

The Store of Peace: A History of the Pauingassi Trading Post, 1969-1980

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The establishment of the Pauingassi Trading Post in 1969 represents a unique collaboration between a Mennonite and Aboriginal community. In 1955 the tiny community of Pauingassi, Manitoba, was launched into a new spiritual, cultural and economic era when Pauingassi elder Waanachensh (Alex Owen Sr.) invited a missionary to the community. Twelve years after this initial invitation to Mennonite missionary Henry Neufeld, the community again aligned themselves with a non-profit Mennonite business organization, Christian Investors in Education, and requested the formation of a local store. In cooperation with Henry Neufeld and Christian Investors in Education, Pauingassi residents embraced the trading post in their community. Confronted with a rapidly changing world, the people of Pauingassi actively sought a non-profit community store, a distinct alternative to the Hudson's Bay Company and its rival independent trading posts in the region. The study of the events surrounding the creation of the Pauingassi Trading Post belongs to a broader emerg-

ing historiography which emphasizes indigenous agency. Due to the wealth of unpublished material on the Pauingassi Trading Post, this paper will focus primarily on the dynamics present in the creation of the store and its first decade of operation.

The Community of Pauingassi

The history of Pauingassi provides an important context for discussing the establishment of the Pauingassi Trading Post. This history illustrates the adaptability of a Native people long perceived to be culturally rigid and isolated. Although Pauingassi's particular history had allowed its members to live in a more fully indigenous context than other First Nation groups, it was not unchanging. Rather, as more recent scholarship has argued, the Ojibwa world had its own dynamism and cosmopolitanism of which white outsiders knew almost nothing.¹ The history of known Pauingassi individuals reveals them to be politically savvy in their encounters with outsiders, whether they be native or Anglo. The residents integrated those religious and cultural components which augmented their lives and spiritual cosmology. Consequently, the establishment of the trading post at Pauingassi illustrates, in part, a function of the community's ability to adapt to changes occurring throughout its existence.

While the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell emphasized the geographical isolation of the Pauingassi community, its location on the west side of Fishing Lake places Pauingassi strategically on a main channel of the water route from the Berens River to Deer Lake and Sandy Lake in the Severn River watershed.² This locale allowed for frequent interaction with other Ojibwa and non-Ojibwa communities, belying the commonly held misperception of its isolation. Pauingassi is located sixteen kilometres north of Little Grand Rapids Indian Reserve #14, sixteen kilometres west of the Manitoba-Ontario border and 276 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg. Dog sleds, canoes, and more recently snowmobiles and motor powered boats, provide access between local communities. Air travel remains the sole method of transportation to distant locations such as Winnipeg for much of the year, although a winter road exists during the coldest months when it is possible to drive across the lake ice.

The Ojibwe speaking people of Pauingassi belong to the larger Ojibwa peoples.³ The Ojibwa have their cultural roots in the upper Great Lakes region and documentary evidence suggests that they expanded into the Red River region and the area east of Lake Winnipeg in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.⁴ Through the signing of Treaty 5 in 1875 the Ojibwa were brought into political contact with Canada for the first time. The reserves became the local centre of subgroups that were then given administrative recognition as 'bands,' each having its own chief and councillors.⁵ A reserve at Little Grand Rapids was established in the 1880's. Even though they were politically identified as members of the Little Grand Rapids band, the Pauingassi community identified themselves as distinct from the Little Grand Rapids community. Residents expressed their desire to remain outside of reserve boundaries due to government treaty restrictions which dictated when and how they could hunt or trap.⁶ Consequently, their traditional hunting patterns and lifestyles were preserved well past the time most indigenous groups were able to maintain cultural autonomy.

The establishment of a Hudson's Bay Company Post (HBC) at Little Grand Rapids in the early 1800s, possibly as early as 1812, simultaneously preserved and changed the

Pauingassi community. For the first time, articles such as men's pants, overalls and underwear were available along with items such as candles and soap. Hallowell argues that the presence of the trading post paradoxically preserved traditional life styles along with the changes it brought. The post encouraged the perpetuation of their aboriginal ecological adaptation of hunting through a demand for furs. "In consequence, not only was their subsistence economy retained, but the seasonal movements, institutions, attitudes and beliefs that were closely integrated with it."⁷ Contact with the trading post remained sporadic however and usually was made by men.

The earliest remembered resident of Pauingassi was Shenawakoshkank (Making a Rattling Noise by Stepping on a Twig) or Kihchi omoosoni (Great Moose) and his family. He was born no later than the 1820s and was a noted hunter and famous medicine man of his time. Great Moose had six wives and by five of them he fathered a total of twenty children of whom sixteen lived into the post-treaty period after 1876.⁸ One of his sons, Naamiwan (Fair Wind), was born in 1851 and lived until 1944 and it is through Naamiwan that Pauingassi's unique place within Ojibwa culture has been identified. Naamiwan and his family interacted frequently with outsiders. Active in the fur trade, they invoked mixed responses from the Hudson's Bay Company at Little Grand Rapids. The factor at the Bay Post reported that Naamiwan frequently conducted fur trade with independent traders which frustrated the HBC journal keeper. Jennifer Brown and Maureen Matthews conclude from these historical sources that "the Owens' [the English version of their name] lack of subservience to the HBC and other traders does not evoke the Native dependency sometimes assumed for recent periods. While they relied on numerous imported goods, they bargained with all comers and attended effectively to their own interests."⁹

Naamiwan has become posthumously famous for his creation of a Drum Dance which he probably first performed in the summer of 1914. Most distinctive about his dance was the pavilion in which it was held. The pavilion was a circular, open lattice-work dome of willow or poplar saplings curving up to a central opening under which the drum and its four drummers sat. The hallmark of the ceremony at Pauingassi, the pavilion also became important later at Popular Hill.¹⁰ Brown and Matthews argue that this particular ceremony represented a syncretic amalgamation of the cultures which Naamiwan encountered throughout his life.¹¹ Although never considered a chief among his people, Naamiwan gained a leadership role as medicine man and hunter.

By the mid 1950s the traditional religious healing ceremony exercised by Naamiwan was no longer practiced. While missionary influence has frequently been held responsible for the destruction of this traditional ceremony, Pauingassi's cultural practices fell victim to several more lethal and complex foes. First, Naamiwan and his sons were aging. Naamiwan, himself died in 1944, and his last known son, Waanachensh, died in 1968. With them, much of the knowledge and belief of the culture and ceremony died. From conversations with community elders, long time missionary and community resident Henry Neufeld concludes that, "with the passing of Naamiwan and his sons, this ceremony also gradually disappeared after having been an integral part of the culture for a long, long time."¹² Charlie George Owen, one of Naamiwan's grandsons told Neufeld after Waanachensh's death in 1968, "my father is gone and the Waapanoowin practice [a ceremonial dance] is a thing of the past. I too used to be a part of it at one time, but not any more. I will take my father's tools and dispose of them in

the bush."¹³ Owen's words along with the increasing presence of alcohol by the 1940s and 1950s lead Neufeld to conclude that alcohol and religious ceremonies appear to have been incompatible and as the community struggled with liquor, the old ways began to fade.¹⁴

By the mid-twentieth century, Pauingassi residents had integrated elements of European culture while successfully retaining the historic patterns of economic subsistence. The community relied predominantly upon a barter economy, trading furs for products at the Hudson's Bay Store at Little Grand Rapids. Despite wild price fluctuations, the fur trade continued to provide their economic base. They hunted, fished, and picked wild rice to feed themselves and trapped fur in order to trade for goods unavailable to them. Evidence observed by the Neufelds suggests the presence of fairly extensive gardening as well.¹⁵ Reminiscent of nineteenth century practices, the community continued to divide into extended family units during the winter months and live on isolated traplines. During the summer, families would reconvene at the Pauingassi settlement for socializing and religious ceremonies.¹⁶

The process of Christian conversion remained slow for the inland Ojibwa compared with other indigenous groups. The first missionary contact appears to have come with the Methodists who traveled into this region between 1873 and 1876. During the 1920s and 1930s, the United Church of Canada had a very active worker, Luther Schuetze, at Little Grand Rapids.¹⁷ Indications are that he and others made periodic visits to Pauingassi. The arrival of Henry and Elna Neufeld in 1955 marked the first permanent missionary presence at Pauingassi.¹⁸ The Neufelds had lived at Little Grand Rapids the previous year under the auspices of the Mennonite Pioneer Mission. The one year at Little Grand provided an initial introduction into the Ojibwa world. Along with teaching, the Neufelds conducted religious services thus allowing for contact with a wider segment of the community. As well, it provided them with the opportunity to meet Pauingassi residents who came to sell their furs and buy goods from the Hudson's Bay Company. On March 20, 1955, Henry visited Pauingassi for the first time. In each contact Henry Neufeld had with members of the Pauingassi community, they expressed the need for a school and a church. Neufeld recounts the words of Waanachensh, a community elder and son of Naamiwan upon his arrival at Pauingassi:

Our way of life has been very adequate in the past. We do not know English and will not need of it, but the world around us is changing. Our children will need to learn English so they can get jobs and cope with the many demands they will come in contact with. Therefore come and live with us, teach our children and have services.¹⁹

The historical integration of the religious and cultural is evident within Waanachensh's request. Elders such as Naamiwan, had been considered important members of the Pauingassi community because he was a great hunter and spiritual leader. The elders could not envision any future changes without the integration of both cultural and religious entities. Consequently, in May 1955, the Mennonite Pioneer Mission agreed to accept the invitation from the Pauingassi community.

Henry and Elna Neufeld lived at Pauingassi from 1955 from 1970. As the time drew near to leave, the Neufelds became increasingly concerned over the physical hardships endured because of the community's geographical isolation. The spring thaw and fall freeze of Fishing Lake brought complete isolation from the Hudson's Bay Store at Little Grand Rapids.

Despite hunting and fishing, food supplies frequently ran dangerously low. In conversations between Henry Neufeld and community elders, the idea began to emerge of a local store which would provide ample food supplies year round. Beyond the mere existence of a store, concern was raised over the precise nature of such an enterprise. Pauingassi residents were well aware of the negative experiences of other native communities with local independently owned stores. Consequently, a store established purely on the basis of profit was not an enticing concept. The residents and Henry Neufeld concluded that Pauingassi needed a store focused not only on economic viability, but also on the well-being of the community.

The Establishment of the Pauingassi Trading Post

In 1967, two separate events converged which led to the creation of the Pauingassi Trading Post. First, a group of nine Mennonite businessmen from Winnipeg formed a non-profit organization which became known as the Christian Investors in Education (CIE), although. Initially calling itself the 'Group of Nine,' the group adopted the name, Christian Investors in Education, and a constitution on February 8, 1967 (See Appendix II).²⁰ The group's primary objective was to provide assistance for educational development, and to establish and promote projects of a Christian, philanthropic or charitable nature. In the summer of the same year Henry Neufeld made a public plea for a store at the Canadian Mennonite Conference in Ontario. When CIE members approached Neufeld about possible needs at Pauingassi, he reiterated the need for a store. Believing that a store would meet the group's goals of both education and service, the project was launched in 1969. Thus, the Christian Investors in Education embarked on their most ambitious project, the creation of the Pauingassi Trading Post.²¹ Although the Neufelds left a year and a half after the Pauingassi Trading Post opened, they remained a vital and integral force behind its existence and its desire to meet the needs of the people at Pauingassi.²²

CIE elected a store committee of three of the Mennonite businessmen, M.J. Hamm, Peter Brown and Jake K. Schellenberg (chairperson). The committee was to estimate the cost of the building of a dock, a warehouse, a store, as well as the operation of such a venture. Henry Neufeld received word from the Conference of Mennonites in Canada's Board of Missions on February 9, 1968 that the CIE was seriously considering the possibility of establishing a store on a non-profit basis.²³ On March 15, 1968, CIE officially launched the Pauingassi project and Jake K. Schellenberg and August Dyck flew to Pauingassi and purchased their first building. The trading post's first quarters was the cabin of Waanachensh, Naamiwan's son, who had recently died. The cabin's dimensions were fifteen by eighteen feet which served as living quarters for the first two managers. The front porch, measuring fifteen by sixteen feet, sufficed as the store. CIE bought it from the family for \$80 and land was leased from the Department of Natural Resources for \$25 per year.²⁴ The initial costs for the store were modest and yet represented a significant investment for a group of volunteers. The cost to improve the log cabin was \$2,400 while the initial stock investment was approximately \$3,500. In addition, a boat and motor needed to be purchased for the manager at a cost of around \$1,200.²⁵ In a letter dated October 29, 1968, Jake K. Schellenberg requested financial assistance for the initial construction of the store project from the Northern Commissioner of the Department of Urban Development and Municipal Affairs:

As you can see that the cost of this type of an undertaking is quite large. It is our hope that your department will see fit to assist us with this project if such assistance is possible....it is not that we are looking for assistance for ourselves but rather for the Indian Community at Pauingassi who are experiencing a real hardship for lack of a store and an outlet for their produce such as furs, fish and rice.²⁶

It appears that CIE did not receive a favourable response since no financial support from outside sources was ever mentioned among the financial reports.²⁷

Careful consideration was given to the precise nature of the store and its relationship with the community. The committee was also concerned about the store's correspondance with CIE's mandate of service and education. According to the official history of CIE, the committee concluded that by setting an example of Christian living, by providing groceries at fair prices and by giving residents at Pauingassi an opportunity to learn how to manage a trading post, the store was educating the residents. At the very least, they argued, the store provided a higher standard of living.²⁸ The original idea for a store evolved to include a centre for the sale of wild rice, gas and kerosene, and a fur trading post.²⁹ CIE's intention was to keep the prices at the store low. Profit was not its main concern. Despite the inter-related Mennonite involvements in the mission, the school and the store, a decision was also made to maintain a separation between these three entities.³⁰ The store committee agreed to address potential problems directly to the community elders and band councillors, rather than using Henry Neufeld as a mediator.³¹ The other important dilemma faced by the committee was the precise location of the store. CIE had originally wanted to build the store across the lake. Its first location however became the trading post's permanent home.³² What remains unclear from current research is the level of community involvement in this discernment process and the extent to which the CIE committee welcomed any such possibility.³³

The challenge of finding appropriate personnel in this initial phase was to remain a constant struggle throughout the store's history. The committee, searching in Mennonite circles, sought a couple in which one spouse managed the store while the other taught at the school.³⁴ The store manager would thus be able to live at the teacherage which potentially eliminated the need for the construction of living quarters at the store. In a letter dated April 4, 1968, CIE sent out a letter to unknown persons requesting just such a couple.³⁵ The Conference of Mennonites in Canada assisted in the search for personnel, although they remained separate from the store project itself.³⁶ Consequently, they drafted a series of letters searching for a suitable couple to fill the role. This task proved to be a difficult one and employees with the specific qualifications never surfaced. A suitable couple, however, was found and in 1969, the project received its official name, the Pauingassi Trading Post (PTP).

The Early Years, 1969-1975

The first six years at the store proved to be both a very exciting and a most challenging time. The store opened on February 26, 1969 to immediate community approval. Henry Neufeld recounts the joy he felt in witnessing customers pass by their cabin carrying such basic necessities as flour and sugar. It was a radical improvement from the twenty-six mile

round-trip to Little Grand Rapids.³⁷ For the Mennonite personnel hired, the challenges of living at Pauingassi quickly emerged. In the late 1960s, Pauingassi residents did not have hydro-electricity, indoor plumbing, telephones or heating. Consequently, chopping firewood and hauling water from the lake were an integral aspect of daily life. In addition, the CIE board required no language training for the position. The subsequent communication difficulties presented formidable barriers between store managers and the community. The first managers, Mennonites Peter and Violet Duerksen, arrived at Pauingassi from on February 19th, a mere week before its opening.³⁸ It quickly became evident to Henry Neufeld that the Duerksens were experiencing difficulties and they resigned in August of 1969. In a letter dated August 15, 1969, Neufeld confirmed these difficulties to the CIE executive board, explaining that it was a painful experience for all involved to admit defeat after only five months.³⁹ Despite this discouraging inauguration, CIE quickly advertised for new managers.⁴⁰

Fortunately, new managers were quickly located. Following an ad in *The Mennonite*, Jake and Margaret Harms, another Mennonite couple, applied for the position and were hired. Their previous experience at the Aboriginal communities of Norway House and Loon Straits, Manitoba, made the transition to Pauingassi somewhat easier. They and their two children moved into the one room log cabin in September, 1969 and spent their first winter in close quarters.⁴¹ Despite the isolation from home in southern Manitoba and language barriers, Jake and Margaret enthusiastically embraced their role as store managers. Separate living quarters were built during the winter of 1969-1970 and the store moved into the cabin in the spring of 1970.⁴²

For the first several years, the Pauingassi Trading Post served as the primary centre of fur trading for the community. Although its function as a fur trading post lasted only for a brief period, this aspect of the store's history contributes to a small body of literature on the late twentieth-century fur trade. The fur trade continued to play a central economic and cultural role in the Pauingassi community into the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴³ Annual cycles revolved around the hunting and trapping seasons, frequently conflicting with the education schedule established by government school. The trading post did a brisk business in furs.⁴⁴ Mink brought in between \$30-\$40 a pelt, and beaver, lynx and muskrat attracted comparable prices. The Pauingassi Trading Post operated as a fur trader along a traditional model postulated by fur trade historian Arthur Ray: "The traditional or remote district....continued to operate predominantly along credit-barter lines; it largely involved the more economically conservative and loyal natives, and competition was weak."⁴⁵ In 1971 disaster struck and the price of mink fell to an all time low of \$1 per pelt due to anti-fur trapping crusades in European and North American cities and the availability of synthetic products. It was only the implementation of government rations that saved many people from starvation. Prices soared again in the late 1970's with lynx fetching up to \$850 per pelt. This stimulated trapping again to some extent, although evidence suggests that it was rapidly becoming an extinct lifestyle.⁴⁶

From all accounts, the issue of credit became one of the few points of conflict between managers and the CIE committee, and between the store and the community. Pauingassi was virtually a cashless society. The people brought furs and wild rice to the store and the money was either given directly to them or more often placed on their credit account. Consequently, money seldom changed hands. Credit accounts were the most viable form of business for

several reasons. First, the seasonal nature of trapping and wild rice harvesting meant that trappers received income only twice a year. In between those times, the community relied on credit to sustain themselves. Second, once the community began to receive government welfare cheques, the only place to cash them was at the trading post. Once again, most people simply applied this income to their line of credit. Therefore, the post also served as a bank of sorts.⁴⁷ The store carried three lines of credit for most families. Women who received family allowance cheques had their own credit account at the store. The second account was a specific trapping account, and the third one was a family account, usually under the father's name. The store later changed its policy and limited each family to a single account.⁴⁸ Despite frequent debt accruals, the store wrote off very few accounts.⁴⁹

For community residents, the Pauingassi Trading Post represented an alternative to fur trading and shopping at the Hudson's Bay store. The HBC at Little Grand Rapids was frequently viewed with suspicion by the Pauingassi community over the issue of credit. Their opinion was that the Bay store cheated people out of the full value of their furs or applied fur money onto their individual line of credit without permission. In light of these perceptions, store manager Jake Harms attempted a different approach to the problem of credit. He consistently gave full price for furs or wild rice without withholding any of the money. He would however raise the issue of their debt and negotiate a possible repayment schedule. According to Jake Harms, this approach had several effects. First, Pauingassi people began to trust that the store would be fair and honest with them. Second, it gave them a chance to work with the manager to negotiate and manage their debts. This particular approach appeared to have had a fairly positive effect on relations between the store and the community as expressed by residents to the store committee and managers.

Despite these efforts, the credit debts mounted quickly during the early years. In 1969, the charge accounts totaled \$2,000; in 1970, they were \$3,986; and in 1971, they totaled \$5,237 (See Appendix). During the first year and a half of the Harms's tenure at PTP, the community received no government support. Jake Harms describes hungry little children peering over the counter, staring at the groceries. He found it impossible to limit credit during these times of extreme starvation.⁵⁰ With the advent of monthly rations, the economic status of the community improved and it became possible to cash government cheques at the store for necessary food and dry goods.⁵¹ A later Mennonite manager, Jake Froese, also reported being uncomfortable with the issue of credit because of the power it gave him. He found it difficult to deny credit to customers and then meet them on the path or at a community event. On the few occasions when the store managers were threatened with violence, it was always over the issue of credit. It remained the single most contentious issue throughout the entire existence of the store. While credit presented difficulties for the store, it made steady profits during its first years in operation.⁵² By 1971, the trading post was operating with a positive balance sheet.⁵³

The cultural and job related challenges faced by the store managers contributed to the rapid succession of personnel following the departure of Jake and Margaret Harms in 1972. Mennonites Abe and Linda Dyck arrived in the summer of 1972 and left at an undetermined date in 1973. They were replaced by Cliff and Wilma Derksen of Winnipeg in 1973 who resigned as of June 1, 1974. The former principal at the Pauingassi school, Ivan Headings and his wife Louise, assumed management of the store from October, 1974 until their resig-

nation on March 22, 1975. Finally, Jake and Margaret Froese of Winnipeg took over the management of PTP on June 20, 1975 and remained until 1980. Their tenure proved to be the longest in the store's history.

While it maintained approximately ninety percent of the community's business, the Pauingassi Trading Post did not remain Pauingassi's sole store. In the spring of 1973, a man named McRae opened a general store. Although his presence challenged the Trading Post's monopoly, his business practices quickly secured PTP's integrity within the community. On one occasion, Mr. McRae's frustration with a lengthy list of creditors resulted in an English list on the store wall entitled, "These are the bastards of the month."⁵⁴ McRae and his pilot, did not endear themselves to community elders and a brush with the law led to a warrant being issued for McRae's arrest. McRae left the community along with his pilot who was eventually killed when his plane crashed in British Columbia. McRae himself, later died in Winnipeg.⁵⁵ During this period, the community began to refer to the Trading Post as the "store of peace" while McRae's store was "the store of trouble."⁵⁶

Years of Stability and Change, 1975-1980

The last five years of the 1970s proved to be the most stable period of the Trading Post's history. Ironically, this same period represented a time of rapid change for Pauingassi. By the late 1970s, Pauingassi residents possessed their first television sets made possible through the arrival of hydro-electricity. A pay phone was also provided along a central path that connected the village from one end to the other. Snowmobiles, once working vehicles that had replaced the dogsled, now became a luxury item enjoyed by the young people. In fact, by 1980, one resident had even purchased a car even though no road existed at that time. A witness to these rapid social changes caused store manager Jake Froese to conclude that while other Canadians adapted to the onslaught of modernization over a period of fifty years, the people at Pauingassi were forced to adapt within five years.⁵⁷ Financially, the PTP enjoyed its most stable period. (See Appendix) The managers were able to maintain low credit balances and established a relatively positive working relationship with the community. It also experienced a time of rapid expansion with the construction of a new store building. The trading post also purchased a house directly behind it for new managers' living quarters, which incidentally was the home of the well-known Pauingassi elder, Charlie George Owen, Naamiwan's grandson.

Despite its apparent success, the Pauingassi Trading Post was not without its share of criticism. Menno Wiebe, head of Native Ministries for the General Conference of Mennonites in Canada and an anthropologist, questioned some of the store's procedures at a meeting in May, 1975. In particular, Wiebe expressed concern over the cultural differences between the Mennonite store managers and owners, and the Ojibwa community. He challenged the CIE board to modify its expectations over issues such as debt repayment and reminded them that as Mennonites, they too had historically been slow to respond to outside change or influence. As an unidentified committee secretary recorded, Wiebe reiterated some of the similarities between Mennonites and the Ojibwa in response to cultural change:

At this point while speaking highly of our efforts with the Native People he cautioned whether it was right to hurry up the process of industrialization at Pauingassi when we, the Mennonite Peoples, in certain areas, have not quite accepted the same philosophy in over four hundred years. We are trying to teach the Native to build up a surplus, be it of food, and if this is not possible than of goods or money. This, as history has shown in the case of the Mennonites, is a slow process and maybe we should be most patient. We are on the right track but the road is likely to be a long, long one.⁵⁸

Several difficult questions were raised for the CIE committee. Was it possible to teach other people how to manage money without an element of paternalism? Was it important to the community to learn how to manage money at all? At times, it appeared that the committee's expectations were somewhat high in comparison with the conclusions reached by the managers working at Pauingassi. Several managers expressed frustration about the gap between expectations learned at the store and those of the committee in Winnipeg. To the credit of the CIE, board members listened and learned from these criticisms. Efforts were made to stay in closer contact with the managers and listen to their experiences. Close communication with the community was also considered essential in their management policies. Missionary Henry Neufeld's cultural experience proved invaluable during these types of debates and many report his presence as translator between the cultural needs of the community and the business needs of the store.⁵⁹

One of the long term goals of the Christian Investors in Education had been to turn over ownership of the store to the community. Throughout the 1970s the challenges of such a transaction became increasingly evident. While ideologically supportive of the possibility, many of the elders expressed ambivalence over the success of such an endeavour. On numerous occasions, the Trading Post had attempted to train local Aboriginal youth as apprentices with discouraging results. The cultural composition of Pauingassi also presented a significant obstacle. Kinship along clan lines was very strong and one was obligated to help a member of one's own clan. The strength of this cultural practice proved to be a shortcoming in the consideration of an economic enterprise such as the store. As Neufeld notes, this type of cultural ideology works with the sharing of moose and duck, but it does not work with a Safeway cart.⁶⁰ At one point, the Pauingassi community seriously considered purchasing the store. It approached the Indian Affairs Department for a loan and was turned down because the Department did not feel that the store was financially viable despite a consistent profit margin. As Jonah Leoppky noted, despite overtures towards self-sufficiency, the Indian Affairs Department hindered community action in regards to the Pauingassi Trading Post.⁶¹

As the 1970s drew to a close, questions regarding its long term relationship with the trading post began to emerge from within the Christian Investors in Education organization itself. After a decade, the Trading Post was consistently operating with a positive balance. The community continued to support the store and recent expansion projects had gone without incident. Despite these practical developments, questions persisted. Some members wondered whether they were really educating the people at Pauingassi or merely serving them? Others questioned the considerable labour investment necessary to sustain the store. Had CIE actually accomplished its task? Many felt that the inability to turn the store over to the community had constituted a failure. After being consumed by store concerns for a decade, some members felt that it was time for a change.

On June 13, 1978, a special meeting was held to discuss the possible disposal of the Pauingassi Trading Post.⁶² The CIE board decided to phase out the Pauingassi Trading Post over the next three years. However, the question of what to do with the store remained. No one could envision closing the store considering its significance to the community. As Frank Giesbrecht recounts, "the attempt to turn the store into a cooperative business, although this had been our dream from the beginning, was now abandoned, regretfully."⁶³ On March 18, 1980, a specially-constituted phase-out committee presented three alternatives to the CIE after careful consideration of the needs of the Pauingassi community. It was decided that thirteen individual members of CIE would buy the store from CIE:

The PTP phase-out committee respectfully recommends that: Effective immediately, Pauingassi Trading post, including the manager's quarters (but not [the] present inventory) be sold to a group, 75% of whom must be members of CIE, for \$10,000. The inventory on hand to be sold at cost as of September 1, 1980. The terms of sale are: 1. \$5,000 to be paid in cash; 2. The remaining \$5,000 plus inventory to be paid for in installments annually of \$5,000 each, for five years without interest. Annual payment of account to be flexible, but final payment should be made before December 31, 1985.⁶⁴

The group which bought the store came to known as the Group of Thirteen. They included the following Mennonites, most of who were Winnipeg businessmen: J.K. Schellenberg, Dr. J. Dyck, Henry Schulz, John P. Dyck, Al Wieler, Jona Loeppky, D.L. Wiebe, F.P. Giesbrecht, M.J. Hamm, John G. Dueck, Abe Poettcker, and Henry Neufeld. The final sale totaled \$115,000 and with that the Pauingassi Trading Post moved into a new phase.

Due to the internal continuity of the trading post's ownership, many components of its operations remained the same. Cognizant of the significant time demands by the store's operations, the group decided to pay several of its members for their services. Consequently, J.K. Schellenberg, Leonard Wiebe, and Jona Loeppky formed an executive committee which reported to the shareholders.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1980s, while the store continued to increase its sales, it also experienced considerable personnel problems. It became increasingly difficult to find managers who identified with the service-oriented goals and ideals of the store and who also had the necessary business skills and knowledge to manage the operation. The cultural and geographical distance of Pauingassi from the Mennonite communities of southern Manitoba, meant that the store managers also needed to have some level of personal relations skills and ability to work within a predominantly monolingual Ojibwa community.⁶⁶

The Group of Thirteen decided to sell the store in the late 1980's. Pauingassi Trading Post had remained an important project in all of their lives, but the time and energy needed to operate such a project were formidable. A man by the name of Bob Jackson expressed interest in the possibility of buying the store. He owned the small airline, locally known as Silver Pine, which flew into Pauingassi and believed that owning the transportation system necessary to the continued operation of the store would keep shipping costs reasonable. The group struck an equitable deal with Jackson and the transition occurred in 1991. The group of Mennonite businessmen who had created and sustained this tiny, but significant project,

regretfully moved out of ownership after more than twenty years of service. Pauingassi Trading Post had become a privately-owned institution.

Conclusion

This paper represents merely an initial investigation into the Pauingassi Trading Post's twenty year history. At this junction valuable information surfaces regarding Mennonite-Aboriginal relations, the fur trade in the late twentieth-century, and the agency of a First Nations people. Mennonites and Aboriginals bear striking similarities to one another in their close ties to the land, their minority social position, and their emphasis on a non-hierarchical structure. This is not to diminish the significant differences that continue to exist between these two peoples. The Mennonites who lived and worked at the trading post during the 1970s were transformed by their experience. While the work presented significant challenges, each individual involved in the store project was confronted by issues of cultural and linguistic differences, systemic racism and spiritual biases. These challenges proved to be onerous for many of the Mennonite store personnel who ultimately chose to leave sooner than originally scheduled. Others discovered themselves transformed in a variety of ways by their experience at Pauingassi. Currently absent from this discussion is the community's experiences with the store personnel who lived at Pauingassi. Further work is needed to examine the community's experiences and personal relations with the store personnel. The brief period of fur trade activity carried out at the Pauingassi Trading Post reveals the nature of the fur trade and its cultural significance in the last decades of the twentieth-century. Far from obsolete, the fur trade remained at the core of Pauingassi identity and economic viability into the 1970s. Even after its economic viability was gone, the people continued to trap and hunt. Further study of this period of the fur trade could enhance the existing historiography of this field.

A history of the Pauingassi Trading Post also provides a significant model for micro-economic development projects. The store was a financially successful endeavour and received consistent community support throughout its existence. The CIE committee was frequently asked to establish similar stores in other communities throughout Northern Manitoba.⁶⁷ The greater significance of the store, however, lay in the ideals behind the project. The store was never established for the purpose of profit, and, in fact, earnings were given back to the community in the form of dividends or hampers. Individually owned stores in other northern communities similar to the Pauingassi Trading Post were established solely for the purpose of profit. Subsequently, members of these communities felt at cross purposes with the independent owners. This sentiment was never expressed about the store at Pauingassi. Ultimately, it served the needs of Pauingassi for over twenty years.

In the final analysis, was the trading post a successful venture? The Christian Investors in Education believed the store to be successful. They had developed a business project to serve a community in need. Although the purpose of the store was always that of a business and not a mission, the ideals and ethics behind its creation served the people of Pauingassi well. The men of CIE expended a great deal of time, effort and money to create something positive without any personal gain. For the members of CIE, it was a venture based on faith.

Epilogue

Shortly after Bob Jackson bought the Pauingassi Trading Post from the Group of Thirteen, it burned down in July, 1989.⁶⁸ The community residents strongly urged Jackson to rebuild the store. While waiting for the insurance money, the Hudson Bay Company now known as The Northern Store moved into the community. Since the community has close to 400 residents, the existence of two such stores appeared economically unviable. Thus ended the history of this small endeavour which began in a log cabin owned by the descendants of Naamiwan. Despite its many challenges and setbacks, this unique model for community development not only retained a strong and beneficial presence within Pauingassi, but also proved financially viable. It supported the community and became the nexus for a cultural and economic exchange between Mennonites and Aboriginal peoples.

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Appendix

Yearly Financial Reports

	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>
Sales	7,586	3,079	73,349	86,860	106,589	107,463	146,459	198,689
Credit	2,000	3,986	5,237	13,271	12,916	7,864	9,323	8,227
Profit	-1,281							

	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>
Sales	269,311	352,930	406,118	60,069*	362,802	405,108	405,820	
Credit	10,346	13,304	13,714	15,311				
Profit								

*This amount is tallied up until March 1981 when Christian Investors in Education sold the store.

Notes

¹ Jennifer S.H. Brown and Maureen Matthews. "Fair Wind: Medicine and Consolation on the Berens River." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 4 (1994): 73.

² *Ibid.*, 58. Hallowell emphasized that the Ojibwa were able to maintain their existence in a sheltered enclave because the waterways in this region did not connect with any important lines of water travel. A. Irving Hallowell. *Culture and Experience*. 119.

³ While I lived at Pauingassi (1969-1972) the language was referred to as Saulteaux and while some Native people continue to use this term, Ojibwe is a more accepted term in current historiography. The term Anishinaabe is also gaining ground among Ojibwa people themselves. Roger Roulette postulates that Ojibwa people have always referred to themselves as Anishinaabe while Europeans created the terms Saulteaux and Ojibwa. Roger Roulette. Personal Conversation. October 14, 2000.

⁴ A. Irving Hallowell. *The Ojibwa of Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History*. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), 22. See also Hallowell's *Culture and Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955)

⁵ The Ojibwa did not recognize internal chiefs and the designation of such by government officials

became a false identification within a community unused to the idea of political leadership. Local leaders were recognizable based on their spiritual and hunting capabilities.

⁶ A sentiment expressed by Jake and Margaret Harms during their tenure as managers of the Pauingassi Trading Post, 1969-1972.

⁷ Hallowell, *Culture and Experience*, 119.

⁸ See Brown and Matthews for a more complete history of Great Moose. 57.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹ For further information see Brown and Matthews, "Fair Wind: Medicine and Consolation on the Berens River."

¹² Neufeld and Neufeld, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Henry Neufeld, telephone interview, 10 April, 2000. Neufeld noted that Pauingassi residents told him that they could not perform the ceremonies while under the influence of alcohol. It would have been considered sacrilegious to do otherwise.

¹⁵ Neufeld and Neufeld, 3.

¹⁶ Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of Berens River*, 48.

¹⁷ Neufeld and Neufeld, 7.

¹⁸ See Block, this volume for more information on Henry and Elna Neufeld.

¹⁹ Neufeld and Neufeld, 8-9.

²⁰ Frank P. Giesbrecht, *Christian Investors in Education: 25 Years, 1962-1987* (Winnipeg: Gateway Publishing, 1987), 3. The charter members include Dr. Jacob Dyck, Dr. George Friesen, M.J. Hamm, C.C. Neufeld, Art Rempel, Herman Rempel, Jake K. Schellenberg, Peter Schroeder and Abe Toews.

²¹ See Giesbrecht's *Christian Investors in Education* for a complete history of the Christian Investors in Education.

²² Henry Neufeld became a member of CIE in 1971 following his return to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

²³ Menno Wiebe, letter to Henry Neufeld, 9 February, 1968. Christian Investors in Education Files. (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre), II-J, 6, 3-9.

²⁴ Giesbrecht, 8.

²⁵ Jake K. Schellenberg, letter, 29 October, 1968. Christian Investors in Education Files (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre), II-J, 2, 1-1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ CIE members interviewed for this paper corroborated this conclusion.

²⁸ Giesbrecht, 19.

²⁹ Jake K. Schellenberg, Christian Investors in Education Files (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre), II-J, 6, 3-9.

³⁰ Although Pauingassi's school was funded and directed by the Indian Affairs Department, many of its teachers were Mennonite.

³¹ Jake K. Schellenberg, handwritten notes from a phone conversation, 6 March, 1969, Christian Investors in Education Files (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre), II-J, 6, 3-9.

³² The store committee purchased land across the lake although it was never used for several reasons. First, the trading post acted by request of the community since it would provide a separation for the managers from the people. Members of the community expressed concern for outsiders during times of drinking. The rationale which eventually decided against such a plan lay in the simple fact that if the store was across the lake, the community would be presented with similar problems during the

freezing and thawing of the lake. They would not be able to get groceries any better from across the lake or sixteen kilometres away.

³³ More investigation needs to be done on the involvement of the community during this critical period of the store's establishment.

³⁴ The Conference of Mennonites in Canada had been involved with recruiting teachers at Pauingassi since Henry and Elna Neufeld's arrival. They were concerned, however, about becoming too involved in the store project as it might compromise their mission within the community.

³⁵ F.P. Giesbrecht, Christian Investors in Education File (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre, II-J, 6, 3-9).

³⁶ Menno Wiebe, Christian Investors in Education File. (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre), II-J, 6, 3-9.

³⁷ Regrettably it was not possible to go to Pauingassi to interview community residents for their interpretation of these events.

³⁸ The couple agreed to work for \$350/month plus lodging.

³⁹ Henry Neufeld, Christian Investors in education File. (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre), II-J, 6, 3-9.

⁴⁰ It is regrettable that the Duerksens were not interviewed for this paper. Their experience during the first crucial months would be a valuable addition.

⁴¹ I was five years old when my parents, Jake and Margaret Harms, moved to Pauingassi.

⁴² Jake and Margaret Harms, telephone interview, 4 April, 2000.

⁴³ On a personal trip to Pauingassi in the summer of 1999, I learned that several widows continue to maintain their late husbands traplines. For the community of Pauingassi, trapping clearly represents a cultural component not entirely related to economic incentive.

⁴⁴ The exact figures are unavailable at this time.

⁴⁵ Arthur Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 225.

⁴⁶ Jake and Margaret Froese, telephone interview, 12 April, 2000.

⁴⁷ Jona Loeppky, Personal interview, 28 February, 2000.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ This view was expressed by Jona Loeppky. The managers, Jake and Margaret Froese, however, expressed the opinion that many debts were written off during their tenure.

⁵⁰ Jake and Margaret Harms, telephone interview, 4 April, 2000.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Jake Harms, Personal Papers, Christian Investors in Education Minutes, May 20, 1975.

During the tenure of Jake and Margaret Harms, the store began to distribute dividends or hampers to the community with the profits of that year. While it is unclear at this juncture whether they continued this practice throughout the 1970s, the store profits were consistently either returned to the community or reinvested into the store itself.

⁵³ Jake Harms, personal papers, Christian Investors in Education Annual Report, 1974.

⁵⁴ Interview with Henry Neufeld.

⁵⁵ Henry Neufeld, telephone interview, 10 April, 2000.

⁵⁶ Reported by all those interviewed.

⁵⁷ Jake and Margaret Froese, telephone interview, 12 April, 2000.

⁵⁸ Menno Wiebe, Christian Investors in Education Minutes, 20 May, 1975. Personal papers of Jake Harms.

⁵⁹ An opinion expressed by every person interviewed.

⁶⁰ Henry Neufeld, telephone interview, 10 April, 2000.

⁶¹ Jona Loeppky. Personal Interview. 28 February, 2000. Loeppky claims that the Indian Affairs Department did not consider the store financially viable because under their leadership, it would have to support three levels of bureaucracy. Under CIE leadership, any profit incurred was simply returned to the community or reinvested into the store.

⁶² Giesbrecht, 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁵ Jona Loeppky, personal interview, 3 March, 2000.

⁶⁶ A brief examination of the period from 1983 through 1987 illustrates the high turnover rate of employees. J. and S.S. were terminated on April 30, 1983 and on July 8, I.J.B. submitted his resignation to the board. E. and E.J. began work on July 13, 1983 and ended on January 13, 1984. B.K. began in late December, 1983 and quit as of June 22, 1984. Another employee was terminated on July 30, 1984. 1986 saw the termination of three managers and in 1987, one of the managers died of natural causes during his tenure.

⁶⁷ Jona Loeppky, personal interview, 28 February, 2000.

⁶⁸ Henry Neufeld, telephone Interview, 26 September, 2000.