

STRANGERS IN BLOOD: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country.

JENNIFER BROWN.

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980. Pp. 291.

Jennifer Brown's anthropological investigation of fur trade family life in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is an important and provocative study. For it she consulted sources from post journals and correspondence to wills and court cases. Her findings on the 'strangers in blood' are also wide ranging. Brown took the title *Strangers in Blood* from the British legal practice of taxing the legacies "of all heirs who were natural children or 'strangers in blood' to a deceased party." Native women who married fur traders *à la façon du pays* and their children often had to go to court to prove their legitimacy and claim their inheritance.

By examining legal records as well as more traditional historical sources Brown has cast fresh light on fur trade history. She contends that before 1821 the rival fur companies, the London based Hudson's Bay Company and the Montreal based North West Company were quite distinct social organizations. The Hudson's Bay Company had recruited Orkney Islanders and provided many opportunities for their upward mobility. The North Westers generally took on Scots as clerks and French-Canadians as labourers. Only the former had much chance of becoming full partners of the concern. Employees of both companies married native women according to the custom of the country but treated their 'families' differently. Bay company men had permanent residential posts, stable family units and generally made provision for their children's future. The North Westers held temporary sta-

tions, and many of them cast off their mates and offspring when retiring from Indian country. After the union of the two fur trade companies in 1821, social and economic pressures combined against the welfare of country wives and children.

Brown's findings diverge from those of other fur trade historians particularly regarding the mid-nineteenth century. Other scholars describe a breakdown of fur trade society in that period. They attribute the fracturing of the web of kinship which had held its classes and races together to the racial prejudice of incoming missionaries and settlers. Brown sees the economic strains of the new Hudson's Bay Company as the root cause. She explains that while reorganizing the company's North American operations Governor George Simpson found it economically advantageous to distinguish between white gentlemen and native servants, between white wives and native women. Many old North Westers followed their tradition and Simpson's own example by casting off their country wives and children. They gave little if any assistance to their descendants in education, employment or marriage. The North Westers' offspring remained in the Northwest as *métis* and "joined a common cause that emphasized their maternal descent." Brown has found, however, that by contrast many old HBC men with their strong family ties sought to protect and advance their country born kin. Brown contends that they had more success supporting the social standing of their daughters and wives than that of their sons. Why? Simpson sidelined the country born sons into a new category of fur trade employment, that of postmaster, and brought in Britons for the junior levels of the management of the concern. Halfbreed daughters of traders were, even in the mid-nineteenth century still the majority of marriageable females available to gentlemen traders. They were

well-connected with the powers of fur trade society and they had learned the arts of civilization at the academies of "Red River and elsewhere."

Canadian historians while appreciating the scope of Brown's study of fur trade family life will wonder why some historical perspectives are absent from *Strangers in Blood*. Brown does mention Scottish customary marriages as pertinent to fur trade alliances but ignores Scottish customs regarding the responsibility of the father for his illegitimate children. *Strangers in Blood* does not discuss French-Canadian law and customs regarding marriage and the family although they were of significance to the evolution of fur trade social patterns, including those of its British officials. Those schools at "Red River and elsewhere" where they educated their daughters were conducted by Roman Catholic French-Canadian nuns as well as Protestant British missionaries.

The most curious omission in *Strangers in Blood* occurs in Brown's treatment of the terminal decade of HBC dominance in the Northwest, the 1860's. She relies on McNaught's *Pelican History of Canada* for details of the transfer of Ruperts Land from the company to Canada and the role of Riel and other Red River residents in resisting the change. Yet W.L. Morton's edition of Alexander Begg's *Red River Journal* (1956) and F. Pannekoek's "The Rev. Griffiths Owen Corbett and the Red River Civil War of 1869-70" (*Canadian Historical Review*, June 1976) were available in the libraries she consulted.

I would, however, recommend *Strangers in Blood* to Canadian historians researching women and the family. It is a fairly comprehensive work on fur trade society and will be the basis of future exploration of fur trade social history. In particular I hope Brown and

others will extend her study of fur trade company families further on in the nineteenth century. For example examination of the context and ramifications of the Connolly case of 1869, which established the legality of fur trade customary marriages, would further illuminate the background of the traders, patterns followed by their families, and the social power of the country wives.

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LABOURING CHILDREN: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924.

JOY PARR.

London-Montreal: Croom Helm/McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980. Pp. 181.

"Mary needs a foster home in a large urban centre where facilities are available to deal with her handicap." "Joseph needs foster parents who will understand his desire to maintain a relationship with his mother." Not only recognition of needs but respect for them—this is the stuff of which modern Canadian adoption advertisements are made. Only those with unquestioning faith in the ability of social welfare to deliver on its promises assume that proclaimed recognition of needs necessarily leads to actual fulfillment of them. But vague and oft-violated as it may be, the concept of children's rights is enshrined in the philosophy of today's child welfare system. In *Labouring Children*, Joy Parr speaks of another era—a time when children's needs and rights may have been more firmly delineated but really only at the expense of the children. In the