

Urbanization in the Backwoods: Planning towns in the the Upper-Great Lakes, 1810-1880

The negotiation strategies used by aboriginal populations in dealing with colonial forces has become an increasingly popular topic of research, particularly in relation to the Upper-Great Lakes of North America. This recent emphasis on the Upper-Great Lakes region can be seen as part of a revisionary shift in the historiography and politics of Canada and the United States. The goal of revisionary scholars is to reincorporate the history of aboriginal peoples into mainstream colonial history. This presentation will examine the legal genesis of both Sault Ste. Marie (Ontario) and Sault Ste. Marie (Michigan) in their critical developmental years of urbanization (1810-1880), as a case study of colonization in the Upper-Great Lakes.

In 1814, the imposed border divided the Northern and Southern factions of Sault Ste. Marie into different colonial jurisdictions. I focus on the influence and importance of aboriginal leaders in combined resistance during times of tension. Anishnabee and Odawa chiefs, as well as Métis leaders, responded to these forces with different strategies on either side of the border; as Great Britain struggled to maintain imperial control and nineteenth-century concepts such as Manifest Destiny. This project will demonstrate how the predominately Anishnabee and Métis populations in both Sault Ste. Maries responded to political and religious influences, by comparing the development of the towns on either side of the border, I will examine how the influx of English-speaking, white settlers affected the established populations' predominately Anishnabee, Odawa, and Métis traditions from 1814 to 1874, and how the resulting legislated policy shaped social structures in both Sault Ste. Maries with the implementation of a border.

I emphasize records produced by Aboriginals in the nineteenth-century, such as the written works produced by chiefs Shingwauk and Andrew Blackbird, and their approaches to managing this urban change. I also endeavour to approach the sources produced by Europeans

with an aboriginal understanding and context, in order to counteract the prejudices of European authors by incorporating studies of Aboriginal leadership in the area into the historical frameworks of colonial history. This approach has led historians to view colonization in the Upper-Great Lakes as a negotiated process rather than as a process of cultural domination. Negotiations between indigenous and settler populations occurred as the indigenous populations balanced the preservation of aboriginal traditions against Anglicizing attempts, both socially and through treaty stipulations on both sides of the border (“Treaty with the Chippewa, 1826” and “Robinson Treaties, 1850”). Negotiation challenges current understandings of the colonization process in the Upper-Great Lakes region and how these changes were managed in communities. That Anglicization was unsuccessful in the area prior to the 1870s, challenges current understandings of the church's role in colonization in North America. It suggests that a more competitive industrial market in the second half of the nineteenth century was the driving force behind Anglicization. As the local economy shifted from subsistence to capital-driven, both Aboriginal and White populations accepted Anglicized to legally secure resource-rich lands, rather than as a result of changing spiritual understandings.