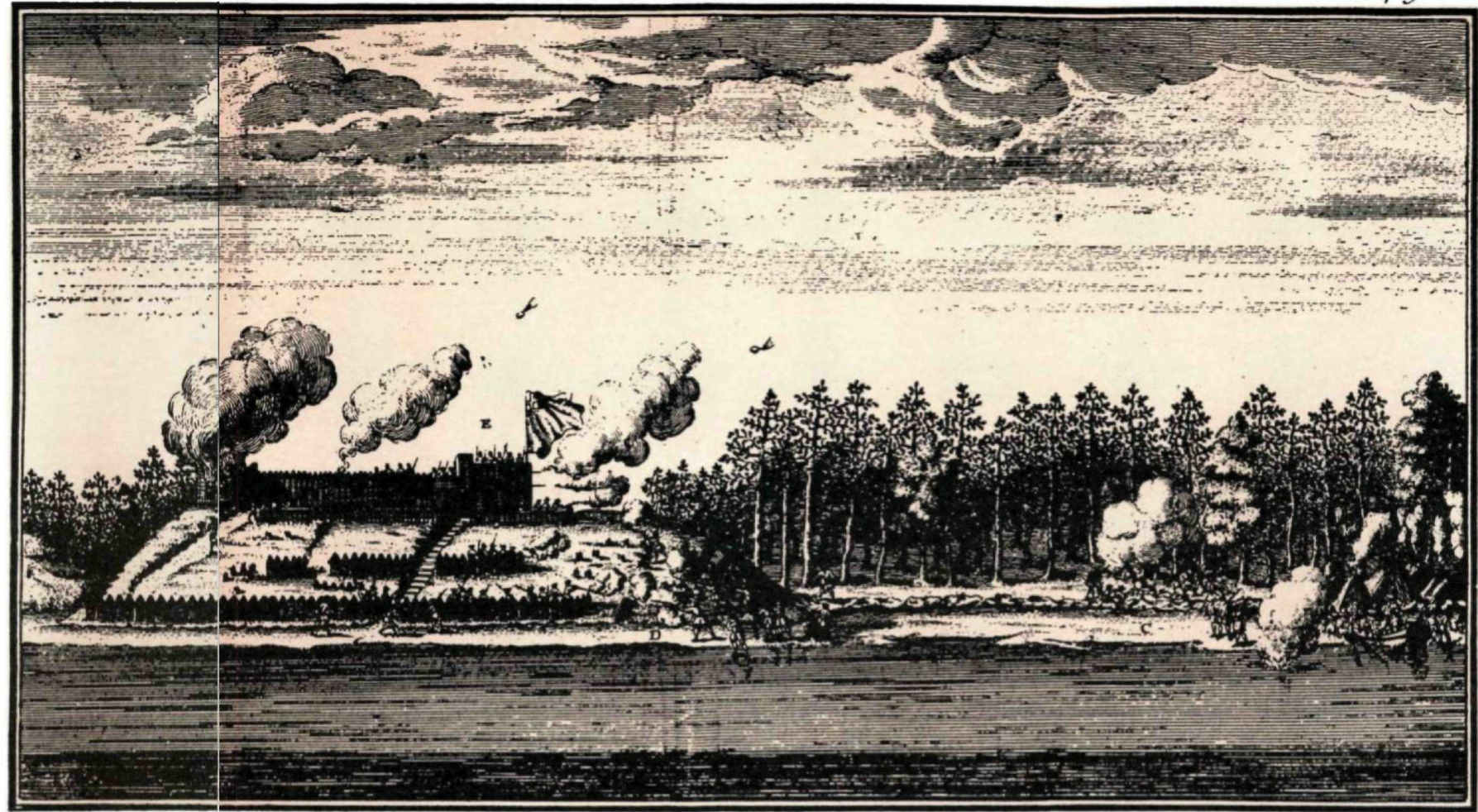


French bombardment of York Factory in 1697, from La Potherie's *Histoire de l'Amerique Septentrionale*. The bombs flying through the air are from the hidden mortar, C.



A Debarquement des Munitions de guerre et de Bouche. B Camp de Bowbon. C Mortier cache' dans le Bois. D Escarmouches. E Fort de Nelson.

The French on the Bay

BY GRACE LEE NUTE

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IN English history the period from 1683 to 1783 is sometimes called the Second Hundred Years' War. For the Hudson Bay area this is an apt characterization of those years, since war with the French began, though unofficially, in 1682-3 in that region, and continued intermittently until the end of the American Revolution. Profits from the fur trade and desire to get control of interior North America lay at the bottom of this French-English rivalry. Both a geographic and an economic empire were at stake.

In the three decades before 1683 two Frenchmen were largely responsible for exploring the Bay and founding trading posts there. Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, and his brother-in-law, Pierre Esprit Radisson, residents of Canada, were the first white men, apparently, to penetrate beyond Lake Superior and to learn of the wealth of furs to be secured there more easily and cheaply by way of Hudson Bay than by the Great Lakes canoe route. After reaching the Lake Superior region in the 1650s and learning much of American geography from the natives, they attempted in the early and middle 1660s to interest Canadian and French authorities in exploring the Hudson Bay route. In vain. The great era of French exploration under the aegis of Talon and Colbert was still to come.

When the two Frenchmen approached New Englanders, however, they were more successful, but adverse weather

and lack of proper seamanship prevented them from actually getting into the Bay. Finally, English commissioners of King Charles II interviewed Radisson and Des Groseilliers in New England, recognized their importance, and sent them to England to tell their story of great potential wealth and empire to the king and his court. Members of that court, duly impressed, organized a corporation, which in 1670 became the Hudson's Bay Company.

Meantime the London group of adventurers began a settlement on the eastern shore of the Bay in 1668 under the leadership of Des Groseilliers. Shortly other factories were established elsewhere on the Bay, at the mouths of rivers flowing from interior North America. Two of the streams were the Nelson and the Hayes rivers, which today drain a vast basin of inland Canada and the United States. They enter the Bay on the west coast, where they are divided only by a small spit of land. Here in 1670 Radisson and others tried in vain to establish a Hudson's Bay Company post. They did take formal possession of the region for the King of England, however, and in 1682 the Company began to build there a fort known as Port Nelson.

It stood on the north bank of the Nelson River below Flamborough Head. Unfortunately for the Company, others had anticipated its plans. Already in the summer of 1682 another post had been built farther upstream on

the Nelson. While Captain Zechariah Gillam was piloting the Company's *Prince Rupert* and the first governor of Port Nelson across the Atlantic, Gillam's son Benjamin of Massachusetts was entering the Bay and setting up a post on Gillam's Island. Likewise that same summer Radisson and Des Groseilliers, who had left the Company in 1675 and returned to France, established a French-Canadian post on the south bank of Hayes River, some fifteen miles upstream. Out of this situation began the first engagements of the Second Hundred Years War.

For the moment the French outwitted both the English and the New Englanders, changed the names of the rivers, seized and expelled the other two first-comer groups after destroying their forts, and departed leaving only Des Groseilliers' son, Jean-Baptiste Chouart, with eight or nine men to hold the area for the French. Not long after the departure of the French, however, an English vessel under John Abraham reached Port Nelson and re-established the Nelson River post. There he maintained Fort Hayes from 1683 to 1687, forcing young Chouart to go upstream and build his fort on Rainbow Island in the Hayes River.

In 1684 the Hudson's Bay Company ordered that there should be two posts at Port Nelson, one on the Nelson River and the other on the Hayes. Abraham's post seems

to have been at Walker's Point on the south side of the Nelson River. The Hayes River fort, later to be named York Fort, after the Company's governor, the Duke of York (subsequently King James II), is shown on a contemporary map on the north bank of the Hayes.

In 1684 Radisson returned to the employ of the Company and was sent at once to recover the area from his French nephew. This he accomplished with consummate skill, and departed for England leaving George Geyer building a new post for the Company. Radisson managed to slip by two French Canadian vessels on their way to provision his nephew's post. This relief expedition from Canada was under the command of Pierre La Martinière and carried as chaplain Father Antoine Silvy, who kept a journal of the trip. In it he writes of catching sight "of an English flag and some buildings on a high spot at a point . . . on our right," as he entered Hayes River.

La Martinière and his party remained that winter, after trying vainly to attack and take York Factory. He built a fort ("three houses and a fort . . . of logs . . . defended by two bastions and a salient angle") on the east side of French Creek, a small stream on the south side of Hayes River some three miles below Abraham's post. Most of the winter was passed uncomfortably by the French. The English meantime destroyed young Chouart's former post

on Rainbow Island, only to have their adversaries rebuild it in the spring of 1685. Later that year this post was abandoned and another built by the French on the south bank of the Hayes near Radisson's post of 1682, opposite Fishing Island. This the French themselves destroyed when they returned to Quebec after a highly successful trading season on the Hayes. On his way out of the Bay La Martinière captured the incoming Company ship, *Perpetuana Merchant*, but her sister ship, the *Happy Return*, escaped capture and reached York Factory safely.

In 1686 an overland military expedition was sent from Canada under the command of Chevalier de Troyes. One of his officers was the Sieur d'Iberville and another was Zacharie Robutel, Sieur de la Nouë. In succession all the Company forts except Port Nelson and its new outpost, New Severn, fell to the French. D'Iberville was left in charge of the captured posts when De Troyes returned to Quebec. In 1687 D'Iberville sailed for Quebec with a cargo of furs, leaving his brother, de Maricourt, in command.

These events led to negotiations between James II of England and Louis XIV of France, which resulted, in November, 1686, in a treaty of neutrality between the two powers. By its terms each sovereign was to retain all territories then in his possession until a commission should settle the conflicting claims of prior ownership in the Bay. Later negotiations in 1687 resulted in an agreement to maintain the *status quo* at least until January 1, 1689, and even later if the two kings so ordered.

During 1687 frantic efforts were made, especially by the French, to locate proof of their claims to prior discovery and occupation of the Bay. Claims and counterclaims were submitted to the commission by both sides, but before January 1, 1689 came, James II had fled England and William of Orange was in London. On May 17, 1689, William declared war on Louis XIV. The ensuing eight years of struggle are known in America as King William's War. Throughout it the French kept the forts at the Bottom of the Bay.

Despite the supposed neutrality of 1687-88 D'Iberville had been in France seeking royal support for a war of aggression in Hudson Bay. Securing it and reaching the Bay once more in 1688, he found two recently arrived English vessels, the *Churchill* and the *Young*, which he captured along with the *Huband*, another vessel then in the Company's local commerce.

That winter, while the English were once more building a fort on the Albany River, on an island a quarter of a league from the French post, the French maintained a guerrilla warfare and obtained a considerable quantity of furs, both on their own account and through capture of Company vessels and other repositories of its furs. One

of the vessels that they did not capture carried Jean Baptiste Chouart, returning to England for the last time from the Bay. Under contract with the Company for a four years' term of service he had returned to the Bay in 1685 and had probably been in the warehouse most of the time. However, we know from Company records that Radisson had sent him inland soon after his arrival to spend the winter, get acquainted with as many natives as possible, and induce them to bring their furs to the forts on the Bay the following year. Henry Kelsey has usually been called the first Company servant to be sent into the interior, but Chouart anticipated him by five years.

Despite French depredations the year 1688 seems to have been profitable for the Company. The *John and Thomas* and the *Dering* got into and out of the Bay safely. In 1689 the new king responded to the Company's pleas for assistance against the French by sending the man-of-war *Hampshire* to the Bay with the Company's *North West Fox* to retake Albany. D'Iberville outfoxed them, however, took both vessels, burned the *Fox*, and sailed for Quebec with his furs in the *Hampshire*.

In 1690 D'Iberville was back in the Bay with the *Ste. Anne*, *St. François*, and *Armes de la Compagnie*. He attacked York Fort, where George Geyer was governor, but was beaten off. An Indian boy saw his ships approaching New Severn, where Thomas Walsh was trader, and gave the alarm. Walsh escaped to the Hayes River fort after blowing up the New Severn post (then called Churchill Fort), and burning it. D'Iberville wintered at Albany. In the spring he went to France with his furs. Meantime Henry Kelsey went up into the interior for the Company and spent two profitable years in the Assiniboine country. The Company in London was so prosperous at this time that it trebled its stock and declared a twenty-five per cent dividend.

Radisson remained in the Bay until 1687, but his life there was far from pleasant. Refugees from the captured English posts, given asylum at the three remaining posts, caused him endless trouble. In 1687 he returned to England "a close prisoner" in one of the Company ships. The malcontents' charges against him were not taken very seriously by Company officials, apparently, for he was naturalized at this time at Company expense and given an addition of fifty pounds per annum to his "salary or pension." The French, on the other hand, put a price on his head. Therefore he doubtless showed good judgment in remaining the rest of his life in London, where he died in 1710. Some of his last years were spent in the employ of the Company.

While King William's War was being waged, the English company determined to make the most of it and regain

control of the Bay. In 1691-2 James Knight was sent as "Governor and Commander in Chief" with four ships, 213 men, 82 guns, and supplies for almost two years. Three of the vessels were frigates. The fourth was a fire ship. In 1693 Knight swept the French from the Bay and paraded his French prisoners in London.

His glory was short lived. In 1694 D'Iberville returned with the *Poli* and the *Salamandre*. Aboard one of the vessels was Father Gabriel Marest, who wrote a long letter describing what occurred on his journey. It also permits us to observe what went on in the Bay that season. Shortly after arrival, with one ship in the Nelson and the other in the Hayes above York Factory, the French compelled that post to surrender on October 4, and renamed it Fort Bourbon. Its furs for the year had already been sent to England. In the fighting D'Iberville lost a beloved younger brother, the Sieur de Châteauguay. Accounts of these events and others include an interesting narrative by Henry Kelsey. Later the Company laid charges against the French of cruel and inhuman treatment of their English captives.

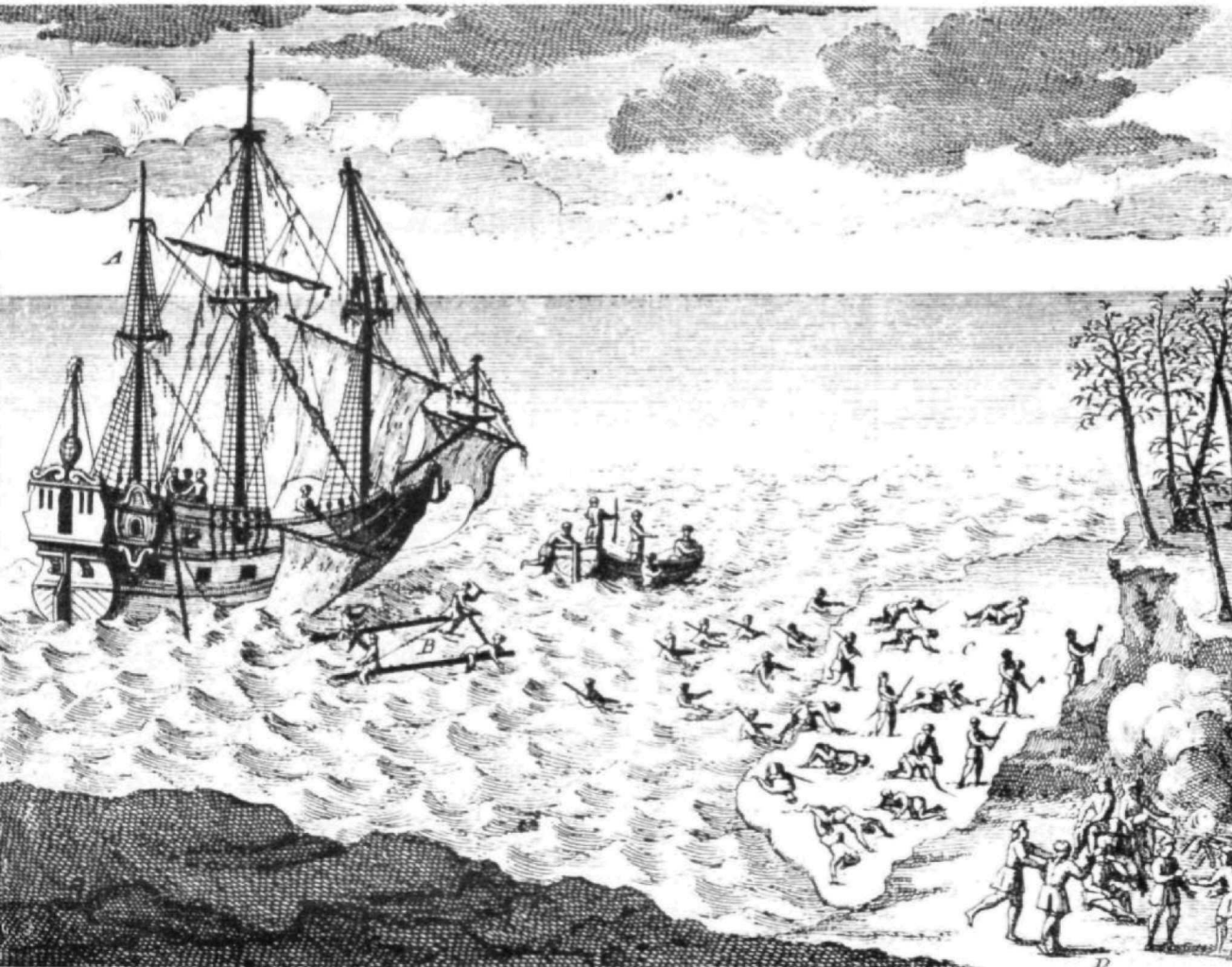
Back and forth surged the fortunes of war. In 1696 the British government sent two warships and three frig-

ates of the Company under Knight to recapture York and take supplies to Albany. On August 31 the French surrendered the fort without bloodshed. Among the captives taken to England was Nicolas Jérémie, who later published an account of both this capture of the fort and the French recapture of it in 1697. In the latter action D'Iberville, as usual, was in command.

He had been plundering in Newfoundland, when he was ordered to return to Hudson Bay in the *Pelican* accompanied by three other ships. Two days after reaching the mouth of the Nelson in September 1697, he was waiting for the rest of the squadron to arrive, when he saw three ships bearing down on him. They proved to be three British ships, H.M.S. *Hampshire* and two Company vessels, *Dering* and *Royal Hudson's Bay*. D'Iberville at once attacked, sank the *Hampshire* with 290 men, captured the *Royal Hudson's Bay* and made the *Dering* flee. Later in London the mate of the captured frigate gave a deposition before the Lords of the Admiralty:

"Capt. Fletcher (who Comanded the *Hampshire*)" he was reported to have said, "was a brave man, and Just before he gave his last broad Side, called to the said Monsr. D'Brevile, bidding him Strike, which he refusing to do,

D'Iberville's ship "Pelican" wrecked off the mouth of the Nelson (actually five miles from land.) B is a raft for saving the wounded. C is a snowbank. From La Potherie.



Capt. Fletcher took a Glass and drank to him, telling him, he should dine with him immediately; Upon which the said French Capt. Pledged him in another Glass, And there upon his Men Fired a Volley of Small Shott upon the Hampshire which was returned with a like Volley to the French man; And after that the said Capt. Fletcher was not Seen; So that it was Supposed the said Capt. Fletcher was then killed."

Three days later the *Pelican* and her prize, the *Royal Hudson's Bay*, were driven ashore and wrecked. Many of the French ship's crew were drowned. Meantime the *Dering* escaped to the mouth of the Nelson River.

The next day three more French ships arrived and the fort was taken. The *Dering* was allowed to take the English survivors to England. Again Kelsey and Jérémie give accounts, Kelsey from the interior of the fort, Jérémie from one of the newly arrived French vessels. The best account, however, is to be found in Bacqueville de La Potherie's book, *The History of North America*. This author was aboard the *Pelican* as commissary of the fleet. From his detailed version one catches the indomitable spirit of both contestants in this, the greatest arctic sea battle in North American history.

The war ended that year with the signing of the Treaty of Ryswick by England and France, which provided that each nation should occupy the territory possessed at the time of the signing of the treaty. This meant French possession of York Factory and English possession of Albany.

From 1697 until the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 French influence was paramount in the Bay, but the English navy was usually able to prevent French ships from getting into and out of Hudson Strait. The War of the Spanish Succession, known in America as Queen Anne's War, was being waged from 1702 to 1713, with final glorious victories for John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, the erstwhile governor of the Hudson's Bay Company and Radisson's protector.

During the French occupation of York, Fort Phéliepeaux on the southeast side of Hayes River above Ten Shilling Creek was built close to La Martinière's house of 1683. Indians attacked and sacked this fort in 1712 after killing seven of the French garrison. For this obscure period in the history of York Factory we are dependent largely on Jérémie's account, which has been published in English as *Twenty Years of York Factory*. From 1690 to 1718 no dividend was declared by the Hudson's Bay Company.

During the French occupation the post was known as Fort Bourbon. Jérémie was interpreter at first, and Serigny, Flamanville, and Delisle seem to have had short terms as governors. In 1707 Jérémie had leave to go to France, but no sooner had he arrived there than he was ordered back

to take command of Fort Bourbon. Contrary winds delayed the arrival of himself and a new contingent of soldiers, so that his predecessor in office, Delisle, and the former garrison had to winter at the fort. Lack of food and ammunition made it a season of distress and discomfort. Delisle died at the fort from an attack of asthma.

By the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht the Bay and its trade were given back wholly to the English. Governor Knight, with Kelsey as deputy, arrived in the *Union* in 1714 to take over York Factory from the French. When the vessel returned to England that autumn, the French garrison was on board. From that season, 1714-15, York Fort journals have been kept. An entry in Henry Kelsey's journal for 1719 shows that the French, deprived of their best entry to the fur country through the Bay, had already gone back to their former Lake Superior canoe route and were even pressing beyond that great inland sea. On June 12 and 13 of that year Kelsey refers to a French post on Rainy Lake. This was undoubtedly La Noue's Fort Tecamamiouen, about whose very existence there has been serious doubt until this journal was recently examined.

There was little, if any, French activity in and around Hudson Bay from 1714 until almost the close of the American Revolution, though careful preparations for a possible surprise attack during the third of the French and Indian wars were ordered from London on May 10, 1744. Nothing happened and the fort continued its normal routine until France became the ally of the new United States during the Revolution. By that time a new post of the same name as Knight's former station at Churchill had been built, supposedly one of the strongest on the continent. Prince of Wales's Fort was begun in 1732 and was in the process of building until 1771 or thereabouts. It was a stone fortress of European design and was believed impregnable.

How mistaken the Company was in relying on its strength is revealed by events of 1782, when Jean François Galaup, Comte de la Pérouse, commanding a French naval expedition of three vessels, landed between three and four hundred men and took the fort without a shot being fired. Samuel Hearne was in command of the fort, but could muster only thirty-nine men when attacked. The French carried off or destroyed the Company's property, burned the buildings inside the fort, and attempted unsuccessfully to demolish the ramparts. Then they departed to capture York Factory a few days later. A French eyewitness' diary of the taking of York describes it as "made of wood, defended by a battery of fourteen 22-pounders." Four bastions are mentioned as "simply store houses in which were kept their skins and bales of colored cloth and a great many muskets."

The title page of a rare pamphlet issued by the HBC and addressed to Queen Anne, outlining the activities of the English and French on Hudson Bay up to 1689. By courtesy of the James F. Bell Colln., University of Minnesota.

THE
 Right of the Crown
 OF
GREAT BRITAIN
 TO
Hudsons Bay and Streights,
 in North-America, Asserted: And
 some Account of the Violences
 Committed by the French, upon
 the English there in time of Peace.

This fort was taken by Frenchmen hacking their way overland on a compass bearing across the spit of land separating Hayes River, on which York Fort was located, from Nelson River, where their vessels were anchored. This course, rather than an assault from the water, was taken to avoid the batteries by the Hayes. Mortars, cannon, and provisions for eight days were carried thus by two hundred and fifty men through the bush, and York capitulated. Its livestock was slaughtered, stores were pillaged, and a general conflagration was produced. La Perouse with his prisoners and booty set sail on September 1, 1782.

Meantime a great store of furs, gathered by Company men at York, was feverishly piled into the *King George*, lying in the Hayes River. Though La Pérouse sent the *Astrée* around the spit to capture this prize, the ship ran into heavy fog, and when she finally got into the Hayes on August 25, the English vessel was well out in the Bay on her way to London.

With the Peace of Paris in 1783 the war ended and reconstruction could begin in the Bay. Churchill was re-established, but Prince of Wales's Fort was never reoccupied. Its melancholy shell can be seen to this day across the harbor from the elevator of the port of Churchill, where the Hudson Bay Railway terminates.

For a century and three quarters peace has prevailed in the Bay. No French troops have emerged out of Canadian forests and bush to seize Company forts; no French ensigns streaming from warships have appeared to announce assaults on York, Albany, New Severn, or Churchill. The exciting days of the Second Hundred Years War are gone forever. There will be no York Fort henceforth, but not because of enemy action. ♦

Part of Robson's chart of the mouths of the twin rivers in the 1740s, showing the locations of various places mentioned in this account.

