

# PAGEANTRY at YORK FORT

by Thomas Hutchins

An eye-witness account of the trading ceremony which was staged at York Factory in the 1770's

**T**HERE are Indians always coming to the Factories, but the main body which make up the bulk of the trade come down in the months of June and July, and as the standard of trade is fixed the same at all the Settlements, and the ceremonies used during their stay on the plantation are similar everywhere; I shall describe the method pursued at York Fort, as that is the capital place in Hudson's Bay; importing as many furs into England as all the other settlements belonging to the Company.

In the month of March the foreign or upland Indians assemble on the banks of a particular river agreed upon by common consent before they separated for the winter. Here they build their canoes which are completed very soon after the river ice breaks up; they then begin their voyage without any regularity, but all driving to be foremost because of the greater prospect of procuring provisions by the way, for without such assistance the stock of dried meat, fat &c which they bring with them would not be sufficient for their subsistence. During the voyage each Leader is can-

vassing with all imaginable art and earnestness for people to join his gang; and influences some by presents, others by promises; for the more canoes under his command the greater he appears at the Factory.

Being now come within two miles of their journey's end a point of land prevents their being seen by the English; here, they all put ashore; the women go into the woods to get pine-brush for their tents bottoms, while the Leaders smook together and regulate the procession. This being settled they reembark and soon after appear in sight of the Fort to the number of between ten and fifty in a line abreast of each other; if there is but one Captain his station is in the center, but if more they are in the wings also, and their canoes are distinguished from the rest by a small St. George or union Jack hoisted on a stick placed in the stern of the vessel; at the distance of four or five hundred yards is another fleet marshalled in the same order; others behind them, and so on until they are all come; Several fowling-pieces are discharged from the canoes to salute the Fort, and the compliment is returned by four small cannon for each division, the great flag flying during the trade. The Captains never concern themselves in taking out their bundles, but the other men will assist their wives in bringing the canoes up the bank. The women set about pitching the tent while

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the Captains are in the Factory. The flags are sometimes placed upon the top of the tent, at other times upon the merlons of the battery.

The Governor being informed what Leaders are arrived sends the Trader out to introduce them singly, or two or three at a time, together with their Lieutenants, which are usually eldest sons or highest relations. Chairs are placed in the room and pipes with smoking materials produced on the table; the Captains place themselves on each side the Governor, but not a word proceeds from either party until every one has recruited his spirits with a full pipe; the silence is then broken by degrees by the most venerable Indian, his head bowed down, and eyes immovably fixed on the floor, or other object. He tells how many canoes he has brought, what kind of winter they have had, what Indians he has seen coming, or staying behind; asks how the Englishmen do, and says he is glad to see them; after which, the Governor bids him welcome, tells him he has good goods, and plenty, and that he loves the Indians, and will be kind to them; the pipe is by this time renewed, and the conversation becomes free, easy, and general. During this visit he [the chief] is dressed out in the following manner.

A coarse cloth coat either red or blue lined with bays [baize] with regimental cuffs and collar; the waistcoat and breeches are of bays; the suit ornamented with broad and narrow orrifice lace of different colours. He is also presented with a white or checkered shirt which is tied at the wrists by worsted lace; the stockings are of yarn; one of them red, the other blue, and tied below the knee with worsted garters; his Indian shoes are sometimes put on, but very often he walks in his stocking feet. The hat is coarse, but

bedecked with three dyed feathers of various colours; a worsted sash tied round the crown, and end hanging out on each side down to the shoulders, a small silk handkerchief is tucked by a corner into the loops behind; with these decorations it is put on the Captains head and compleats his dress.

The Lieutenant is presented also with a coat, but without lining and less ornamented with lace; he has also a shirt given him, and a laced cloth cap not unlike those wore by marines.

The guests being now equipped, a basket of bread and prunes is brought and set before the Captain who takes care to fill his pockets with them before it goes out to be shared in his tent together with a two gallon rundlet [barrel] of brandy and several pipes & a fathom or two of tobacco. The Lieutenant has one gallon rundlet of brandy.

Every thing being prepared he is conducted to his tent with a procession; in the front are the halberts and ensigns, next to the drummer beating a march; then several of the Factory Servants bearing the bread, and prunes, pipes, brandy, tobacco, and the beaver coats of the chief, which he had on when admitted into the Factory. Then comes the Captain walking quite erect and stately smoking his pipe and conversing with the Governor and his Officers; then follow the Lieutenant and perhaps a friend or two who was permitted to come in with the Chief. The tent is all ready for their reception and clean birch-rind or beaver coats are placed for them to sit on, and here the prunes tobacco &c are deposited, and the Chief takes his station and making a speech to his comrades orders the Lieutenant or some respectable person to distribute the things. . . .

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The trading room window is now opened, and the men and women resort hither continually to purchase brandy. They sing, dance, cry, and quarrel for two or three days: at eight o'clock in the evening the drum is beat upon the works to give notice the trading room is going to be shut, and the same again at five in the morning as a signal that attendance is given at the window for those who choose to trade: This window is in the trading room in the south curtain accessible only by a boarded passage railed in from the outer works so that all other communication with the Factory is excluded. . . .

After having given a loose to their pleasure they begin to compose themselves and proceed to business, for hitherto they have traded nothing but brandy: the league of friendship must be renewed by smoaking the Calimut [Calumet], and the guns, tobacco, and other goods are to be viewed, and the measures examined before any thing else is purchased; in order to this the Captain collects the puc ca tin ash awin which is a collection of a skin or two from each man to form a present for the Governor: As the ceremony of smoaking the Calimut is necessary to establish a confidence, it is conducted with the greatest solemnity. . . .

The Captain walks in with his calimut in his hand covered with a case, then comes the Lieutenant, and the wives of the Captain with the present, and afterwards all the other men with the women and their little ones. The Governor is generally dressed after the English fashion, & receives them with cordiality and good humour. The Captain covers the table with a new beaver coat, and on it lays the calimut or pipe, he will also sometimes present the Governor with a clean beaver toggy or banyan to keep him warm in the winter: the Puc ca tin ash a win is also presented. Then the Governor sits down in an arm chair, the Captain and chief men on either hand in chairs: the others sit around on the floor; the women and children are placed behind and a profound silence ensues.

The Calimut being lighted the Governor, a servant holding the bowl, and applying the fire; it is pointed towards the East; South, West, and North parts of the hemisphere, also to the Zenith and Nadir: every man takes a certain number of whiffs as fixed by the owner of the pipe, and thus it passes round the circle: when out, is delivered again to the Governor who repeats the manoeuvres as when he lighted it, at which all the men pronounce the monosyllable Ho! which is expressive of thanks. The women never touch the Calimut, but smook the common pipes as usual. A respectful silence again reigns for a few moments and then the Captain makes his speech in a low voice at first, but rises as he proceeds, his hands are placed on his knees, and head hung down; after he has ended, the Chief makes a reply; and then the measures for powder, shot, cloth, and tobacco are produced and examined, and thus ends the ceremony.

Baskets of bread and prunes are brought and distributed amongst them all, (men women and children) and then the whole company depart to their tents except the Captain and those men who are intending to purchase guns who remain behind to examine them which they are very curious about as indeed they ought; for the preservation of their families often depend on their goodness; having each made choice of one, a label is affixed, on which the person puts his mark. The tobacco is then examined as to the thickness of the role together with the moisture and blackness.

The Captains are frequently invited to breakfast or dinner with the Governor, and council; and at such times their discreet and pretty behaviour is very laudable: they are it is true very awkward, but it would be ungenerous to tax them with that as a fault which they never had an opportunity of amending.

Whilst any tribe or tent is trading their Captain is admitted into the trading room to satisfy them that every thing is measured fair and that they have their due; he frequently talks to them out of the window, receives the furr, and carries the goods in exchange now and then to show his familiarity, and consequence with the English: what a pity it is, that pride which makes him aspire to be thought great cannot deter him from actions which must degrade him even in the sight of those Europeans by whom he wishes to be respected; for while he walks about in the trading-room under the sanction of good faith and confidence he does not scruple to purloine a hatchet, knife, or other article; and if observed it is taken from him with a smile, and without the least expostulation at the time, or recrimination afterwards. Should the Governor come into the trading room he will cut off a foot or two of tobacco and put it into the Captain's pocket, at the same time shaking hands and talking familiarly with him as if he was as honest a man as ever breathed. These Captains with a confident or two are admitted into the factory to trade their goods, and they are the fonder of this distinction as it is not allowed to the others. The major part of the Indians are traded and gone in fourteen or sixteen days.

The Captain and several others are Doctors, and are taken singly with their wives into a room where they are given a red leather trunk with a few simple medicines such as the powder of sulphur, bark, liquorice, camphorated spirit, white ointment, and basilicon, with a bit of diachylon plaister; the use of every thing is explained, and the women are bid to remember, and indeed their memories are very tenacious: A picture is generally put up with the things for it is held in great reverence & thought to add to the efficacy of the remedies.

On these occasions the Captain receives parting presents, which consists of a new gun, two gallon rundlet of brandy, four fathom of brazile tobacco, cloth, smoke, sleeves, and stockings for the favourite wife, with beads and several other articles. The calimut is also presented, and its length of tobacco returned; after which it is laid up by the Governor if the Indian chuses; otherwise he takes it with him. Notwithstanding the kind treatment they meet with and the many indulgencies they are shewn yet there is no end to their craving; when they are going away they remind each other what to ask, and no sooner is one thing given but another is requested until they know not what more is wanted. Besides all this which belongs to the Captain only, there is a return to be made for the puc ca tin ash a win which though given as a present yet is only a mere form of kindness, because it is expected to be paid for, and as it belongs to the whole gang; brandy and tobacco being the articles returned for it, the Governor always greatly exceeds its value as a mark of his approbation of their conduct, and to encourage them to come down again next year. . . .

The Indians are used with the greatest kindness and familiarity, their wants supplied when in necessity, and neither provisions nor trading goods are spared on these occasions, and every method is used as far as prudence will admit to conciliate their affections.