

**Timothy Cochrane. *Gichi Bitobig, Grand Marais: Early Accounts of the Anishinaabeg and the North Shore Fur Trade*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018. 249 pp. ISBN 978-1-5179-0593-4.**

<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/gichi-bitobig-grand-marais>

Readers of *Transmotion* will be accustomed to history monographs, and also to editions of historical documents mined from archives, whether they be journals, memoirs, missionary relations, exploration narratives, or political manifestos. There is a potential, however, for these two common book formats to blend into one another. Many of us can probably recall reading an edition of a document or a literary text for which the introduction and other apparatus was longer than the document itself.

*Gichi Bitobig, Grand Marais* is such a book, except that the primary texts edited here – journals written by the chief factors of a new fur trade post during its first two winters on the North Shore of Lake Superior – are not entirely new nor particularly extraordinary. Instead, the logbook by Bela Chapman and the journal by George Johnston, who commanded the post established by the American Fur Company from 1823 to 1825, provide anchors for a monograph that delivers what the subtitle promises: *Early Accounts of the Anishinaabeg and the North Shore Fur Trade*. Author Timothy Cochrane worked a long career with the National Park Service of the United States, at parks in Alaska as well as in Northern Minnesota and Michigan, and served for twenty years as superintendent of Grand Portage National Monument, on the Canadian border about fifty kilometers northeast of Grand Marais. He is also the author of two previous books about Isle Royale, an island near the middle of Lake Superior that has been a National Park since 1940. Cochrane has worked extensively with Anishinaabeg tribal leaders in the area by virtue of his jobs with the park service.

Both Chapman's and Johnston's journals convey a sense of suffering, tedium, and desperation as they worked to try to build permanent shelters, collect enough firewood to stay warm, and catch enough fish to stay fed. Desultory comments on the weather and the insubordination of their men are recurring themes. A typical passage from Chapman, written March 7, 1824:

“...every thing has been wet through + through but as bad luck would have it I have no Peltry to get wet My buildings are worse than any hog pens, I am entirely cast down to see my returns, we are not arrived at spring and nothing done, to say we live would be false only stay and hardly that since March began we have taken no fish until this day”  
(166)

The Grand Marais post was situated on a natural harbor. The name means “large marsh” in French but may be a mis-transcription of a Quebecois dialect term *marée* which meant pond or pool, such as a harbor (see 44). The site was a stopover for canoe convoys travelling from Fond du Lac (today's Duluth, Minnesota and Superior, Wisconsin) to the large fur trade post of Fort William, at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River in modern Thunder Bay, Ontario, just east of Grand Portage. However, the primary routes for voyageurs led up the Kaministiquia, or along the eponymous grand portage to the Pigeon River in the Hudson's Bay watershed, and thence toward

Rainy Lake and the Red and Saskatchewan Rivers. The north shore was more thinly travelled, and Chapman tried in vain to locate Anishinaabeg who would sell him their pelts.

The book depicts a time and place where geopolitical and economic forces were on the cusp of great changes. As Cochrane explains, the post was established by the American Fur Company (founded by John Jacob Astor in 1808) in an effort to challenge the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company, which had merged with the North West Company in 1821. Astor built the largest fortune in American capitalism in the early 19th century in part by seeking government subsidies and support for his ventures. After the Jay Treaty of 1794, the United States wished to expand its sovereignty west of the Great Lakes. The "[U.S.] Congress passed a law on April 29, 1816, that provided that 'licenses to trade with the Indians...shall not be granted to any but citizens of the United States.'" (67). Astor himself had lobbied for this measure and he saw to it that some of his factors were appointed U.S. customs officials as well. If Native trappers north of the border sold their pelts to Astor's agents, he could maintain a monopoly similar to that enjoyed by the HBC.

Chapman and Johnston distinguish their characters in their short journals. Johnston was considerably more loquacious and literary than his predecessor, and, though he referred to his new home as "Siberia," he was somewhat more successful at trade. He wrote of meetings with Anishaabeg leaders, Grand Coquin, Espagnol, and Maangozid, whom Cochrane fleshes out for the reader, with genealogies and descriptions by better-known fur trader writers including George Simpson and David Thompson. These family histories and others illustrate the *métissage* of the fur trade. Another interesting portrait Cochrane provides is of George Bonga, and his brothers Jack and Stephen, all sons of Pierre, an African servant of Alexander Henry, and Ojibwayquay, an Anishinaabe woman. George Bonga was referred to in a fur trader's writings as "the first white man that was a negro that ever traded at Leech Lake" (54).

For decades the center for fur trade research has been the Hudson Bay Company archives in Winnipeg, but the two documents published in this book are not held there, but instead among the Henry Rowe Schoolcraft papers at the Library of Congress (for Johnston, who was Schoolcraft's brother-in-law through Jane Johnston Schoolcraft), and at the Minnesota Historical Society (for Chapman). Cochrane makes a bid to shift attention of fur trade historians toward the U.S. side of the border, and has written a book that will appeal to academics and local history enthusiasts in equal measure.

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