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Prior to amalgamation in 1821, the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company fought for economic supremacy in the fur trade. Metis and First Nations often found themselves in the middle of this rivalry. The establishment of the Red River settlement by Lord Selkirk in 1812 and the arrival of white settlers exacerbated tensions and placed pressure on resources. Policies, especially the Pemmican Proclamation in 1814, encroached on the independence and livelihood of the Metis and First Nations people, but such infringements were not passively accepted.

Speech of the Grandes Oreilles a Great Chief of the Chippaways made in this Indian Hall at the Forks of the Red River on the 19th of June 1814, and addressed to several Partners of The North West Company—

The Chief holding in his Hands a string of Wampum tied at both ends proceeded as follows.—

“Traders! My Children! When I first heard of the troubles you were in at this place my heart became [...] and the tears ran down my cheeks—I found however there was no time to indulge in grief—no time to be lost—Our Traders—Our Friends—The Protectors of our Children—were surrounded with dangers—I gave the call of war—and you see before you proofs that my voice is not [...] in vain—my Young men have listened to it.”—

“I find that you as well as the Indians are [...] with difficulties and dangers—We are placed as if all were encircled within the ring of beads which I hold in my Hands.”

“We have the Sioux to oppose from above and now it appears you have to contend with Land-Workers from below—Who are they—these Land Workers?—What brought them here? Who gave them our Lands—and how dare they to prevent our Traders from purchasing whatever we have to give them upon our own Lands? But it would appear that these strangers—these Makers of Gardens—look upon themselves as the Real Possessors of these Lands—and presuming on this extraordinary Right would wish to prevent you from returning here by depriving you of your Stock of Provisions Traded on this River—in hopes thereby to drive you from the Country—and make Slaves of the Indians—when deprived of their friends and protectors—as for them we can never look on them as such.”

“Last summer I was called upon by you to go with my Young Men to Fort-Williams in order to give assistance against the Americans—I listened to the call and proceeded toward your Great-Lodge—but when we reached it—I found our assistance was not required. I however left my War-Club in the Hall in case I might again be called upon—I could not then have thought that I should ever have occasion for my club to [...] against the Whites on these Lands—and white People [...] coming from the same Lands with yourselves and all of you [...] will [...] the Indians obeying the same Great Father!”

“But we see that these Land-Workers are unreasonable—that they are determined to impose upon us—and upon you—we are therefore equally determined to break down whatever Barriers they may set up against us—or against you.— Methinks I regret my War-Club is at a distance but I can easily find a substitute for it—I am now an old man—I do not value life—I am therefore come resolved to die between the two Hostile Parties—my young men are equally

determined with myself—It is our wish—it is our Interest—to pressure you at the risk of our lives—for if you leave us—who amongst us will have pity on our women and children”.—

“You say however—that you have come to an understanding with these people—I am glad of it—I thank the Masters of Life that my string of Beads will not be stained with the blood of Whites residing on these Lands—I should always wish to see you at Peace—I would love you all and if possible—but my Heart and my Life are at the service of those who have charge of the Bones of my Fathers and of my Brothers—if you cannot live in Peace—and that those Land-workers will not allow you to trade with us as usual—they shall be destroyed or driven from the Assiniboine River.”—

“To conclude what I had to say—I already see a great change—when we were accustomed to encamp [...] the Forts of your Traders in this River—My Children used to be fed with Pounded Meat and Grease—but this Spring Hunger & Starvation forced us to leave the Fort much sooner than intended for my wish was to remain till the Black-Clouds which appeared hovering over the Fort were dispelled—some of you my Children, thought then perhaps that I wished to get out of the way—but no—I had no such intention—seeing that you had not a mouthful of Provisions even for your young men—I was forced to go and seek something for my Children—It was not the sound of bad birds that drove me away—My readiness in appearing here to support your cause ought to be a proof of my attachment to my Traders and to my Children!”

“These are my words—and I have not two Mouthes!”

- (1) Fort-Williams is the Head-Quarters or place of Rendez-vous of The North-West-Company—It is situated on Lake Superior Lat: 48° 30° N. and Long: 89° 30° W.—
- (2) The Bones of Netam, the Great Chief and Father of the Speaker are preserved on a Scaffold at Fort-William—and his Brother’s Bones in the same manner at Lac-la-pluis—There is always a Flag placed over them by the Company as a mark of distinction and respect for the memory of the dead Chief.—