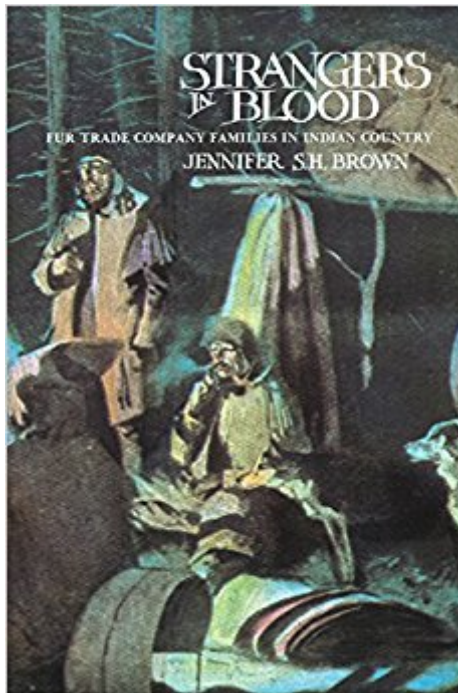




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# Strangers In Blood: Fur Trade Company Families In Indian Country



## Synopsis

For two centuries (1670-1870), English, Scottish, and Canadian fur traders voyaged the myriad waterways of Rupert's Land, the vast territory chartered to the Hudson's Bay Company and later splintered among five Canadian provinces and four American states. The knowledge and support of northern Native peoples were critical to the newcomer's survival and success. With acquaintance and alliance came intermarriage, and the unions of European traders and Native women generated thousands of descendants. Jennifer Brown's *Strangers in Blood* is the first work to look systematically at these parents and their children. Brown focuses on Hudson's Bay Company officers and North West Company wintering partners and clerks—those whose relationships are best known from post journals, correspondence, accounts, and wills. The durability of such families varied greatly. Settlers, missionaries, European women, and sometimes the courts challenged fur trade marriages. Some officers' Scottish and Canadian relatives dismissed Native wives and "Indian" progeny as illegitimate. Traders who took these ties seriously were obliged to defend them, to leave wills recognizing their wives and children, and to secure their legal and social status—to prove that they were kin, not "strangers in blood." Brown illustrates that the lives and identities of these children were shaped by factors far more complex than "blood." Sons and daughters diverged along paths affected by gender. Some descendants became Métis and espoused Métis nationhood under Louis Riel. Others rejected or were never offered that course—they passed into white or Indian communities or, in some instances, identified themselves (without prejudice) as "half breeds." The fur trade did not coalesce into a single society. Rather, like Rupert's Land, it splintered, and the historical consequences have been with us ever since.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For two centuries (1670-1870), English, Scottish, and Canadian fur traders voyaged the myriad waterways of Rupert's Land, the vast territory chartered to the Hudson's Bay Company and later splintered among five Canadian provinces and four American states. The knowledge and support of northern Native peoples were critical to the newcomer's survival and success. With acquaintance and alliance came intermarriage, and the unions of European traders and Native women generated thousands of descendants. Jennifer Brown's *Strangers in Blood* is the first work to look systemically at these parents and their children. Brown focuses on Hudson's Bay Company officers and North West Company wintering partners and clerks — those whose relationships are best known from post journals, correspondence, accounts, and wills. The durability of such families varied greatly. Settlers, missionaries, European women, and sometimes the courts challenged fur trade marriages. Some officers' Scottish and Canadian relatives dismissed Native wives and "Indian" progeny as illegitimate. Trades who took these ties seriously were obliged to defend them, to leave wills recognizing their wives and children, and to secure their legal and social status — to prove that they were kin, not "strangers in blood." Brown illustrates that the lives and identities of these children were shaped by factors far more complex than "blood." Sons and daughters diverged along paths affected by gender. Some descendants became Métis nationhood under Louis Riel. Others rejected or were never offered that course — they passed into white or Indian communities or, in some instances, identified themselves (without prejudice) as "halfbreeds." The fur trade did not coalesce into a single society. Rather, like Rupert's Land, it splintered, and the historical consequences have been with us ever since.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The experience of these conscientious objectors offers insight into evolving attitudes about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship during a key period of Canadian nation building.

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Actually interesting! Filled with detail but not at all overwhelming. I have grabbed my highlighter and am having a ball. I have ancestors who I was told were fur traders from the North West and Canada, so this is a goldmine for me. I think the title of "Strangers in Blood" misleads. Demeans the topic, and is not as descriptive as the rest of the title. I'd been told by my uncle that "our" fur traders were

not fur trappers, but traders...voyagers... and that they did not work for the Hudson Bay company but for another company. this book speaks directly to the different companies, the circumstances, places, social networks, influences of business, society and religion on the people in the fur trade. It speaks of the countries of origin of the white traders. Really quite a find for the genealogist, as well. This is about the 4th book on this topic I've read, and I like it the best so far. About 1/3 into it.

I find it odd that a reviewer of a scholarly book written by a noted academic would take umbrage at the book's use of "long sentences" and "academic jargon." In fact, I don't find STRANGERS IN BLOOD's language and structure "foggy", confusing, jargon-ridden, or complicated. I would caution the reader that the subject itself is fraught with complications and inconsistencies, especially with regard to fur trade companies' changeable policies toward "wives in the country", but the persistence and durability of the families produced thereby gives Brown's book both its thesis and consistent thread. I teach Cultural History and use the book in my classes. Freshmen students - most of them new to academic literature in general - have read it and gained much from it, and none has found the book impenetrable. I think STRANGERS IN BLOOD is a valuable addition to the literature in the field.

This book has a high "fog factor" and is difficult to read. It uses academic jargon and long sentences. The structure is complex and confusing. That is not to say that the book is inconsequential; indeed, the subject matter is quite important. It is simply difficult to access it through this book. The back cover accurately describes the book as looking systematically at the families and offspring of the upper echelon of the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company. Unfortunately, this was a male-dominated business and a male-dominated period in history. Men kept the written records. The author of "Strangers in Blood" relies heavily on anecdotal accounts of individuals, complete with many direct quotes. Thus, this is a book that follows the men of the fur trade. Their wives and offspring become adjuncts. The book partially compensates for this by providing information on societal pressures within the fur trade, as well as in Canada and England at the time. It also addresses the policies of the fur companies relative to dependents. The book characterizes and contrasts family connections in the Hudson Bay Company and the Northwest Company. The presentation is roughly chronological from the late 1700 to the mid 1800s. The 1821 merger of the two companies is a focal point. Chapters and subchapters move back and forth between the two companies; as well as between various topics of gender and types of family relationships. The focus is on individuals, with every page containing a confusing array of proper

names. The names of key individuals (men) reappear constantly until the reader longs for a wall chart to keep them straight. The author has even provided a few small pieces of such a chart and they are helpful. One comes away with the feeling that the men of the fur trade took more responsibility for their families than one might expect. They usually tried to place their offspring, both male and female, in a position to start a life of their own. That included at least some education; an apprenticeship for men, and marriage for women. Fewer men stayed committed to the mothers of their children but some of the relationships were life-long. From the early 1820s on, one man, George Simpson, had great influence over the fur trade and the people involved with it. He directed the Hudson Bay Company through the merger with the Northwest Company and for forty years afterward. He influenced the tenor of the fur trade and everything connected with it. Ms Brown shows his impact to be more negative than positive. Simpson, the clergy, and English women all arrived on the scene at about the same time. The result was increased racism, emphasis on class, and moral disapproval of "country marriages." These semi-formal unions with Indians and mixed-bloods were prevalent in the fur trade up until that time. The problems of integrating the descendants of the fur traders into society continue in Canada today. Finally, I even want to complain about the title. "Strangers in Blood" is an English legal term for relationships that exist "in blood" but the law refuses to admit as legitimate. This book is about a much broader range of relationships. The author recognizes the problem in the final chapter. Someone in the publishing process should have insisted on a better title.

"Strangers in Blood" is a British legal term that "describes any relationship, even familial, that the law refused to admit as legitimate." This book is one of the first efforts to systematically look at the intermarriage and trade alliances between Native Americans and Europeans that formed the backbone of the North American fur trade. The fur trade "splintered", and some descendants identified as *Métis*, some as "Halfbreeds", others passed into Native American or "white" communities. Nice graphics, phenomenally researched, and good index. How did the Northwest Company, the Hudson's Bay Company and other concerns differ in their treatment of Native wives and families of mixed descent? Have you ever wondered about the distinction between a fur trade "House" versus "Factory"? What happens when fur trader Daniel Williams Harmon returns to Bennington Vermont in 1807, bringing along his mixed blood family? Did the Northwest Company's rising use of the term "halfbreed" or "Metis" for children of mixed descent signal a politically different era? Jennifer S. H. Brown is a professor of history at the University of Winnipeg. This well-researched academic work is invaluable to anyone interested in Native American studies,

Canadian or American history, the North American fur trade, western settlement, or the MāfÂ©tis.

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