How the Macroeconomic Undercurrent of Trade Influenced the Lives of the Historic Cromarty Family through Immigration, Employment, and Family Building: a Representation of the Time

Report Prepared at the Request of Parks Canada Fort Langley in Partial Fulfillment of UBC Geography 429: Research in Historical Geography, for Dr David Brownstein

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Abstract:

As part of a community partnership initiative between the University of British Columbia Geography Department and Parks Canada Fort Langley, a research inquiry was analyzed. This inquiry, as part of a research in historical geography course, has been shaped around course goals, existing literature, primary sources, and the goals of Fort Langley. The result has been a research process framed around the question: how did the macroeconomic undercurrents of Fort Langley shape the lives of the historic Cromarty family? Through extensive research, it has been concluded that trade did, in fact, influence the lives of the Cromartys in three distinct ways: immigration, employment, and family building. Furthermore, the Cromartys therefore exemplify similar historic families of the time. In addition, Aboriginal people were very much incorporated into the process of trade influence, and therefore the same three shaping factors can be used to explain their unique perspective at Fort Langley.

Thesis:

In order to thoroughly investigate the research question, it is necessary to establish the economic processes that were taking place within the Hudson’s Bay Company, and in particular, at Fort Langley. After investigating the HBC as well as Fort Langley, it became evident that the dominant economic process was trade. Being able to contextualize trade at a specific moment in time became imperative in order to see how it influenced and affected all parts of society, and particular generations of the family. Analyzing trade based on the time period of the first Cromarty brother, William Cromarty allowed for a research foundation specific to this historic family. Ultimately, connections arose that linked the macroeconomic process of trade with the Cromarty family in three main ways: immigration, employment, and family building. It is through these three premises that the Cromartys are representative of a broader economic relationship with people, which contributes to the significance of this research endeavour given how little has been done to provide a personal context to the broader history of British Columbia. This project, therefore, contributes important aspects of our diverse yet common

heritage by documenting human histories in relation to a significant component of history in BC—the Hudson’s Bay Company trading network².

**The HBC: An Ideological Backbone**

Based on a monopolistic framework, the Hudson’s Bay Company was largely an engine for Imperialist Britain³, and all trade conducted, therefore, become part of this network, though on a continuum. Although the company adopted some of the framework from the North West Company, they eventually moved away from the assimilation ideology used by them⁴.

The Hudson’s Bay Company was established in 1670 in London England thus deemed one of the “oldest commercial corporations in the world”⁵. Given how young Canada is as a nation, the Company’s connection to Britain ran deep, and as the HBC became more established in Canada, so too did the influence of British ideologies. Because of its youth, therefore, Canada had even more of a dependence on Britain⁶. Though commonly known for the fur trade, the HBC facilitated trade of many goods, eventually “completely removing itself from the fur trade” entirely⁷.

For this reason, and for the purpose of this project inquiry, the influence of Britain became imperative to trade because it reshaped and reconfigured trade relationships with

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⁴ Bruce Watson, interview, 2014.
⁵ Mackie, 1999, 559-561.
Aboriginals\textsuperscript{8}. Therefore, the backbone of HBC can be linked to its ideology, or in other words, influence from Britain. Furthermore, this backbone had a timeline, and a point at which Britain’s influence greatly changed the entire interaction of trade.

In summary, for the purpose of this project, essential components of this ideological backbone are the enforcement of corporate hierarchy which separated the officers from the servants with a ranking system, as well as the enforcement of rules and systems which encouraged central management, and allowed for the extensive documentation of HBC history available today\textsuperscript{9}.

In terms of trade relationships, there seemed to be a negative correlation with the increase of British influence within the HBC and the decrease in ethical trade with Aboriginals\textsuperscript{10}. This proves to be significant based on the ways by which this trade was previously encouraged and facilitated, and how that economic-social dynamic shifted with a change in HBC backbone\textsuperscript{11}.

**Fort Langley:**

Since its establishment in 1827, Fort Langley is best associated with the fur trade. Fort Langley was one piece of a larger trading network establish by the Hudson's Bay Company\textsuperscript{12}. As part of a larger trade route, Fort Langley fostered foreign commerce as well as trade west of the Rockies. Trade with America, Hawaii, as well as Australia are just some of the more significant


\textsuperscript{11} C. Judd, Native labour and social stratification in Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, 1770–1870, *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 17 (1980).

\textsuperscript{12} Maclachlan, 2002.
recipients for HBC products. As noted, Fort Langley was most linked with the fur trade but other trade also took place; for the purpose of this project, the trade focused on is salmon.

**Fort Langley & Salmon:**

Fort Langley initiated the West Coast Salmon Packing Industry. By 1838, Fort Langley was the primary supplier of salt salmon company-wide, west of the Rockies, and abroad. Trade relationships with Aboriginals were imperative to sustain the magnitude of trade success enjoyed by the HBC. Initiating a foundation of free trade allowed for trade route exploration and use\(^\text{13}\).

**Trade as a Macroeconomic Undercurrent**

**European-Aboriginal Trade:**

European settler trade with Aboriginals was a top priority given that the entire business initiative was based on reliance on the fruits of Aboriginal land\(^\text{14}\). Because of this reliance, European settlers had to promote trade as a mutually beneficial relationship which required adequate and appropriate compensation for traded goods, respect, equity and fairness as a trading partner, and assurance of the preservation of social dynamics. Given how different the European culture was from Aboriginal heritage, the successful facilitation of trade relied on social arrangements. For this reason, and many others, it is necessary to observe the influences of trade on two groups: the Cromartys as well as Aboriginals whereby the Cromartys are representative of the European-settler group. It becomes necessary to note, and remain aware of, the fact that

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this division or separation between 'whites' and 'Aboriginals' is used for the purpose of simplifying the societal make up of that time. In actuality, as Bruce Watson notes, "our heritage is very mixed and it is impossible to divide people into simply 'white' and simply 'Aboriginal' given there are many ethnicities coming into contact over many generations...thus, the nomenclature of 'white' and 'Aboriginal' is rather hollow".15

Shaping Lives: Cromartys

Immigration:

Trade of salmon at Fort Langley began increasing by 1838. This increase in salmon created an increase in the demand for skilled labourers. A "call for new hands" was invoked company-wide, and many immigrants answered it including the Cromarty brothers Magnus and William. The demand for immigrant workers resulted in an increase of European immigrant men, but included far less women and children. Because of this, the immigrant influx typically consisted of unmarried, labour-ready young men capable of coping with labour intensive, yet European-friendly conditions in Fort Langley.

Both William and Magnus were employed in the fishing industry in their homeland of South Ronaldshay, Orkney Islands, Scotland and immigrated to Canada together16. The focus will be narrowed on William Cromarty born in 1814 in St. Margaret's Hope in South Ronaldshay.

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15 Bruce Watson, interview, 2014.
William immigrated to Canada on the *Prince Rupert V* in 1843. His journey involved travelling by the River Communication through Lake Winnipeg, the North Saskatchewan River, the Rocky Mountains, the Columbia River, eventually reaching Fort Vancouver in approximately 1844 or early 1845 at the age of 30\(^\text{17}\).

![Family Group Record](image)

Figure 1: This is representative of the family tree work done by Jane Cromarty obtained from HBC Archives at Fort Langley, BC. This shows the family lineage of William Cromarty.

\(^\text{17}\) See Figure 2.
Employment:

Given the strict divide between officers and servants within the HBC, labourers were plentiful in comparison to high ranking officials, and their jobs and livelihoods greatly differed\(^\text{18}\).

Trading of salmon across such vast distances required the need for salting and processing. This resulted in the creation of fishing industry jobs at all points of transport. Although a labourer, any job that contributed to the increased efficiency of salmon trading was useful.

William Cromarty (known as ‘Cromartie the Cooper’) was hired on as a Cooper by the Hudson’s Bay Company at Fort Langley in 1845 in response to the need for a “qualified cooper for the HBC salmon trading operations”\(^\text{19}\). He worked as a Cooper for Fort Langley until his retirement in 1872, and died 3 years later at Fort Langley.

Life as a Cooper\(^\text{20}\):

Coopers worked all year round at the cooperage alongside Hawaiian Islander workers (another narrative not included). William’s work as a labourer followed the salmon run closely, and was thus year-round work making brine, preparing for salting, or making barrels out of wood and other parts of the tree.\(^\text{21}\) Although salmon was the largest export, Cranberries were among the other products traded with San Francisco being the largest importer. Work as a cooper was hard, manual labour. Coopers worked 6 days a week, typically putting in 12-14 hour days with Sunday off as a day of rest\(^\text{22}\). Given that Fort Langley was a small port of trade, William was one of two head coopers, and many other labourers assisted with their work.

\(^{19}\) B. Watson, 1999, 24-30.
\(^{20}\) See Figure 3-4.
\(^{21}\) Products from trees can be seen on the barrels. The cooper sometimes used vines or branches with bark on instead of metal hoops.
\(^{22}\) Phil Butcher, interviewed by Jenna Singh, Vancouver, BC, 7 March 2014.
Figure 3: Photo taken at Cooperage in Fort Langley, BC. This is a common stamped barrel similar to what William Cromarty would make.

Figure 4: Photo taken at Cooperage in Fort Langley. Workspace represents what William Cromarty would work in 12-14 hours a day.
Family Building:

In order to sustain the trade relationship, and ensure ease of trade, European-settler men employed by the HBC often married high-ranking Aboriginal women, a process “influenced by the absence of white women”\(^{23}\). These unions were encouraged and commonplace\(^{24}\). It was not atypical for these marriages to be documented, and for the couple to have many children given that the union gave European men the opportunity to replicate the domestic life\(^{25}\).

Family tree investigation conducted by Jane Cromarty as well as familial documents indicate that William Cromarty married the daughter of a Chief named Salum'mia (known as Jane Elizabeth or Jennie) of Matsqui heritage in approximately 1846, roughly 1 year after becoming employed by the HBC. It is noteworthy that given that William was a seemingly low-ranking, skilled labourer, he married a high ranking Aboriginal woman, considered a desirable\(^{26}\) candidate for marriage during that time; however, this may be because Aboriginal perceptions of status differed from the HBC differentiation of Officers and servants; furthermore, amongst the skilled labourers, the cooper was the highest paid\(^{27}\).

William and Salum’mia had seven children, 4 boys and 3 girls, and lived on site at Fort Langley\(^{28}\). All of the children were baptized at Fort Langley indicating that although half-Aboriginal, European roots took precedence religiously. Of the daughters, only two survived to mature; both of the surviving girls married European men, which were common for the half-


\(^{26}\) Based on a comment put forth by Professor David Brownstein

\(^{27}\) Mike Starr, paper revision comments.

\(^{28}\) Jane Cromarty, documents provided, interviewed by Jenna Singh, 2014.
Aboriginal girls at that time. Of the sons, one married a Matsqui woman named Annie on Matsqui territory in 1883, one was not married, and one married a European woman in New Westminster in 1893. I was not able to investigate further as to the lineage of these relationships, and what came of the children. Though, for future research, it is a very interesting subject to explore.

**Shaping Lives: Aboriginals**

**Immigration:**

As trade flourished between Aboriginals and European settlers through the HBC, immigration from Europe increased, as noted in the case of the Cromartys. Because it was not uncommon for single men to immigrate, there was a shortage of women in the Forts, which became another reason for marriages with eligible Aboriginal women.

However, as European immigration to Canada increased in the early to mid-1800s, more young European women began to immigrate. Furthermore, the decrease in the fur trade and shift to trade of other products put stress on the trade reliance with Aboriginals. Working in tandem, increased British influence in company policy meant that in order to make space for new European female immigrants, Aboriginal women were displaced.

The influx of European female immigrants brought in new sets of cultural and societal values which changed the whole dynamic at places like Fort Langley. Aboriginal women were very hard working, and did not possess the same delicacies and fragility that European women

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were accustomed to. As noted in the excerpt below, the day-to-day inner workings of the Fort depended on the hard work of the Aboriginal wives – a kind of livelihood they were used to and comfortable doing. To put it simply, the Aboriginal women were strong, hardworking, capable, and knowledgeable about treating salmon, and other products given the epistemological framework of their heritage; in contrast, European women that were able to immigrate during the time were typically ‘ladies of leisure’ – they were taught skills such as mastering musical instruments, and needle work. Though these are generalizations, it exemplifies the difference in customs exhibited by the two groups of women, and nods to what may have contributed to a change in daily livelihood at the Fort.

Employment:

In a Fort like Fort Langley, it was not uncommon for every individual to have a role in the functioning of the place. The Aboriginal wives of European settlers, such as Salum’mia, would have very labour-intensive jobs, and contributed to the salmon processing that took place at Fort Langley. As the wife of a cooper, Salum’mia would participate in a daily life that involved the contribution of her working husband, her children, and fellow families. The Cromartys were representative of a common Fort family, most of which were comprised of an Aboriginal woman as a wife, and half-Aboriginal children.

"The nature of work at Fort Langley made families interdependent. The jobs of the fur traders had evolved. Self-sufficiency was the rule of the day for each post. The wives secured and prepared the food, sewed, kept the children in tow, made clothes, etc. This veil of domesticity relays the importance of wives extended ties to the wider community not to mention their knowledge of the ability to survive in the area. Almost as soon as the children were able to handle it, they were put to work. They might be

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beating furs to get rid of dirt and bugs. While the clerks and officers might be negotiating fish sales at the wharf, the children would have to carry fish up to the Fort, where their mothers would split the fish and put them in brine. There is no room for education. Unlike other Forts in the area, there were no teachers at Fort Langley. The children had to pick up what little information they could from their parents.\textsuperscript{31}

**Family Building:**

With the influx of European immigrant women, often times, but not always, European settler men employed with the HBC would drop their Aboriginal wives\textsuperscript{32}. In exploration of the displacement of Aboriginal women, Sylvia Van Kirk’s argument can only be loosely applied here given that her thesis deals with the officers who were higher in rank at HBC than William Cromarty\textsuperscript{33}.

Furthermore, these theories are more applicable to the children of William and Salum'mia Cromarty being half-Aboriginal and half-European. Often times, the half-Aboriginal girls would have more of an opportunity for success than the half-Aboriginal boys given that the girls could, and sometimes did, go back to their Aboriginal heritage.

Displacement is evident, however, especially in the case of Salum'mia given that in 1879 just 4 years after her husband William died, their house and barn at Fort Langley was torn down presumably dislocating the surviving members of the family\textsuperscript{34}.

\textsuperscript{31} Lives Lived West of the divide: A biogeographical diction of fur trades p. 1090 vol 3
\textsuperscript{32} B. Watson, Interview, 2014.
\textsuperscript{34} See Figure 2.
Aboriginals carried a strong oral tradition whereas the Scots carried a strong written tradition which over time prevailed, as seen in the Cromarty documented family information in the family bible. The oral tradition dies out or gets radically changed after a few generations—a phenomenon that may explain the scarcity of information on these earlier Aboriginal-European Cromarty generations.

**Significances:**

By overlaying existing literature on Fort Langley, with oral interviews, and archival research, it is evident that the Cromartys are representative of larger examples of how trade influenced the lives of real people at Fort Langley. Part of Hudson's Bay Company priorities and initiatives, Fort Langley was a site of trade and its social dimension reflected the facilitation, and establishment of trade relationships with Aboriginals.

This research project indicates how important it is to provide people that wish to engage with the history of Canada with accurate representations of the past. The desire for the facts to be precise, dated, and verifiable should not hinder the ability to provide new, unique ways for people to engage in this history.

**Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank Parks Canada Fort Langley and the University of British Columbia for the opportunity to research a piece of the past, and to explore one of many faces of the Fort. Respect and thanks to the focus of my research: the Cromartys.

Special thank you to the four interview participants: Mike Starr, Manager of Visitor Services at Fort Langley, Bruce Watson, author of Lives Lived West of the Divide, Jane Cromarty, the wife
of a Cromarty descendent whose active research into her husband’s family lineage have resulted in a plethora of information on the family, and Phil Butcher, employee at Fort Langley.

Furthermore, thank you to my professor David Brownstein for consistent constructive feedback and recommendations. Also, a thank you to my small Geography 429 class for all of the feedback and support throughout the term.

Appendix:

Research Consultation Process:

In order to become familiarized with the intricacies and delicacies of the Fort’s history, a broad range of literature was consulted. Because an economic angle was incorporated in this research, it was necessary to consult literature on trade economics within the field of economics, political science, as well as social geography. Furthermore, in order to obtain an unbiased perspective on the history of Fort Langley, and the Hudson’s Bay Company, a variety of literature was used both historic, archival, government-based, and also peer reviewed scholarly papers to include a more academic perspective. To remain inclusive of all individuals involved in the history of Fort Langley, literature on Aboriginal communities was included to capture that narrative. Two works that were consistently consulted, and that became particularly relevant were Sylvia Van Kirk’s article on the role of native women in fur trade society of western Canada as well as Bruce Watson’s three volume book *Lives Lived West of the divide: A biogeographical diction of fur trades*. In addition, archival records, and Cromarty documents were also consulted.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ See Figure as an example of the kinds of documents used.
A significant component of the research process involved oral interviews. This introduced the need for ethics and conduct, as well as the consultation of literature on oral history to further investigate the importance of oral history as a research method, as well as the negatives of such use. The “danger of a single story” became an area of contest during this research process and therefore literature on the subject of personal stories was imperative.36

**Oral History as a Mode of Research**

Oral history is often an area of contest given the involvement of human subjects, the high level of variability and error, and the potential for the introduction of biases in subject matter.37

In the context of this research, four oral interviews were conducted all of which had an accompanying University of British Columbia consent form, and policy approval.38

Within these interviews, it became essential to incorporate oral history methodology in the literature consultation process. When investigating history it is imperative that researchers remain conscious of dominant narratives, and hyper-visible narratives.39 Problems may arise when deciding which person’s story should be shared and heard given that “documented voices act as authoritative…[and] these authoritative voices prove to be significant and contentious” when painting a landscape of a particular place.40 Oral historical recollection can provide a unique narrative to an otherwise homogenous set of historic ideas; however, it may also pose a potential concern for reliability and validity of the stories being told. For these reasons, it is

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38 Four interviews: Jane Cromarty, Mike Starr, Bruce Watson, and Phil Butcher. Specific details when sourced.
39 Bruce Watson, interview by Jenna Singh, Vancouver, BC, 10 April 2014.
necessary to conduct critical research that employs the use of other sources of information to corroborate retold stores. As Bruce Watson, experienced researcher and BC history enthusiast contends, “you must always remain aware of the narratives, and always be critical.” Because there are negative aspects to the process of oral history, adding an archival research dimension aids in the critical analysis process. However, like oral history, archival research has its negatives as well. For example, archival records often provide a rigid, one-dimensional timeline that accounts for significant contributions to history but fails to honour the stories of the individual.

Oral History as a Mode of Research: The Context of BC History

In terms of history in BC, and in particular, the history at Fort Langley, a reoccurring theme is the notion of a dominant narrative that has blanketed the history. This has caused a general rethinking, and reframing of the stories told about the past, and has encouraged murals and paintings to be remade in order to remain inclusive of the narratives that are often not heard.

For the purpose of this research project, the dominant narratives tend to be “European, white males who are educated and literate” thus leaving out the narratives of the opposite. What this means is that a lot of the sources consulted for this project have had the potential to be influenced by these dominant narratives, or are at some level being reintroduced to hyper-narratives of the history of place.

Though all that can be done in the effort to engage in, and critically analyze all narratives to arrive at a working conclusion about history, this is a process that relies heavily on time and

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44 Mike Starr, interview by Jenna Singh, Fort Langley, BC, 2014.
access. As researchers begin critically investigating the past, and conducting paths of research inclusive of all narratives, in time the landscape of history will be multidimensional. However, there will always be the disproportionate representation of documented history owned by the European male narrative, which makes access to the contrary difficult and often overly-reliant on oral history and heirloom stories of the ‘other’.

The Overlay Process

A unique suggestion to the construction of reliable historic narratives is the idea of overlaying research methods, a concept partially derived from the literature consulted for this project. This requires separating research inquiries into many sub-categories or subject fields, and researching those subjects extensively in a wide range of disciplines, filtered by location, and timeframe if possible. Next, narrowing the research inquiry into a known narrative (or dominant narrative) and a hyper-visible narrative, and researching those two groups extensively. Then, employ the method of oral history by conducting oral interviews on subjects that directly pertain to the inquiry. Proceed to critically analyze the interview. Finally, corroborate the oral interviews with archival documentation if possible. The process involves treating each of these steps as a layer. Overlaying each layer on top of the next allows the researcher to see which aspects of the methods that are consistent, or ‘thick’. These ‘thicknesses’ become a Research Methodology Consensus (RMC). Following the above process outline, the research process for this project was as follows:

### Table 1: Outline of project overlay process in order of layer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Subcategory separation: economics of trade, Aboriginals, place-specific history, Cromartys Filters: Western Canada, BC, 1820-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dominant Narrative: HBC — European white literate male; Other Narrative: Aboriginals, and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oral History: Cromarty descendent Jane Cromarty, Mike Starr Parks Canada, Cooper Enthusiast, Bruce Watson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Archivals research HBC, original documents from Cromarty</td>
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RMC: The Cromartys are representative of a larger process of exclusion. Trade influenced the Cromartys through immigration, employment, and family building. Parallel elements can be seen with Aboriginals influenced by trade in the form of immigration, employment, and family building.

**RMC: The Importance of National Historic Sites**

By overlaying archival records with oral histories, visitors to Fort Langley will benefit from the opportunity to switch between unique and original historical lenses as they engage with a historic family’s story. This is especially significant given that Fort Langley is a National Historic Site and therefore demands a very different mode of engagement than other sites.

Commemoration of historic sites continues to be a top priority to Parks Canada\(^{46}\). Through iconography, the erection of historic sites and monuments allows people that engage

with these figures to pay tribute to the remarkable aspects of Canadian historic landscapes\(^{47}\). By engaging with National Historic Sites, people sustain accessibility to historic moments of the country.

As a reservoir of knowledge, National Historic Sites are capsules of the past, and are representative of the history of place. These sites become the first node of contact for tourists looking to discover the unique history of Canada, and therefore become critical opportunities for conveying a message about Canadian history—a message by which visitors to Canada will leave impressed by. For Canadian residents, National Historic Sites are also primary nodes of historic engagement. Often visited by young school children, these sites are imperative in teaching Canadian history and identity to young Canadians\(^{48}\). Fort Langley as a National Historic Site, therefore, becomes representatively responsible for keeping Canadian culture intact, and teaching a unique history that allows future generations to reimagine the place they live\(^{49}\).

\(^{47}\) Payne and Taylor, 2004, 46.  
\(^{48}\) Mike Starr, Interview, 2014.  
\(^{49}\) Leylan, 2013, 855.