the results of Anglo-French conflict directly affected the Anishinabeg, however, their recollections become much more informative. In 1763 the Anishinabeg went to war against the British, not as

before on behalf of the French, but to protect themselves 'against what they considered as the usurpation, by the British, of the hunting grounds which the Great Spirit had given their ancestors.'⁴¹ The relations in Blackbird and Warren of the careful planning and successful execution of the attack on Fort Michilimakinac are as complete as those of a campaign against the Dakota.⁴²

From the limited attention devoted to Anglo-French wars in Anishinabeg narratives, it would appear that the Anishinabeg did not consider their participation and the conflicts themselves to be of great significance, relative to their own preoccupations. French wars waged for French objectives held scant interest for the compilers of the Anishinabeg narratives, who refrained from passing on their memories of these wars to their descendants. Judging from their respective histories, intra-European wars in North America loomed much larger in the consciousness of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans than in the minds of contemporary Amerindians.

This indifference likely stemmed from the fact that the homelands of the Anishinabeg were not directly threatened by Anglo-French wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Located as they were in the Great Lakes region, most Anishinabeg were comfortably distant from the major theatres of intra-European conflict. Only the last campaigns of the Seven Years' War approached the easternmost fringes of their territory.⁴³ In contrast, Amerindians from outside the Great Lakes region who were directly affected by the Seven Years' War preserved some memories of the military events of that conflict in their own oral traditions. The Abenakis of Odanak (St François), for example, who were attacked by Anglo-American forces in 1759, passed on detailed descriptions of the destruction of that village to their descendants.⁴⁴

41 Ibid., 199

42 Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 7–9; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 199–204

43 Other Amerindian participants in European wars went to war to protect threatened national interests. During the Seven Years' War, for example, the nations of the Ohio valley were able to fulfil their own goals of defending their homelands from Anglo-American expansion by fighting alongside the French; later, these objectives were fulfilled when the British agreed not to claim lands beyond the Appalachians. See W.J. Eccles, *France in America* (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside 1990), 207–8; Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies & Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: W.W. Norton 1988), 369–414

44 Gordon M. Day, 'Rogers' Raid in Indian Tradition,' *Historical New Hampshire* 17 (June 1962): 3–17

about having been expelled from a portion of their land by ... the Ojibways, but they often spoke of having driven the Iowas from southern Minnesota.' Nonetheless, 'The [Dakota] warriors generally made it a point of honour to tell the exact truth [about a military venture] without concealment or exaggeration. If they had been against the Ojibways, we commonly soon heard the Ojibway version of the affair, which seldom differed materially from the account given by the Dakotas.' Samuel W. Pond, *The DAKOTA or SIOUX in Minnesota as They Were in 1834* (first published in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 12, 1908; reprinted St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press 1986) 174, 134

38 Assikinack, 'Legends and Traditions of the Odawah,' 118

39 Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 9–10. For the Anishinabeg of Michilimakinac, the most important event of the 1750s was not the war, but the smallpox epidemic that devastated their community.

40 Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 195, 220

Europeans are not ignored in Anishinabeg historiography, but theirs is very much a supporting role. Their most important function is that of commercial associates, who supply the weapons that greatly facilitate Anishinabeg expansion.⁴⁵ They are usually portrayed reacting to the initiatives of the Anishinabeg. It is the Anishinabeg who open up trading relations with the French by travelling to Canada, deal with them as equals or superiors, and take the leading role in time of war.⁴⁶

It is possible that the writers predetermined these results by the questions they asked and by their choice of informants. Given, however, that after making inquiries among tribal elders, all of these writers produced similar histories, it would seem that a consensus existed among the elders that war and migration were the important events of the Anishinabeg past.

Few of the occurrences related by these historians, drawn from Anishinabeg oral tradition, are greatly at variance with Western versions of North American history. Their distinctiveness lies in the stress placed on particular events and the situation of the Anishinabeg firmly at the centre of the history of the Great Lakes region. Like all recorders of events, the Anishinabeg elders were selective, and attention paid by their narratives to a particular happening can be taken as a rough indication of its significance to contemporary Anishinabeg. When considering the question of whether an event described by Europeans actually took place, Warren asserts that 'the Ojibwa ... are ... minute in the relation of the particulars of any important event in their history, comprised within the past eight generations.'⁴⁷ The obvious corollary is that occurrences that were thought to be less important were not transmitted to the younger generation.

The inclusion of a particular event in the oral tradition was determined by the memories of the male elders of the Anishinabeg, who responded to questions about the past with stories of war, very much a male-dominated activity. Had women been consulted, they might,

45 Blackbird and Warren both mention the shattering impact of the first appearance of firearms on the enemies of the Anishinabeg. Warren attributes Anishinabeg success against the Iroquois to the acquisition of adequate supplies of fusils. See Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 94; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 120, 124.

46 Assikinack, 'Social and Warlike Customs of the Odahwah,' 307; Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 92-3; Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 117-20.

47 Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 115.

or might not, have given a different version of history.⁴⁸ In any event, Anishinabeg narratives recorded in the nineteenth century are oriented exclusively towards male activities. Almost every individual mentioned by name is male. Women appear as wives and victims of Dakota and Muskawiwuk attacks; men are actors, fulfilling economic and military roles as hunters and warriors in the wars that dominate Anishinabeg historiography.

The prominence of a particular group in this historiography varies not with their importance to the Anishinabeg, but to the nature of the relationship. Those with whom the Anishinabeg established an amicable partnership are taken for granted, and merit only modest attention. Prominence is accorded only to the enemies with whom the Anishinabeg competed for territory and control of economic resources.

Many Anishinabeg bands are neglected. On the whole, the historians of the Anishinabeg directed their attention to the leading edge of Anishinabeg expansion to the west, east, and south. The traditional history of a given region generally ends with the coming of peace. Even Copway and Jones terminate their historical narratives of the Ojibwa in southern Ontario after the expulsion of the Iroquois. The actions of their warriors on the frontier are recalled minutely, while the role of those within Anishinabeg territory is generally confined to providing manpower for major offensives against the Dakota, Iroquois, or Muskawiwuk.

Those who listened to the narratives of Anishinabeg elders received an education in what the Anishinabeg themselves considered to be the most important events in the history of the Great Lakes region. Just as Euramerican histories pay considerable attention to the establishment of colonies and nation-states in North America, much, but not all, of the Anishinabeg oral tradition is devoted to explaining to future generations how their nation came to possess the territory that it occupied prior to the beginnings of Euramerican settlement. In providing this explanation, the elders bequeathed to posterity the history of the dynamic, enterprising, and successful people who dominated much of the Great Lakes region during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

48 For an appraisal of gender bias in Anishinabeg narratives see Laura L. Peers, "'A Woman's Work is Never Done': Harold Hickerson, the Male Bias, and Ojibwa Ethnohistory' (Rupert's Land Research Centre Conference, Churchill, 1988), 14-16.

This history is valuable both for the insights it provides through comparison with contemporary Euramerican documents and in itself, as an independent record of the past from an Amerindian perspective. It was, of course, possible for the Anishinabeg to be just as ethnocentric as the French or British, yet neither European nor Anishinabeg accounts can be ignored if one wishes to produce a balanced history of the Great Lakes region.

Focused as it is on the concerns of the Anishinabeg themselves, the history preserved in their oral traditions is largely independent of the history of Euramericans in North America. Yet the occasional references to the French in Anishinabeg narratives are of considerable interest, for they make it possible to contrast Amerindian and European depictions of specific incidents, and to bring to light events which were overlooked by contemporary Europeans. The three examples adduced here give some indication of how Amerindian oral traditions can enhance and expand history based upon European documents.

When European traders first travelled to Lake Superior and met with Amerindians, members of both cultures left accounts of their relationship. Pierre-Esprit Radisson gave the impression in his memoir that Franco-Amerindian relations in the upper Great Lakes in the seventeenth century were such that two Frenchmen and their trade goods were able to dominate the nations of Lake Superior: 'We wear Caesars, being nobody to contradict us. We went away free from any burden, whilst those poor miserable [Amerindians] thought themselves happy to carry our Equipage, for the hope that they had that we should give them a brass ring, or an awle, or a needle ... Wee ... weare lodged in y^e cabban of the chiefest captainne ... We like not the company of that blind, therefore left him. He wondered at this, but durst not speake, because we were demi-gods.'⁴⁹

Yet when the Anishinabeg of Lake Superior described their first experiences with French traders, they portrayed isolated travellers, dependent on the tolerance of the indigenous peoples through whose national territories they travelled: 'Early the next morning, ... the young men once more noticed the smoke arising from the eastern end of the unfrequented island, and led on by curiosity, they ran thither and found a small log cabin in which they discovered two

white men in the last stages of starvation. The young Ojibways filled with compassion, carefully conveyed them to their village, where, being nourished with great kindness, their lives were preserved.'⁵⁰

As trade continued, French and Anishinabeg reached a point where it was decided to formalize their relationship with an alliance that was negotiated at a meeting at Sault Ste Marie in 1671. But the reports that delegates brought home reflected widely varying interpretations of the nature of this relationship. Simon François Daumont de St. Lussou, representing the French crown, produced a description that left nothing to the imagination:

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST HIGH, MOST MIGHTY AND MOST REDOUBTABLE MONARCH LOUIS, THE XIVth OF THE CHRISTIAN NAME, KING OF FRANCE AND NAVARRE, we take possession of the said place of St. Mary of the Falls as well as of Lakes Huron and Superior, the Island of Caientolon [Manitoulin] and of all other Countries, rivers, lakes and tributaries, contiguous and adjacent thereunto ... declaring to the aforesaid Nations that henceforward as from this moment they were dependent on his Majesty, subject to be controlled by his laws and to follow his customs.⁵¹

St Lussou was evidently a good deal more circumspect when speaking to Amerindians than when writing reports, for a less baroque but more convincing relation of the same meeting was preserved by the descendants of Ke-che-ne-zuh of the Crane Clan who represented the Ojibwa: 'Sieur du Lussou ... The envoy of the French

⁵⁰ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 122. Although the two Frenchmen have been identified as Médard Chouart des Grosseilliers and Pierre-Esprit Radisson, there is no real evidence one way or the other. See Grace Lee Nute, *Caesars of the Wilderness: Médard Chouart, Sieur des Grosseilliers and Pierre Esprit Radisson, 1618-1710* (New York: D. Appleton-Century 1943; reprinted St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press 1978), 62n.

⁵¹ 'Simon François Daumont Esquire Sieur de St. Lussou, Commissioner substitute of my Lord the Intendant of New France, to search for the copper mine in the countries of the Outaouais, Nesperce, Illinois and other Indian Nations discovered and to be discovered near Lake Superior or the French Sea,' in E.B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York: Procured in Holland, England, and France, by John Romeyn Brodhead, esq., Agent under and by Virtue of an Act of the Legislature Entitled 'An Act To Appoint an Agent To Procure and Transcribe Documents in Europe Relative to the Colonial History of the State'* vol. ix (Albany 1855), 803-4. Léopold Lamontagne repeats St Lussou's version of this event in 'Simon-François Daumont de Saint-Lussou,' in George W. Brown, ed., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1: 1000 to 1700 (Toronto 1966), 249.

49 Pierre-Esprit Radisson, *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson, Being an Account of His Travels and Experiences among the North American Indians, from 1652 to 1684*, ed. Gideon D. Scull (Boston: Prince Society Publications 1885; reprinted New York: Peter Smith 1943), 198, 200-1

king, asked, in the name of his nation, for permission to trade in the country, and for free passage to and from their villages all times thereafter. He asked that the fires of the French and Ojibwa nations might be made one, and everlasting.⁵² Once again, rather than the forceful, dominant newcomers depicted in contemporary Euramerican documents, the French are portrayed by Amerindians as isolated travellers in a foreign land.

The presence of European traders in Lake Superior and the negotiations at Sault Ste Marie have never been called into question, although acceptance of an Amerindian point of view is relatively recent. In the case of the Ojibwa-Iroquois wars for control of what is now southern Ontario, however, the Anishinabeg version of the past was initially rejected by mainstream historians. Based as they were on what Amerindian elders rather than Euramerican historians considered to be important in history, Anishinabeg accounts of their victories clashed with white preconceptions about the power of the Iroquois.⁵³ These narratives were thus ignored by generations of scholars, until Leroy V. Eid and Peter S. Schmalz used them to reconstruct the series of successful Anishinabeg campaigns that led to the expulsion of the Iroquois from southern Ontario. In this case, the skilful use of Amerindian oral tradition has forced a revision of longstanding opinions regarding the Iroquois and the role of the Ojibwa in the history of Ontario.⁵⁴

European accounts are neither the only, nor necessarily the most reliable record of events in the Great Lakes area during the post-contact period. Amerindians had a particular point of view, and the use of their traditional history allows historians to take account of this perspective. Nonetheless, traditional Anishinabeg history remains a complement to, not a replacement for, history based upon the observations of contemporary European observers. European records, taken down and preserved in print at the time, contain many statements by Amerindians that reveal a much broader range of Amerindian concerns than the oral tradition, especially those involving contact with Europeans. Indeed, a complete history of the Anishinabeg cannot be assembled without recourse to documentary evidence.

52 Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 131. Warren acquired this account from the descendants of Ke-che-ne-zuh.

53 Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*, 21-2.

54 Leroy V. Eid, 'The Ojibwa-Iroquois War: The War the Five Nations Did Not Win,' *Ethnohistory* 26, 4 (fall 1979): 297-324; Schmalz, 'Role of the Ojibwa in the Conquest of Southern Ontario,' 326-52.

Documents, however, contain only those facts observed and deemed relevant by literate Europeans. Relying solely on evidence produced by Europeans leaves events beyond their vision shrouded in darkness, and tells little about how Amerindians viewed the events of their times and the importance they attached to activities that brought them into contact with Europeans relative to other concerns.⁵⁵

To read the works of Assikinack, Blackbird, Copway, Jones, and Warren is to step out of the familiar Eurocentric history of North America into a world where the European presence is off in the distance and Amerindian concerns are at the centre. Occurrences that might be of tremendous importance to Europeans are ignored or mentioned only in passing. Those that held significance for the Anishinabeg are recounted at length. For contemporary Amerindians, these were the great events of their time.

Important as the activities of the French and English might be for the future, the Anishinabeg of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not feel compelled to transmit a detailed account of their dealings with Europeans to their descendants. The coming of Europeans was one of the crucial events of North American history, but theirs was not the only story in progress in the postcontact era.

One might be tempted to dismiss this version of history as merely tribal, and thus parochial. The Anishinabeg, however, were the dominant human group from the outlet of Lake Ontario to the headwaters of the Mississippi for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The history of the Great Lakes area in this period is *their* history, not that of the European intruders in their scattered outposts.

Then, as now, the history of North America was a history of competing and coexisting human groups interacting with each other and with the environment. In their annals of the past, humans from every group place themselves at the centre of events. This would be a harmless enough conceit had not an interpretation of North American history based almost exclusively on documents prevailed, producing a distorted vision of postcontact North America in which Amerindians are fully visible only when they interact with Europeans.

55 This is not to say that they cannot be used to illuminate Amerindian opinion regarding specific topics, especially those dealing with the Amerindian-European relations. See, for example, C.J. Jaenen, 'Amerindian Views of French Culture in the Seventeenth Century,' *Canadian Historical Review*, 55, 3 (Sept. 1974): 261-91.

To redress this imbalance, it is not enough to tinker with historiography by attempting to tell the 'Amerindian side of the story' of those processes and events like the fur trade and Seven Years' War that fall into the categories established by Western historians. Americans had their own priorities and their own agenda, which were and are reflected in their historical narratives. Their version of the past deserves to be accepted on its own terms, and fully integrated into the larger history of humans in North America.

'The Ojibways,' wrote Warren, 'are traditionally well possessed of the most important events which have happened to them as a tribe, and from nine generations back, I am prepared to give, as obtained from their most veracious, reliable, and oldest men, their history, which may be considered as authentic.'⁵⁶ All things considered, the quickest road⁵⁷ to an understanding of the Amerindian past may prove to be by way of the writings of those nineteenth-century American authors who undertook to preserve the historical narratives of the Anishinabeg and 'to write their history as they themselves tell it.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 91

⁵⁷ This expression is from G. R. Elton and Robert William Fogel, *Which Road to the Past? Two Views of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1983).

⁵⁸ Warren, *History of the Ojibways*, 113

NOTES AND COMMENTS

UNORTHODOX WARFARE IN THE NORTHEAST, 1703

On 9 June 1703 (OS) Governor Joseph Dudley of Massachusetts left Boston to travel to Casco Bay, in the territory of the Abenaki. Since the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession in May 1702, relations between New England and the Abenaki had remained generally though uneasily peaceful. The conflicts of the 1690s, during which the Abenaki had maintained an alliance with the French of Acadia and Canada, had not been repeated. Dudley himself had travelled to the northeast in the summer of 1702 to make overtures to native leaders, and agreement had been reached to extend Abenaki-English trade and to avoid military conflict.¹ The understanding survived in spite of intermittent tensions during the ensuing months. The visit of an Abenaki delegation to Quebec in the fall of 1702 seemed to indicate a leaning back towards the French, and shortly afterwards New England privateers intercepted a vessel carrying arms and other supplies from Quebec to the Kennebec Abenaki. Some isolated incidents of hostility between English and Abenaki occurred during the winter and spring, but Dudley reported to England in April that peace had prevailed.² The visit to Casco in June was intended to maintain and strengthen the relationship.

The meeting that took place towards the end of the month was not, from Dudley's point of view, an unqualified success. The Abenaki refused to be overawed by the governor's blustering assertions of English military might, and rebuffed his suggestions of military cooperation.³ Nevertheless, the meeting was polite, and ended with the placing of stones on two cairns to symbolize continuing respect. The Abenaki – those present had included, among others, sachems from the Penobscot and Kennebec rivers – gave no indication of intending to intervene in the war on either the French or the

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¹ Joseph Dudley to Council for Trade and Plantations, 5 Aug. 1702, Great Britain, Public Record Office (PRO), CO5/862, no. 125

² Joseph Dudley to the Earl of Nottingham, 10 Dec. 1702, PRO, CO5/863, no. 4; Dudley to Council for Trade and Plantations, 4 April 1703, PRO, CO5/863, no. 16; Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1984), 154-7

³ The most complete account of the meeting is contained in the diary of Samuel Sewall, who saw a more lengthy report that apparently has not survived, and entered an abstract in his diary. Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, vol. II, 1699/1700-1714, Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 5th series, vol. VI (Boston 1879), 85-7