

# “I Have Embraced the White Man’s Religion”: The Relations Between the Peguis Band and the Church Missionary Society, 1820–1838

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As part of a large evangelical project to bring the word of God to every corner of the world, agents from the Church Missionary Society came to the Red River valley of present-day Manitoba in 1820 to serve the settlement community and to convert natives to Anglicanism. They met a group of Ojibwa under the leadership of Peguis, who had been hunting, fishing and farming in the area for roughly 30 years. The missionaries agreed to provide the Ojibwa with European goods on the condition that the band implement aspects of missionary civilization and evangelization programs, which required that they live in houses, practise European-style farming and send their children to school. The missionaries also expected they would adhere to Christian values, such as monogamy and temperance, and embrace Christian religious beliefs, attend prayer meetings and church service, and be baptised.<sup>1</sup> The Peguis band regarded the missionaries as a new source of European goods and spiritual power. The relationship between the two groups was fraught with misunderstanding and tension, but it eventually led to the formation of a native community where European-style farming and the Anglican religion were practised.

This paper will trace the turbulent development of the relationship from 1820, when the first missionary came to the Red River, to 1838, the year Chief Peguis was baptised and officially declared his support of the Church Missionary Society. John West, the first Anglican missionary to the Red River valley, established the initial pact of friendship with the Ojibwa in the early 1820s. David Jones, who replaced West, maintained

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Stock, *The history of the Church Missionary Society: its environment, its men and its work* (London, 1899), and T. C. B. Boon, *The Anglican Church from the Bay to the Rockies* (Toronto, 1962), describe the activities of Church Missionary Society agents in Rupert’s Land, while J. E. Foster, “Program for the Red River Mission: the Anglican clergy, 1820–26”, *Social History / Histoire sociale* 4 (1969), 40–75, describes the missionaries’ civilization and evangelization programs.

a tenuous alliance with the band. William Cockran, who arrived in 1825, initiated a closer relationship with the band in the early 1830s, which led to the formation of the native settlement.<sup>2</sup>

The nature and effects of the relationship between missionaries and natives has been widely debated by historians. Some, such as Robin Fisher, argue that missionaries were the most destructive group of whites in North America because they deliberately set out to change native culture and religion. Others, such as John Webster Grant, have looked beyond missionaries as a homogenous block, and explored the wide range of policies and experience in their conversion efforts among natives, arguing that many missionaries brought aid and enlightenment to native communities, in addition to disease and destruction.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries' writings reveal that in the Red River valley the civilization and evangelization programs were problematic ideals, as each man had to reconcile his interpretation of the missionary program with the situation he faced in the Red River valley. Personality and individual relationships, as well as conversions, determined the missionaries' ideas of their own success with the Ojibwa.

Native reaction to missionaries and the nature of conversion has also been subject to wide-ranging interpretations. Some historians, such as Kerry Abel, found that missionaries had a minimal impact on native culture, inspiring syncretic and prophet movements more than gaining converts. Others have shown how natives used missionaries to their own advantage, as an access to European goods and political power among whites.<sup>4</sup> Some natives converted on their own terms, maintaining elements of native spirituality and creating an indigenous Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> The settlement eventually became St. Peter's parish, well known as the first Christian native settlement in western Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Fisher, *Contact and conflict: Indian-European relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver, 1977), 119-145; John Webster Grant, *Moon of wintertime: missionaries and the Indians of Canada in encounter since 1534* (Toronto, 1984). David A. Nock, *A Victorian missionary and Canadian Indian policy: cultural synthesis vs cultural replacement* (Waterloo, 1988), 33-34, describes the range of beliefs and policies held by missionaries, and demonstrates the complexity and ambivalence of missionaries in their dealings with and ideas about natives.

<sup>4</sup> Kerry Abel, *Drum songs, glimpses of Dene history* (Montreal, 1993), 113-144; Clarence R. Bolt, "The conversion of the Port Simpson Tsimshian: Indian control or missionary manipulation?", *Out of the background: readings on Canadian native history*, ed. by Robin Fisher and Kenneth Coates (Toronto, 1988), 219-235.



Many historians have difficulty reconciling their affirmation of the strength of native religion and their late 20th-century bias towards secularism with the sheer number of recorded baptisms and the long history of Christian practice within many native communities. What has not been explored are the many instances of partnership between natives and missionaries and the complexities of their relationships. Current debates often focus on materialism, without considering spiritual dynamics.<sup>5</sup>

The Peguis band is characterised as a group of "good Indians" in the popular culture and history of Manitoba. Monuments in the province's parks praise Chief Peguis as a steady friend of the Selkirk settlers and one of the first native converts to Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the relationship between the Peguis band and the Church Missionary Society in the Red River valley has been portrayed as positive and successful by both white and native scholars. Rev. T. C. B. Boon and Michael Czuboka portrayed the development of the first Christian native settlement in western Canada as rescuing natives from poverty and misery.<sup>7</sup> Chief Albert Edward Thompson praised Chief Peguis for his wisdom in pursuing a friendship with whites and leading his band to prosperity and civilization.<sup>8</sup> These writers have overlooked the difficulty, uncertainty and misunderstanding which imbued the friendship between the missionaries and the Peguis band. Laura Peers explains the relationship between the Ojibwa and the

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Kugel's examination of the relationship between Ojibwa and missionaries at Fond du Lac, "Of missionaries and their cattle: Ojibwa perceptions of a missionary as evil shaman", *Ethnohistory* 41 (1994), 227-244, provides an example of how a spiritual framework dominated Ojibwa perceptions of the missionaries.

<sup>6</sup> The statue of Chief Peguis clutching a Bible, erected in Kildonan Park in 1923 under the auspices of the Lord Selkirk's Association of Rupert's Land, praises Peguis as a "steady friend" of the Selkirk settlement, a devout Christian worshipper, and one of the first converts of "his race". In 1924 the Association sponsored Peguis's headstone in the graveyard of St. Peter's Church "in grateful recognition of his good offices to the early settlers". A pamphlet on Chief Peguis published by the Manitoba Department of Cultural Affairs and Historic Resources in 1982 emphasizes the great friendship between the Peguis band and whites, and historic plaques at Netley Creek and St. Peter's Church echo the image of Peguis as Friend of the Selkirk settlers and a devout Christian.

<sup>7</sup> T. C. B. Boon, "St. Peter's Dynevour: the original Indian settlement of western Canada", *Transactions of the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba*, ser. III, 9 (1954), 16-32; Michael Peter Czuboka, "St. Peter's: a historical study with anthropological observations on the Christian aborigines of the Red River", M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba (1960).

<sup>8</sup> Chief Albert Edward Thompson, *Chief Peguis and his descendants* (Winnipeg, 1973).

agents of the Church Missionary Society in materialist terms, characterizing it as mutually beneficial. Christian charity had been an exploitable resource for the Ojibwa since the arrival of the first Anglican missionary at Red River in 1820. Peers believes that the Ojibwa generally paid no heed to the missionaries' demands in the 1820s and 1830s, and only accepted the missionaries' agricultural program when they thought it a necessary concession to maintain a diplomatic relationship and retain access to prestige and material goods.<sup>9</sup>

Research for this paper is based on an analysis of the journals and letters written by the missionaries for the records of the Church Missionary Society. Though an imperfect source for writing the history of contact between two cultures, these records do provide a basic outline of relations between the Ojibwa and the missionaries and sometimes inadvertently provide an insight into Ojibwa culture. Cockran's habit of recording Peguis's speeches almost verbatim is valuable, though Ojibwa speech reached Cockran's ears through an interpreter, a fact seldom mentioned in any of the missionaries' writings. Another remarkable absence in the writings of the missionaries is women. Although they occasionally mentioned the activities of native women, they did not directly comment on the status or roles of Ojibwa women, nor did they comment on gender divisions in farming and conversion. Jones and Cockran were also silent about their own wives, although I suspect that they played an important role in their husbands' efforts to establish a native Christian community. Of the three missionaries, only Cockran came close to treating his journal as a daily log, providing a more detailed account of occurrences. Jones complained that keeping a journal was a nuisance because his activities were mundane.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, West romanticized his activities in his colourful and probably embellished

<sup>9</sup> Laura L. Peers, "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, chief: Saulteaux in the Red River Settlement, 1812-1833", *Papers of the 18th Algonquian Conference* (1987), 261-270, "An ethnohistory of the western Ojibwa, 1780-1830", M.A. thesis, University of Winnipeg (1987), and *The Ojibwa of western Canada, 1780-1870* (Winnipeg, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Church Missionary Society Archives (CMSA) C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones to the CMS Secretaries, 17 August 1835, 60. Also see CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones to the CMS Secretaries, 21 July 1826, 204. The CMSA records are available on microfilm at the Anglican Church Archives in Toronto, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba in Winnipeg, and the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa.



narrative. Despite the variety in style, biases and absences, much information can be gleaned from the journals and letters of these men.<sup>11</sup>

#### DIPLOMACY, 1820–32

The early years of the relationship between the missionaries and the Peguis band were characterized by suspicion and distance, as each group tried to convey their expectations of “friendship” and alliance. Throughout the 1820s all Red River valley inhabitants, including the Peguis band, had suffered from buffalo scarcity, poor crops, fire and flood. As other resources became depleted, the Ojibwa looked to the missionaries as an alternative source of European goods.<sup>12</sup> They initiated a relationship of gift and cultural exchange, by providing food and conducting pipe ceremonies. After supplying European settlers and West with dried sturgeon, Peguis expected that his goodwill and generosity toward the missionaries would be reciprocated.<sup>13</sup> In Ojibwa society, gift exchange was practised in all social relationships from the most intimate of the immediate family to the more public spheres. Structured in kinship terms, gift giving formally affirmed relationships of mutual trust and respect between people.<sup>14</sup> During the winter of 1823, parts of Peguis’s hunting grounds had been burned and he had had difficulty securing food. Peguis and another Ojibwa visited West, expecting to be treated as guests and to be granted provisions. West provided them with wild rice and potatoes on the promise that they would move to another hunting ground

<sup>11</sup> For examples of the layered contexts and meanings emerging in manuscript and published portrayals of the New World, see Ian S. MacLaren, “Exploration/travel literature and the evolution of the author”, *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 5 (1992), 39–68, and “Wanderings among fur traders, reliability among documents: Paul Kane and others” (1992).

<sup>12</sup> Peers, *The Ojibwa of western Canada* (1994), 130–1.

<sup>13</sup> John West, *The substance of a journal during a residence at the Red River colony* (London, 1824), 67–68.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce M. White, “‘Give us a little milk’: the social and cultural meanings of gift giving in the Lake Superior fur trade”, *Minnesota History* 48(2) (1982), 61–62; Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991), 129. Misunderstood behaviour included ritual gift giving and expressions of starvation. The Ojibwa also had a variety of meanings for “starving”, such as greeting and joking: Mary Black-Rogers, “Varieties of ‘starving’: semantics and survival in the subarctic fur trade, 1750–1850”, *Ethnohistory* (1986), 354. By analyzing terms used by European recorders in different contexts one may better understand native concepts and interactional routines in contact situations.

the next day.<sup>15</sup> The missionaries responded by providing what they considered Christian charity while complaining of the Ojibwa's "indolence".<sup>16</sup> The lack of communication and understanding in Ojibwa-missionary meetings was evident from the start as West resented giving Peguis and his companions the presents of food which they demanded. West doubted the sincerity of their hunting efforts, believing that they were not "starving" in the European definition, and thus not deserving of "aid", and he resented their attitude of expecting to be given anything they desired.<sup>17</sup> Peguis believed that gift and cultural exchange secured friendship between two parties, and was perhaps hasty in expecting the missionaries to enter into a friendship of sharing and reciprocity, as he did not acknowledge European concepts of private property and individual ownership.

Another sign of friendship employed by Peguis when he visited missionaries was the pipe ceremony.<sup>18</sup> Pipe ceremonies have been described as an essential part of any diplomatic conference, symbolizing the end of conflict and the beginning of peace. This ceremony was performed before the deliberations at a conference to "induce temperance in speech and wisdom in decision". The smoking and offering of tobacco was a holy and reverent acknowledgement and appeasement of spirits.<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that Peguis considered his visits with West important and treated the occasions with honour.

<sup>15</sup> West, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 114-5.

<sup>16</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, West's journal from 10 June 1821 to 24 October 1823, 42, 25. A parallel can be made with Paul Thistle's assertion in *Indian-European trade relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River region to 1849* (Winnipeg, 1986), 48, that European perceptions of Cree "indolence" illustrate Europeans' inability to appreciate the Cree world view centred on what Thistle calls the "Zen way to affluence".

<sup>17</sup> West, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 115. Peers, *The Ojibwa of western Canada* (1994), 132, calls the misunderstandings "cross-cultural 'static'".

<sup>18</sup> A visit on 4 January 1823 began with smoking the calumet. After lighting the pipe, Peguis's *aide de camp* pointed the stem to the heavens and then to the earth, offering the first smoke to the *Master of Life*. West, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 114-5.

<sup>19</sup> Basil Johnston, *Ojibwa ceremonies* (Toronto, 1982), 160, 33. Christopher Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa religion and its historical changes* (Philadelphia, 1983), 108, and Michael Angel, "The Ojibwa-missionary encounter at the Rainy Lake Mission, 1839-57", M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba (1986), 47, have noted that Ojibwa believe that Nanabozho created tobacco for humans so that they could offer it to spirits. White, "Give us a little milk" (1982), 63, cites evidence for the holiness of tobacco and equates smoking with praying among the Ojibwa.



From the start, the missionaries badgered the Ojibwa to change their lifestyle. They initially focussed their attention on children, and built a school to educate Ojibwa boys in agriculture and the word of God.<sup>20</sup> The Ojibwa resisted missionary efforts to impose rules on their behaviour. Peguis was openly sceptical of the missionaries' program, questioning their long term plans for the children's education. He criticized the apparent contradiction between the Christian rule of monogamy and the polygamy practiced by several "Christian" settlers.<sup>21</sup>

The missionaries and the Peguis band continued their diplomatic manoeuvring throughout the 1820s. On 22 May 1824 the band demanded seed for wheat; they had been cultivating corn and potatoes since the early 1800s and were willing to grow wheat.<sup>22</sup> The band felt entitled to the supplies because of their friendship with Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company, and approached Jones in a formal procession: Peguis wore a uniform given to him by Lord Selkirk, and as they proceeded up the river chanting and drumming, their 30 canoes were headed by a flag given to the band by the Hudson's Bay Company. Instead of commending their motivation and seizing the opportunity to begin a program of civilization with the Ojibwa, Jones commented on their ridiculous and degrading appearance and delayed supplying the wheat.<sup>23</sup>

Both groups resorted to threats and intimidation in their attempts to gain power. Jones felt that natives could never be properly civilized because they did not act in accordance with his immediate agenda of educating their children. The missionaries were generally annoyed because few Ojibwa sent their children to school, and they tried to prevent the

<sup>20</sup> West, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 117–8.

<sup>21</sup> West, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 103–4; CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, West's journal 1821–23, 38, 42; Jones's journal from 3 July 1825 to 12 June 1826, 189–208.

<sup>22</sup> According to Peers, "An ethnohistory of the western Ojibwa" (1987), 103, 134–5, the gardens at Netley Creek had been abandoned in 1813 because of European pressures to trap more furs and because of continuing bad weather from 1812 to 1819. However, Ojibwa gardening continued throughout the 1820s. West acknowledged Ojibwa agriculture as a "valuable dawn of true civilization" and pledged to support it; CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, West's journal 1821–23, 47. However, West also believed that Ojibwa men considered tilling the ground to be beneath their dignity, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 151.

<sup>23</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Jones's journal 1823–24, 105.

Ojibwa from withdrawing their children without missionary approval.<sup>24</sup> The Ojibwa responded with threats of "bad medicine", tried to impress and intimidate the missionaries with scalps as evidence of their prowess in war and their spiritual power, and criticized the missionaries for their poor potential as hunters and warriors. The Ojibwa also played Anglicans against Catholics, vying for better terms of gift exchange.<sup>25</sup>

The Ojibwa had developed a deep mistrust of Europeans based on their experience with fur traders and settlers. Peguis voiced the discontent of the band in his scepticism toward missionary promises and his grievances concerning native land and resources:

...since you White people have got our lands we are very poor; before that we had plenty — our woods were full of game — our creeks full of Beaver — our rivers full of fish, and we always conquered our enemies; but now the White People promise much and give nothing.<sup>26</sup>

He reminded the missionaries that Ojibwa had never harmed Europeans as Europeans had harmed the Ojibwa.<sup>27</sup>

Ojibwa mistrust of whites, their discontent over resource competition with the settlers and Company, and the misunderstanding between the band and the missionaries were partially overcome during the 1830s, when the relationship between the missionaries and the Ojibwa grew closer, partly because of the mutual respect and admiration which slowly grew between Cockran and Peguis. The first time Cockran mentioned Peguis in his journal, in October 1828, neither was impressed with the other and they resisted each other's demands for generosity and cooperation. Yet Peguis and Cockran slowly grew to respect one another as each made an effort to understand the other's needs. Cockran helped to diffuse the negative reaction of the Peguis band to the missionaries by his persistent efforts to establish a native settlement. He also managed to convince some members of the band that his benevolent intentions were sincere.

Cockran presented a plan to Peguis in October 1831 for establishing

<sup>24</sup> West, *Substance of a journal* (1824), 118–9, 142–3.

<sup>25</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Jones's journal 1824–25, 156–57; Jones's journal 1823–24, 105, 157; and Jones's journal 1825–26, 191.

<sup>26</sup> During Peguis's first formal visit to Jones and after Jones expressed the benevolent intentions of the Church Missionary Society, Peguis listed his grievances against whites: CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Jones's journal 1823–24, 90–91.

<sup>27</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Jones's journal 1823–24, 105, 157.



European-style farms and houses at Netley Creek.<sup>28</sup> In it he promised to assist families who wished to “cultivate the ground, to raise a little wheat, barley, potatoes and Indian corn” by furnishing hoes, a plough, and a pair of oxen. Cockran limited assistance to those who complied with his directives; he promised to provide seed to those who weeded and hoed and did not harvest too early. Cockran offered to help build houses and dig winter cellars in hopes that the Ojibwa would store enough food to feed their families over the winter, freeing the men to hunt for furs rather than provisions. He also promised to provide fishing nets and repair them when needed. He offered his oxen to haul fish, as long as they were used responsibly. Finally, he hoped to build a grist mill for the native settlement.<sup>29</sup>

Threats, taunting and stalling tactics surrounded the intense negotiations over the terms of the plan. Cockran withheld the agricultural supplies desired by the Ojibwa until they consented to following his directions. Peguis responded with caution to Cockran’s grand proposal, reminding Cockran of the dishonesty most Europeans had thus far shown his band. Cockran acknowledged Peguis’s grievances, but reminded Peguis of his honesty, and tried to impress Peguis with his wealth and power by giving Peguis a tour of the interior of the Anglican church and of the first pillar of a grist mill under construction.<sup>30</sup>

Peguis’s consent in spring 1832 involved material and spiritual considerations. The band wanted to secure a source of European goods, and to further their agricultural operations. Peguis was losing his competence in hunting as he aged, and was more than happy to utilize a less taxing resource. Cockran assured Peguis that he respected “the honest and peaceable manner in which he had conducted himself since my residence in the settlement” and “his humanity towards the first settlers”. Cockran promised to work towards improving the welfare of Peguis and his lands as long as he “continued to enjoy health”.<sup>31</sup> As

<sup>28</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Jones’s journal 1823–24, 459.

<sup>29</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran’s journal from September 1831 to August 1832, 459–460.

<sup>30</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran’s journal 1831–32, 460–1.

<sup>31</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran’s journal 1831–32, 461, 466.

well, band members were interested in increasing their spiritual power through an alliance with the missionaries.

Agreeing to the terms of the plans involved a verbal sparring-match in which both groups tried to impose obligations on the other and at the same time limit their own obligations. Peguis complained that avaricious white settlers in the valley had depleted fish, buffalo and game resources, leaving nothing for the Ojibwa.<sup>32</sup> Cockran complained that Peguis suspected all Europeans of wishing to force the Ojibwa to produce more skins for the benefit of the Europeans, to make slaves of Ojibwa children, and to exploit Ojibwa resources.<sup>33</sup> Cockran wanted to build a school at the native settlement, while Peguis wanted Cockran to convince the Hudson's Bay Company to trade fairly with the Ojibwa.<sup>34</sup> Peguis suspected that the band had incurred the displeasure of the *Master of Life* by signing the treaty with Selkirk and was afraid of further alienation by agreeing to Cockran's plan. The Ojibwa feared death if they were to "accommodate themselves to the customs of the Whites, embrace their religion, and lay aside their medicines, drums, and conjurers". Peguis explained to Cockran that Ojibwa were dependant on the "pity" of spirits to provide for their needs and well-being and he therefore wished to follow the ways of his ancestors. Cockran replied with confidence that it was inevitable that either Peguis or his children would convert to the white lifestyle and religion, claiming that the *Master of Life* sent the Ojibwa difficulties in hunting to convince them of the superiority of agriculture.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1831-32, 461. Peguis had also complained to Cockran in August 1831: "Before you Whites came to trouble the ground, our River was full of fishes, our Creeks were full of Beaver, our Plains covered with Buffaloes; but now we are brought to poverty: our beaver is gone for ever — our Buffaloes are fled to the lands of our enemies — the number of our fish is demolished — and we are left to starve in poverty & rags, while you Whites are enriching yourselves with the very dust of our ancestors, covering our plains with Cows and Oxen in the Summer, and feeding them in the winter with hay gathered from the swamps and creek, formerly the residence of our Beaver." CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran, Red River, to CMS Secretary Woodroffe, 3 August 1831, 437.

<sup>33</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran to Woodroffe, 3 August 1831, 437.

<sup>34</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 8131-32, 467-8.

<sup>35</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1831-32, 462-3. Cockran probably used the term *Master of Life* to refer to the Kitchi Manitou.



## NETLEY CREEK FARM, 1832–34

Cockran's efforts to establish a program of civilization and evangelization at Netley Creek met with faltering results. The first year only seven families planted 70 bushels of potatoes, ten bushels of barley and three bushels of wheat.<sup>36</sup> Cockran was unable to maintain interest in his project when the fishing season started and unfavourable weather hindered crops.<sup>37</sup> The second year showed only a small improvement: 14 bushels of wheat, 12 bushels of barley, and 68 bushels of potatoes were sown by 15 families. The fisheries in late autumn also failed so the winter was particularly difficult for the Ojibwa.<sup>38</sup>

Cockran's proposal to change Ojibwa subsistence patterns was met with resistance, perhaps following established party lines within the band. Despite Peguis's claim that he had discussed the agreement with band members, from the start an anti-Cockran faction appeared, forcibly rejecting Cockran's agricultural program.<sup>39</sup> The anti-missionary faction was led by Ojibwa religious leaders, who instructed Ojibwa to terrorize the missionaries and sabotage their efforts to build houses and grow crops. The religious leaders or shamans taunted and laughed at Cockran, and demanded wheat.<sup>40</sup> The Midéwiwin ceremony served as a focal point for hostilities against the missionaries. At these gatherings the Midé cast spells on missionary activity and encouraged the Ojibwa to ignore the missionaries.<sup>41</sup> At the end of May, 1832, Cockran was invited to attend

<sup>36</sup> Czuboka, "St. Peter's" (1960), 24–25, estimates that there were approximately 200 Ojibwa under Peguis's leadership in the 1820s.

<sup>37</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1831–32, 475; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 9 August 1832, 453–4.

<sup>38</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal from 19 August 1832 to 7 August 1833, 569; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 12 November 1833, 576; CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran's journal, 1833–34, 11–12.

<sup>39</sup> On 11 February 1832 Peguis misinformed Cockran that all band members he consulted were in favour of the plan. CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1831–32, 467–8.

<sup>40</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1832–33, 547–9. The missionaries referred to the Ojibwa religious leaders as "conjurers", and referred to their healing ceremonies and spiritual evocations as "conjuring". Through these labels the missionaries attempted to denigrate Ojibwa religion by denouncing it as magic and superstition. It is difficult to estimate the number of religious leaders in the Peguis band because the missionaries may have referred to anyone who had a vision or was engaged in religious activity as a "conjurer".

<sup>41</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran's journal, 1833–34, 11.

the spring meeting of the Midéwiwin; one of the subjects under discussion was whether Cockran's plans would help or hurt the ground. The results of the religious divination were uncertain, but the Ojibwa believed the spirit of the ground was irritated with Ojibwa efforts at cultivation.<sup>42</sup> The split in the band intensified. Some families came to Cockran's aid in planting while other continued to harass Cockran, digging up the seed after it was planted. As well, Roman Catholic priests attempted to thwart Cockran's efforts by spreading rumours that Cockran wanted either to drive the natives out of Red River or to make slaves of them. Some Ojibwa vandalised Cockran's equipment, stole his hoes and attempted to sell them, and threatened to throw him in the river.<sup>43</sup>

Peguis also voiced doubts about his decision to ally himself with the missionaries. He was frustrated that the "foolish" young men in his band would not heed his counsel, and worried that if they were to gather together in a village they would destroy the crops to resist becoming "slaves" of the ground.<sup>44</sup> Failed crops added to Peguis's uncertainty; he worried that he was losing the medicine of his ancestors by not living solely by the hunt. Cockran reasoned that Peguis should not take the crop failure as a personal message directed specifically at him (crops failed throughout the settlement) and commented that Peguis did not cease forever to fish or hunt when he was unsuccessful in those pursuits.<sup>45</sup>

Despite his misgivings, Peguis maintained his alliance with Cockran. Because the missionaries were a source of European goods, Peguis was able to use his relationship with them as a power base for his ambitions, which helped him control the conflicts within his band. He supported Cockran when he was harassed by the shamans, laboured alongside of

<sup>42</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1831-32, 473, 475. A. Irving Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: ethnography into history*, ed. by Jennifer S. H. Brown (Fort Worth, 1992), 71, 93-94, has explained the Ojibwa practice of personalistic causation. Because the Ojibwa believed that good conduct was essential to maintaining a good relationship with other than human persons, they attributed poor results or misfortune to their own bad conduct.

<sup>43</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 9 August 1832, 453. The main "conjurer" of the Peguis band unsuccessfully attempted to throw Cockran's Inuit assistant into the river: CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1832-33, 557.

<sup>44</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1832-33, 568.

<sup>45</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal from 19 August 1832 to 7 August 1833, 546-7.



Cockran and gradually demonstrated more trust and confidence in him.<sup>46</sup> Cockran reciprocated this respect by building Peguis's house first, which bolstered the chief's prestige and may have contributed to his authority in the band.<sup>47</sup>

Some Ojibwa supported Cockran early on in his efforts to implement his civilization plan. In the autumn of 1832 one Ojibwa family remained, threshing barley to use throughout the winter. They told Cockran that initially they expected he would enslave them and seize their crops. The Ojibwa family expressed regret for following the advice of the shamans to ignore Cockran's directives and tend the crops with indifference. They thanked Cockran for his assistance and asked him to remain in the native settlement to continue directing agriculture. Cockran gained the support of other members of the band, such as Red Deer, and rewarded them by supplying material and helping them build houses.<sup>48</sup> The genuine gratitude of some Ojibwa allowed Cockran to continue his work in the settlement.

Accepting Cockran's advice and support in agriculture did not mean that the Ojibwa were rejecting their own way of life. Red Deer's decision to remain in the native settlement to harvest barley and potatoes, and to fish with the missionaries' net did not lead him to a more "civilized" lifestyle. Cockran complained that Red Deer had two wives and was engaged in preparing roots for medicine. All of Red Deer's extended family enjoyed his stored provisions, sharing in the traditional Ojibwa manner. This practice exasperated Cockran as he wished Red Deer's supply to last all winter and he wished him to preserve some produce for seed for the following spring.<sup>49</sup>

Cockran's initial effort to civilize and evangelize the Ojibwa at Netley Creek could not be called successful, as very few Ojibwa planted the seeds he provided, no school was established, and Cockran had very few chances to spread the word of God. Ojibwa activity at the summer encampment continued as it had in the past. Agriculture remained only one component of their annual round of activity.

<sup>46</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 9 August 1832, 453.

<sup>47</sup> Construction began in mid-September 1832 and the house was finished by early October. CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1832-33, 547-8.

<sup>48</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1832-33, 551-2, 548-9.

<sup>49</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1832-33, 556-7.

# COOK'S CREEK NATIVE SETTLEMENT

After two years at Netley Creek, Cockran initiated a move three miles south to Cook's Creek, where several Cree families had been farming. The move to Cook's Creek was pivotal for both the Ojibwa and the Church Missionary Society. Cockran saw his civilization and evangelization program implemented — he directed farming, built houses, fenced fields and held Bible classes. For the Ojibwa the move meant further splitting of the band. The presence of the Cree in the area also changed the dynamics of the band, as Cree and Ojibwa came to live as neighbours and eventually to act as one group.

Cree from the York Factory, Norway House and Cumberland House areas had been migrating to the Red River settlement throughout the 1820s and 1830s. They sought assistance from their country-born and Métis relatives living in the Red River settlement, but quickly became a burden to the community.<sup>50</sup> They turned to the Anglican missionaries, accepting their directives in evangelization and civilization. Cockran proposed to settle Cree immigrants on the "Indian Reserve" promised to Peguis upon signing the Selkirk Treaty. The missionaries also planned to encourage Indian mission school graduates to settle in the area. He sent the Cree to Peguis to request permission to settle and cultivate land on the reserve.<sup>51</sup>

Tension had existed between the Swampy Cree and the Ojibwa throughout the 1820s and continued in the 1830s. Open warfare, such as between the Sioux and the Ojibwa, did not occur, but individual spiritual warfare was common.<sup>52</sup> The Ojibwa had a general reputation for stronger medicine and probably did not feel severely threatened by the Cree.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 9 August 1832, 451.

<sup>51</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Jones's journal from 15 October 1826 to 25 October 1828, 318, 323; Jones to the CMS Secretaries, 16 August 1831, 441–2; Jones to the CMS Secretaries, 25 July 1832, 487; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 9 August 1832, 453; Jones to the CMS Secretaries, July 1833, 501; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 25 July 1833, 524; Cockran's journal 1832–33, 550.

<sup>52</sup> For example, on 6 July 1832 one Ojibwa who believed that two of his relatives had been conjured to death by the Cree sought protection and retribution from an Ojibwa conjurer and Chief Peguis. CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1831–32, 476.

<sup>53</sup> Peers, "An ethnohistory of the western Ojibwa" (1987), 73. In *The Ojibwa of western Canada* (1994), 134, Peers attributes their "magical rivalries" to economic and social stress as each group tried to maintain their niche in their relations with Europeans.



However, the tension was so great that Cockran hesitated to urge the two groups to settle together, but rationalized that “Christian instructions and civilization” would lead them to get along.<sup>54</sup> Peguis may have consented to the settling of Cree near Ojibwa encampments as a concession to Cockran or because he hoped that his authority might be expanded to include the Cree settlers.

Cockran began suggesting the move to Cook’s Creek as early as 1833 because it was closer to the southern boundary of the “Indian Reserve”; Peguis could therefore more easily protect his land from encroachment and timber theft by white settlers. As well, more timber for construction could be found at that location and the land was dry and could be drained easily. Cockran restricted settlement to those who agreed to farm under his direction, and he required children to attend school and help their parents in the fields. Peguis agreed to the move because he was pleased with his alliance with the missionaries. He enjoyed the prestige he gained from owning a house and he wanted his children to be taught skills of the white world in the mission school to protect him from deception by the Company and settlers.<sup>55</sup>

The native settlement at Cook’s Creek grew more rapidly than Netley Creek. A Cree assistant employed by Cockran drew many relatives and friends to the area, and his house served as a landmark and meeting place for Cockran and the natives.<sup>56</sup> During the summer of 1833 Cockran directed the construction of ten small houses and assembled 25–30 children for instruction. By mid-November 1833, a schoolroom was constructed, and by late November 32 children had European clothes.<sup>57</sup> Cockran provided the 15 families in the settlement with two bushels of wheat, one bushel of barley and four or five bushels of potatoes to sow. He also sent two ploughs and six oxen to the native settlement to assist

<sup>54</sup> C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 11 July 1834, 3.

<sup>55</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran’s journal 1832–33, 569, 571–2; C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 23 October 1834, 56.

<sup>56</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran’s journal, 1833–34, 18.

<sup>57</sup> CMSA C.1/M.1, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 12 November 1833, 576; Extracts from Cockran’s journal, 1833–34, 17; C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 16 December 1833, 577.

in operations.<sup>58</sup> The community gradually became more stable and successful in agricultural production and the Ojibwa seemed more enthusiastic about the settlement. In February 1835 the inhabitants fenced fields to be cultivated and asked Cockran for a grist mill.<sup>59</sup>

The move to Cook's Creek caused a deep split in Peguis's band as more Ojibwa remained at Netley Creek than moved to Cook's Creek. However, the division between pro- and anti-missionary parties was not hard and fast. Some Ojibwa at Cook's Creek did not pay any heed to Cockran, while some Ojibwa at Netley Creek accepted his aid. There was not a firm split between those who practiced agriculture and those who did not, nor between those who moved to Cook's Creek and those who did not, but what seems sure is that the community was unresolved in determining its relationship with the Church Missionary Society.

Cockran continued his efforts to persuade the Ojibwa at Netley Creek to follow his programs. He distributed tobacco to the men, promised to feed and clothe children who attended school, offered to assist all adults wishing to build houses, and to supply them with seed and cattle.<sup>60</sup> Despite his efforts, Cockran had limited success. He reported only ten acres under cultivation in August 1834.<sup>61</sup> Few Ojibwa sent their children to the school, and Cockran had to contend with influential shamans who urged Ojibwa to disperse the mission settlement.<sup>62</sup> The Ojibwa at Netley Creek regarded his plans with apathy, disrespect and boredom. Even though they agreed to allow Cockran to work for them, they maintained their disdain.

Throughout the 1830s, Peguis continued his diplomatic efforts, preserving his alliance with the missionaries while retaining favour with his band. Peguis established personal friendships with Cockran and Jones to benefit fully from both men. He visited the missionaries regularly throughout the autumn of 1835, asking for ink-powder, paper and quills

<sup>58</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran's journal, 1833-34, 29; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 24 July 1834, 41.

<sup>59</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal from 14 August 1834 to 2 August 1835, 99, 102, 106-8.

<sup>60</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 82.

<sup>61</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 83.

<sup>62</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 91, 93, 94, 97; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 11 July 1834, 3; Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 24 July 1834, 42.



for his children and a *capot* (winter coat) for himself. By asking for “sensible” goods, Peguis retained the respect of the missionaries and thus was able to take full advantage of Christian charity and the missionaries’ political clout within the colony to help preserve his timber supply.<sup>63</sup>

Other Ojibwa imitated Peguis’s strategy in order to prosper in their relationship with the missionaries. Several visited Jones, as they had done with Cockran, asking for food because their children were in school.<sup>64</sup> Some Ojibwa may have resented Peguis for his success in manipulating the missionaries or resented his alliance with them after other whites had treated the Ojibwa unjustly. Their feelings towards Peguis were probably influenced by the extent to which he shared his good fortune with other members of the band. Although Peguis did not tolerate anyone “stealing” his provisions, he did not deny anyone access to the missionaries’ medicine and power. Peguis was probably treated with both respect and resentment by the Ojibwa throughout the 1830s.

As his civilization program began to prosper at Cook’s Creek, Cockran devoted more energy to his evangelization program. Numerous Ojibwa and Cree were sympathetic to Cockran and began to participate in his weekly prayer meetings.<sup>65</sup> He did not rush baptisms as he wished to make them a serious matter and not easily attainable. Cockran was concerned that sinning as a member of the church was far more serious than sinning as a “heathen”, so he wished to ensure that those who were baptized genuinely believed in Christian principles, or were too near death to sin. Cockran refused the first person who asked to be baptised on 29 January 1833 on the grounds that she was “not sufficiently acquainted with the duties enjoined by the Christian religion”.<sup>66</sup> Support for Christianity increased by late February 1834 when one man asked to be “legally married” to one of his wives, and another woman asked to be baptized.<sup>67</sup> By the spring of 1834 Cockran began to permit baptism for

<sup>63</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones’s journal from 20 May 1835 to 20 July 1836, 148, 150; Cockran’s journal from 16 August 1835 to 31 July 1836, 181.

<sup>64</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones’s journal 1835–36, 153.

<sup>65</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran’s journal, 1833–34, 19.

<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately Cockran did not indicate whether she was Cree or Ojibwa: CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran’s journal, 1833–34, 23.

<sup>67</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran’s journal, 1833–34, 24–25.

those who attended school and Sunday school, abstained from fishing on Sunday, maintained monogamous marriages, tended their fields, sent their children to school, prayed at home, and were industrious.<sup>68</sup> In 1835 Cockran and Jones recorded that 70 natives attended Sunday service at Netley Creek and 60 assembled every Wednesday for "religious instruction and advice".<sup>69</sup>

In native eyes, baptism did not necessarily represent a conversion to Christianity in the European sense, and farming did not represent a rejection of Ojibwa culture. Rather, the Ojibwa and Cree acknowledged the missionaries as shamans and demonstrated their support to create an alternative spiritual resource against future troubles, such as sickness or danger. The decision to convert could be sincere and genuinely spiritual. For example, on 17 May 1835, one man began to groan at a prayer meeting because he expected God would never forgive him for his wickedness.<sup>70</sup>

Demonstration of support for missionaries may not have initially prevented individuals from frequenting established shamans. However, tension was building between the missionaries and shamans. Shamans fiercely objected to missionary efforts to intrude in their area of influence and convinced many Ojibwa to resist evangelization efforts. Cockran began to challenge the shamans more forcefully. He refused them wheat, arguing that their gods should be able to provide for them. One shaman brought his sick child to Cockran in September 1833 because his own incantations had failed. Cockran chided him for not turning to God earlier, claiming that his child would never have become sick in the first place.<sup>71</sup> In November 1834 Cockran battled with a shaman over the conversion of "a sick old man at the Indian settlement". The man's wife and mother were furious at his decision to convert and sent for a shaman

<sup>68</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 86-88.

<sup>69</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran and Jones, "Report of the state of religion, morality, and education at the Red River and Grand Rapids", 5 June 1835, 65.

<sup>70</sup> As well, Cockran considered it an important occasion when he baptised a man on 10 June 1835 who had once been a shaman of great repute: CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 108, 112.

<sup>71</sup> At one of his initial weekly meetings in December 1833, a shaman attended for the purpose of disrupting the meeting: CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Extracts from Cockran's journal, 1833-34, 19, 24.



who evoked “the spirits of the wind, the sea, the forest, and the dead, to restore him to health.” However, the man, “wearied with such vexatious companions, and anxious to cut the connexion [*sic*], and silence the... magical drum”, choose to convert to Christianity. Cockran disregarded the women and the shaman, entered the house and baptised the man, as well as his son and daughter who attended the school in the settlement. Unfortunately for Cockran, the man died three days later, which supported the belief that baptism caused death.<sup>72</sup> Occasional baptisms at the northern end of the native settlement continued through the winter and spring of 1835; Cockran was pleased at the size of the meetings and the progress of Sunday scholars.<sup>73</sup>

In the summer of 1835 the native settlement had to battle an influenza epidemic that raged throughout the Red River valley. By 19 June 1835 Cockran noted that one child from the native settlement had already died. In early August two Ojibwa boys died and one was close to death. Cockran recorded with horror that the extremely debilitating disease affected people of all ages, often resulted in death, and was particularly severe in the native settlement. Everyone suffered indirectly because no one was well enough to cook or tend the ill.<sup>74</sup> It was not the first time that either the Cree or the Ojibwa had faced epidemics of this nature or magnitude, but it was the first since the missionaries had come to play a significant role in their lives. Confidence in native medicine was undermined by the severity of the disease and for the first time the Ojibwa and Cree could turn to a different source to battle it. The disease acted as a catalyst to emerging patterns of spiritual behaviour in the community, hardened opinions about the missionaries, and polarized the community into missionary supporters and opponents.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran’s journal 1834–35, 91–92.

<sup>73</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran and Jones, “Report of the state of religion...”, 5 June 1835, 65.

<sup>74</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones’s journal 1835–36, 144; Cockran’s journal 1834–35, 112–4.

<sup>75</sup> In the 17th century, death resulting from disease made the Huron less able to resist the theological inroads of the Jesuits, according to Bruce G. Trigger, *The children of Aataentsic* (Kingston and Montreal, 1976), 601. Grant, *Moon of wintertime* (1984), 42, asserts that in a wider context epidemics created serious vacuums in native leadership which missionaries were able to fill. Although the Peguis band did not lose its leadership, missionaries came to play a much more important political and spiritual role.

Cockran helped the Ojibwa and Cree not only because he genuinely worried about them, but also because he wished that those natives under his direction would fare better than those not, to prove that his power was great and that the Christian god's supporters would suffer less. He had his servant cook for the whole community and nurse those who were ill. Cockran worried that the natives would blame the deaths on him or their change of lifestyle to farming and worshipping God. Cockran's fears were realized when some blamed their illness on "their change of circumstance and opinions". During a lull of the epidemic in mid-July, many wanted to return to the old ways because the *Master of Life* had brought influenza.<sup>76</sup>

Another consequence of the epidemic was the immediate baptism of many Ojibwa and Cree. At the first remission of the disease in July 1835, one shaman who had been "of considerable pretensions" lost all confidence in his previous religious beliefs, promised to send away his second wife, marry his first wife, send his children to school, build a house, receive religious instruction and generally conform to Christianity. Cockran continued to baptize people in the native settlement throughout the summer. Some were receptive to Cockran's explanation that the epidemic was a trial sent by God to test people's conviction and faith.<sup>77</sup>

Missionary response to the epidemic was pragmatic. The missionaries wished to baptize those about to die so that their souls would go to heaven, which may have led some Ojibwa to believe that baptism caused death.<sup>78</sup> The missionaries did not discourage natives from the belief that worshipping the Christian god instead of native gods was the means by which European diseases could be overcome. Converted natives often expected their baptism to dramatically improve their lives. Many people decided to request baptism after members of their family had died from illness, perhaps to ensure that all family members would be reunited after death.<sup>79</sup> Jones and Cockran gained a reputation for spiritual power among

<sup>76</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 113-4, 117-8.

<sup>77</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1834-35, 115, 119-120, 123.

<sup>78</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal from 11 August 1836 to 2 August 1837, 279.

<sup>79</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1835-36, 181, 186, 191, 195.



both the Cree and the Ojibwa, especially after the first epidemics of influenza swept the colony.

Ojibwa decisions to become baptised covered a wide spectrum of attitudes and experiences. Many of the seeming conversions were incorporated into the existing native religion and world view, and Christian rituals were used for native purposes. In some cases the Ojibwa believed the influenza was caused by a distant sorcerer, and people turned to the powers of the missionaries after their own shamans had failed to cure or prevent the disease. One former shaman related to Cockran how a mystical experience led to his conversion to Christianity. During the summer of 1835, one of the shaman's sons fell ill. The boy's mother, who had attended Cockran's meetings, lost her confidence in native medicine. The shaman allowed her to take the child to be baptised by Cockran. The night after the baptism the shaman had a vision that two people clothed in white healed his son. The next day his son began a full recovery. The man was convinced of the power of the gospel, decided to have a monogamous Christian marriage, become baptized and lead "an orderly & pious life".<sup>80</sup>

Some Ojibwa considered their turn to Christianity as a switch in alliance from native spirits to the Christian god. One man resisted baptism and conversion because he was afraid he would lose his hunting skills, which he considered as gifts from his guardian spirits.<sup>81</sup> Another, who was unsuccessful in hunting, believed the spirits had fled from the area and abandoned him because his family members had betrayed them by converting to Christianity. He therefore turned to Christianity when the spirits spurned him. This man incorporated the events of the native settlement into his personal spiritual system through a vision which he related to Cockran. In it he was presented with a gun to shoot any man who rose against him, but as he touched the gun it broke and fell to the ground. Then a European women led him to the church in the native

<sup>80</sup> Another woman applied to receive baptism after hearing a voice one night say "This is the Word of life; God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." She recalled she had first heard these words in church and thus sought to be admitted: CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1835-36, 190-1, 195.

<sup>81</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran's journal from 9 August 1837 to 1 July 1838, 314.

settlement to worship God. Cockran baptized him and he promised to become a servant of God.<sup>82</sup>

A typical conversion was that of an Ojibwa religious leader in June 1836. According to Jones the man had recently stopped practising his medicine because he had been informed that the devil controlled native medicine. Jones convinced him that his herbal remedies would work if he prayed to the Christian god rather than native gods. The man, who was dying of consumption and presumably unable to cure himself, was open to Jones's teachings of Christ. He had had previous contact with missionaries and received a Bible from Cockran which he constantly carried with him, perhaps as a charm or as part of his medicine bundle. After Jones baptised him, Mrs. Jones supplied him with a tent, flock bed, blankets, sage and arrow root. The material goods may have been perceived as rewards for supporting the missionary, reinforcing Jones's position as a competing shaman in the community.<sup>83</sup> Jones encouraged the man to treat him as a shaman, and the man considered his "conversion" as a turn to new spiritual guides.

Despite the ravages of the epidemic, the native settlement at Cook's Creek continued to grow, though shakily. During the autumn of 1835 residents constructed a grist mill. Cockran reported 20 cottages and a schoolhouse at the upper end of the native settlement and five cottages and a schoolhouse at the lower end. A census revealed 31 men in the community with 35 wives and 94 children and 23 dwellings.<sup>84</sup> A church was built by January 1837.<sup>85</sup> Cockran continued to baptize residents of the native settlement through 1836, 1837 and 1838. In the summer of 1837, he reported between 200 and 260 people attending the church every Sunday.<sup>86</sup> Although Cockran was still making little headway with the Ojibwa at Netley Creek, a few people began to join him.<sup>87</sup> He was pleased when one Ojibwa from Netley Creek, whom he called "a

<sup>82</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1836-37, 279-280.

<sup>83</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones's journal 1835-36, 160-1.

<sup>84</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 28 October 1835, 130-1.

<sup>85</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 28 October 1835, 130-2; Cockran's journal 1835-36, 201; Cockran's journal 1836-37, 258.

<sup>86</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 2 August 1837, 240.

<sup>87</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1836-37, 270, 274.



ringleader of the vilest of the vile", requested baptism. The man had previously encouraged Ojibwa to eat the seed Cockran gave them to sow, sent his children to school and secretly enticed them away once they were clothed, and begged for food for his ill and starving family but traded it to other natives for rum. The man regularly stole large sums of money from Cockran, usually advances for labour or housing materials. However, the man asked for Cockran's forgiveness and began to defend Cockran to other Ojibwa. He let his children choose their religion and said he would follow their choice. When the man became deathly ill he was brought to the house of Chief Peguis to meet with Cockran and told Cockran he had been deeply impressed by a dream that he must change his course of life. He found that he no longer believed in native medicine and could not attend the Midéwiwin, and had decided to change the manner in which he supported his family. Cockran agreed to baptize him because he was ill, but did not permit him to offer annual sacrifices to his departed friends.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these occasional conversions, Cockran was still frustrated with the majority of the Peguis band as most Ojibwa encamped near Netley Creek continued to resist Cockran's pressures to settle, farm, and send their children to school throughout the mid 1830s.<sup>89</sup> He complained that he had supplied the Ojibwa at Netley Creek with seed and ploughed and sowed their fields for five years, yet each year they refused to tend the crops, allowing them to be destroyed by weeds and blackbirds. The Midéwiwin remained strong and vital, and as soon as a person decided to convert to Christianity, he was banished from that faction of the band.<sup>90</sup> The band continued to harass Cockran and the natives who took up farming and Christianity. The Ojibwa maintained that "they had long followed their own ways, and were still intending to continue in them" and asked Cockran to stop bothering them.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1836-37, 277-8.

<sup>89</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 8 August 1836, 213.

<sup>90</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran's journal 1837-38, 318, 335; Jones's journal 1835-36, 159.

<sup>91</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 8 August 1836, 213-4; Cockran's journal 1836-37, 270.

Alongside of the increased incidence of native conversion to Christianity and adoption of European farming methods was a rise in the incidence of raiding in the native settlement. Religious tensions split both families and the community as the battle between Christians and non-Christians grew. Cockran complained that crops at the native settlement were often raided by vagrant families, yet the owners of the crops would not protest because they were afraid of challenging their kin and fellow band members.<sup>92</sup> In August 1837, one shaman who was ill wished to be baptised to reconcile with his Christian family before he died.<sup>93</sup> On 24 October 1838, Cockran suspected a woman from the lower part of the native settlement of poisoning her husband after he started farming, expressed interest in Christianity, and insisted his daughter and her fiancé become Christians.<sup>94</sup> The missionaries retaliated with intimidation and violence. Jones noted on 24 February 1836 that "Some ill disposed natives have lately committed many acts of outrage, & it is necessary to terrify them." One native convicted of shooting a settler's horse was sentenced to a whipping.<sup>95</sup>

Tension increased considerably at the native settlement in the spring of 1837 when a group of Ojibwa elders who were strongly opposed to Christianity turned their attention to Chief Peguis. Although Peguis had not yet been baptized they objected to his support of the missionaries. At the spring Midéwiwin ceremony, they unsuccessfully attempted to elect a new chief on the grounds that Peguis did not attend the Midéwiwin.<sup>96</sup> The tension in the band reached a crisis in 1838 when Peguis fully allied himself with the missionaries through baptism and letters of support to the secretary of the Church Missionary Society in London.

Like other Ojibwa, Peguis's baptism was prompted by illness and conversion in his family. In August 1837, Cockran took Peguis's son William and two other boys to the Rapids to teach them to read and write English. When William began to show signs of sickness in early

<sup>92</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1835-36, 192.

<sup>93</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Cockran's journal 1836-37, 279.

<sup>94</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran's journal from 10 August 1838 to 10 July 1839, 376.

<sup>95</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77, Jones's journal 1835-36, 154.

<sup>96</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran's journal 1837-38, 335.



November 1837, Cockran sent him back to his father.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, all three boys became ill and eventually died.<sup>98</sup> Peguis refused to let anyone perform Ojibwa healing ceremonies for William, announcing “Brethren you are too late, I have given up my heart to this new religion, and I intend to prove it; I leave my son in the hand of God, he shall do with him as he pleases...” Just before he died on 15 November 1837, William told his relatives not to weep for him as he was going to join God in heaven where he would be happy. One week after this incident, the first member of Peguis’s family, another of his sons, requested baptism in order to marry one of the pupils at the native school who insisted he become a Christian. Chief Peguis followed his son’s actions on 7 February 1838 by openly renouncing Ojibwa religion and accepting baptism.<sup>99</sup>

Peguis began to tighten his alliance with the missionaries by asking the Church Missionary Society for a replacement for Jones who was leaving. On 13 June 1838 he gave a calumet to Jones to present to the directors of the Church Missionary Society, as well as the following message:

To the friends of the red men over the waters, I send by you a pipe and a stem. The stem according to indian custom, personifies [or stands in the place of] the one who sends it, and it ratifies and confirms the message which accompanies it... I have embraced the White man’s religion, and mean to hold it with a firm hand to the end. My son [Geo. Prince] sleeps by your Church, and I mean to sleep by his side. Tell them my place is now getting very different that what it was: a Church is now built amongst us, and I go to it to hear the word of life; but we want a minister to dwell among us, & to watch over us. I have said all I can to the Indians about changing their ways, and hearing the word of life: while some hear, many turn away. Perhaps they will listen to him. Tell them to send me a Teacher.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> CMSA C.1/ M.2, reel A-78, Cockran’s journal 1837–38, 323.

<sup>98</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 4 August 1838, 309–310.

<sup>99</sup> CMSA C.1/ M.2, reel A-78, Cockran’s journal 1837–38, 324, 326–7, 334. The actual date of Peguis’s baptism is debatable. In *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 9 (1976), 626–7, Hugh Dempsey reports that Peguis was both baptised and married 7 October 1840, while Boon, “St. Peter’s Dynevor” (1954), 22–23, asserts that John Smithurst’s “Private Register of Births, Marriages and Burials” recorded only Peguis’s marriage and not his baptism on that date.

<sup>100</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Jones’s journal from 31 May 1838 to 17 October 1838, 286–7.

Peguis and the inhabitants of the native settlement, claiming to represent 200 to 250 people, gave Jones letters to deliver to the Church Missionary Society requesting a "praying master" to come to Red River and live at the native settlement.<sup>101</sup> The letters both flattered and threatened the Society. Peguis's letter employed sophisticated tactics of persuasion, commenting on the work ethic, the virtue of perseverance and the presence of Roman Catholic missionaries.<sup>102</sup> The authors of the other letter explained that they converted to Christianity out of fear that God would send them to the "great devils fire". They expressed fear of other "Red River Indians" who threatened to kill them if they hunted furs. The authors also mentioned that they might seek the Roman Catholic priests if a replacement did not arrive at the native settlement.<sup>103</sup> Both Peguis and the "Indians of Red River" received a response from the Church Missionary Society, and their request for a new "praying master" was met by the appointment of John Smithurst.<sup>104</sup> However, rumours suggested that the new missionary would not be stationed at the native settlement. The natives again wrote to the Church Missionary Society, re-stating their request in more forceful tones.<sup>105</sup>

The steps Peguis took to tighten his alliance with the missionaries had serious repercussions *vis-à-vis* the cohesion of his band. After Peguis was baptised his oldest son, who had invariably rejected the missionaries, attempted a coup, lobbying for support to deprive Peguis of his chieftainship. The coup failed, according to Cockran "through the influences of his fathers friends; and the vicariousness of his sons character."<sup>106</sup> Although Peguis managed to remain as chief of the Ojibwa living in the

<sup>101</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Jones's journal 1838, 295.

<sup>102</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Chief Peguis or William King to the CMS Committee, 1 August 1838, 297-9.

<sup>103</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Indians at Red River to the CMS Committee, 1 August 1838, 299-301.

<sup>104</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran to the CMS Secretaries, 2 August 1839, 358; CMS Secretary R. Cortes to Peguis, no date (listed spring 1839), 152-3.

<sup>105</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Indians of Red River to the CMS Committee, 7 August 1839, 414-5.

<sup>106</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Cockran's journal from August 1839 to August 1840, 470.



area, his relationship with the missionaries split his family, as well as the band, deeply.<sup>107</sup>

The formation of the settlement at St. Peter's was not an expression of a great friendship between the Ojibwa and the Church Missionary Society. Their relationship involved much misunderstanding, miscommunication and hostility. Efforts to overcome these obstacles required elaborate diplomacy, as each group tried to convey their expectations to the other. The relationship between the Ojibwa and the missionaries involved more than material exchange: it assumed political and spiritual dimensions. Gift exchange and the farms established at Cook's Creek became an alternative economic resource for the Ojibwa, the alliance provided some prestige and political clout for the band within the Red River colony, and the missionaries were seen as a new source of spiritual power.

The missionaries were able to enter the world of the Ojibwa and effect changes by posing as spiritual leaders and competing with shamans. Cockran came the closest to replacing shamans in the Ojibwa community, as he was trusted by the Ojibwa more than other missionaries and seemed to respect Ojibwa religious beliefs.<sup>108</sup> The Peguis band's reactions to the missionaries covered a wide spectrum. Some Ojibwa rejected an alliance with the missionaries. Others rejected their proselytizing and farming direction, while accepting their gifts. One faction of the Peguis band farmed under Cockran's direction but chose to become members of the Anglican Church. These so-called conversions also had a wide variety of meanings. Some added the Christian God to existing Ojibwa beliefs, while others rejected their previous religious patterns to follow the evangelization program of the missionaries. Some acknowledged the missionaries as shamans and demonstrated their support to create an alternative resource against future troubles, such as sickness or danger. It is not surprising that illness was the focal point of their relationship:

<sup>107</sup> CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-78, Smithurst's journal from 25 December 1839 to 13 March 1840, 485-7.

<sup>108</sup> Cockran was deeply impressed with the mystical experience that led to the conversion of a conjurer on 2 August 1837. Christian spirits entered a conjuring tent and convinced him to become baptised. CMSA C.1/M.2, reel A-77 and A-78, Cockran's journal 1836-37, 280-1.

shamans were primarily concerned with ensuring good health, so the Ojibwa naturally looked to the missionaries to do the same.

The period between 1820 and 1840 marked an important turning point for the history of the Peguis band. It was during this time that a part of the band adopted the "white man's religion" and agricultural methods. Ironically, in adopting some cultural and spiritual aspects of white society, the Ojibwa became more segregated from the Red River colony. The physical separation of their settlement from the rest of the colony, the continuing health of Ojibwa religion despite the pressures of Christianity, and the increasing racism of many colonists led to an increasing isolation of natives from European society. Far from representing the growth of friendship between natives and white society, the relationship between the Peguis Band and the Church Missionary Society was turbulent, wrought with ambiguity and tension, and led to social alienation.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Peers, *The Ojibwa of western Canada* (1994), 157.



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