ABSTRACT

“THE PRINCIPLE OBJECT OF THEIR AFFECTIONS:” THE CHANGING NATURE OF BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES IN THE LAKE ERIE WORLD, 1794-1825

by

Andrew Thomas Hall

From 1794 to 1825, a distinct transnational community developed along the American-Canadian border around Lake Erie that matured first through social contact and strengthened with trade. Nationality mattered little, as people of various backgrounds developed unique relationships in a shared border space that existed on the frontier of many societies. The strong social ties strained under the threat of war in 1812, and suffered extensively through a retaliatory conflict along border spaces. Broken kinships followed bifurcated loyalties in the years following the war, leading to a dramatic decline in cross-border interaction. As friends and families broke apart, the fur trade kept transnational contact alive, but only for as long as there were animals to hunt. The development of the Erie Canal in 1825 and the decline of valuable game led to the exodus of major trade groups and the overall collapse of this Lake Erie World.
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Table of Contents

List of Figures ................................................................. ii
Acknowledgments ............................................................. iii
Introduction ......................................................................... 1
Chapter I: The Rise of the Lake Erie World ..................... 8
Chapter II: From Borderlands to Battlegrounds ................. 29
Chapter III: (In)Visible Borders ....................................... 50
Conclusion ........................................................................... 74
Bibliography ....................................................................... 76
List of Figures

Figure 1: John Mitchell 1755 Map: .........................2
Figure 2: Old Northwest Population 1800: .................14
Figure 3: Old Northwest Population 1810 ..................57
Figure 4: Old Northwest Population 1820 .................68
Acknowledgements

The quote used in the title above comes from the collected papers of John Graves Simcoe, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada in the late eighteenth century. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Miami University History Department, the Detroit Public Library’s Burton Historical Collection, and the members of my committee for providing support and proofing drafts. I also want to especially thank Ashley, Dana, Katie, Kelsey, Will, Mike, and AJ for their unwavering support. I would not have made it this far without each one of them.
The formation of an international boundary line between the new United States and the Colonies of British Canada in 1784 yielded striking consequences for the following decades. The perceived need to officially separate the fledgling republic from its colonial progenitor led to a series of hastily-made and poorly considered decisions about the border. Most of the attention focused on the west, with British and American diplomats both attempting to gain a better foothold for their nation in the western regions of North America. Consequently few people considered the borders directly separating the United States from Canada, one of the main points of the peace talks.

The commissioners placed in charge of determining where the United States ended and Canada began were not locals, and never visited North America during their decision process. They relied both on maps of North America and verbal recommendation as guides. During this process the commissioners used “confused or competing landmarks” as physical descriptors of where the border lay, which were not universal for all people along the border.¹ Perhaps the most significant issue that contributed to the perplexing nature of the border were the resources used by the various diplomats who designed it. John Mitchell, an explorer and cartographer, created a map of North America in 1755, which most knew to contain serious geographical lapses. Egregious errors, such as placing the Niagara River, which empties into Lake Erie, too far north and not even touching the lake made the map unreliable.² These kinds of issues led to confusing treaty language, and even more confusing border delineation.

¹ Francis M. Carroll. *A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5; Many of the geographical markers that the commissioners discussed, such as river bends and physical landmarks, often took on different meanings depending on which side of the proposed border a person stood on. This contributed to some land disputes, but generally led to an acceptance by people in the region that the rivers and lakes made a better border. Despite making their own boundary, many people still crossed between the U.S. and Canada as they did before the Revolutionary War.
² Ibid 9.
The Great Lakes, specifically Lake Erie, remained even more ambiguous and undefined than the rest of the border. It lay along the “frontier” of both the United States and Upper Canada and held a large population of indigenous peoples. It existed as a “fifth coast” in North America, as it saw a large volume of traffic similar to the Atlantic coastline and granted great access to the continental interior. With direct connections to the Atlantic through the Niagara and Saint Lawrence Rivers, and as a passageway to the western parts of North America through the Detroit River, Lake Erie acted as an easily accessible gate through which people could travel. For settlers, the massive water basin made the Lake Erie watershed an excellent place for agricultural development. Low lying land with sandy soil made the coastal regions ideal for farming. No oversight over the border allowed people to move as they wished, and led to a wide

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5 Ibid 8
scattering of populations in the latter years of the 1790s. The major increase in settlement around Lake Erie caused tensions between new arrivals and the Native Americans already inhabiting the area. Tension led to open war between Native Americans and new settlers, and eventually American political intervention. Suddenly the border mattered, but only long enough to resolve the disputes before it again faded away into vague treaty language and obscurity.\(^6\)

These events beg the question: when did people living in the Great Lakes region of North America recognize the various borders there, and why did it matter? Borders always existed in the region, whether in cultural, economic, or political forms. What makes this region interesting is that these borders overlap with a major body of water, changing the dynamics in how people interact and form relationships along what eventually became a recognized international boundary. Most scholars who focus on this period emphasize the political and militaristic interplay between Americans, Canadians, British, and Native Americans living along the various borders between the United States and Canada. Historiographical trends point to the American-Canadian border as being a singular construction, with a set understanding of frontier dynamics that apply anywhere along it.\(^7\) Borders, however, are complicated structures that are as fluid as the water that they occasionally cross. The boundary between the powers of North America in the 1790s held a different shape in the Northeast along the St. Lawrence River than it did in the Northwest along Lake Erie.\(^8\) While in other border spaces the boundary line was porous and led to some contact, the open nature of Lake Erie led to something far more complex. Over the course of three decades a distinct international community formed along the coasts of the lake, with individuals using the water as a convenient method to meet new people and conduct business. This Lake Erie World, a construction similar to the long standing Atlantic World, developed its own culture and economy through the development of strong social ties that disregarded national identity and concepts of race. As a true frontier community it matured away from the purview of most governmental oversight, allowing people to meet on common ground and develop something new.

\(^6\) Ibid 22
\(^7\) Several recent works that discuss this topic include Catherine Cangany’s *Frontier Seaport*, Alan Taylor’s *The Civil War of 1812*, and Jason Kaufman’s *The Origins of Canadian and American Political Difference*.
\(^8\) Works such as William Ashworth’s *The Late Great Lakes* and John Bukowczyk’s *Permeable Border* discuss Lake Erie during the early nineteenth century, but leave considerable gaps when discussing the period around the War of 1812 and its impact on the region.
Several interesting developments arise from the creation of the Lake Erie World that bear scrutiny. One significant aspect of the region is the way in which the physical space in which people lived influenced the decisions they made, particularly in terms of self-identification. When placed in a region outside of the aid of governmental authorities, people of different backgrounds had to find ways to work cooperatively with their neighbors in order to effectively manage this new space. As people came together, their community solidified into a cohesive organization. Through the sharing of physical space people had to form social bonds in order to create stable homes. Social and economic associations like these eventually gave powerful trading groups, such as the American Fur Company, a great deal of power throughout the region, eventually granting them near governmental legitimacy. A final interesting point that the creation of a Lake Erie World brings to bear is how it dealt with conflict. The rise of the regional community coincided with a decline in diplomatic relations between the United States, Upper Canada, and Great Britain, leading eventually to the outbreak of war. While it did not collapse as an immediate result of the conflict, the Lake Erie World suffered serious setbacks in attempting to keep cross-border relations alive. The same social institutions that people attempted to save from the war ironically caused more significant damage than the war ever did, leading to interesting international interactions in the following years.

A variety of historical approaches inform this thesis, including Canadian and American development, border and borderlands histories, and work on identity and nationalism. The discussion on the relations between the United States and Canada began mainly with the perennial *The Mingling of American and Canadian Peoples* by Marcus Hansen. Hansen developed the interesting concept of geo-political borders as “imagined lines,” an important concept now widely used by scholars. Jane Errington’s *The Lion, The Eagle, and Upper Canada* continued the ideas Hansen first stated about communities by denoting Canadian colonists as “multi-national citizens,” as they could operate just as well in the United States as in

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9 Richard White. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) White argues that middle grounds formed partially as a result of conflict, with war forcing people to find a sort of common ground in which to negotiate. This work is both a continuation of his argument and a challenge to it, as I do not think that his model holds true until 1815 as he claims.

Upper Canada before the war. The post war years, she argues, caused Canadians to withdraw from this international persona, as fear of further conflict pushed the colony towards isolation. A recent addition to the conversation on Canadian and American development, Alan Taylor’s *The Civil War of 1812*, gives a unique perspective on the War of 1812 and the relationship between Upper Canada and the United States. He argues that despite the increasing political divide between citizens of the republic and subjects of the empire, people in America and Upper Canada still maintained significant border-crossing relationships, and that the War of 1812 was in reality “a civil war between kindred peoples.” Catherine Cangany’s *Frontier Seaport* is the most recent addition to this discussion, arguing that Detroit became a frontier metropolis that connected the Great Lakes region with the Atlantic world. Cangany emphasizes the importance of the North American interior during a time in which the Atlantic dominates most discussions of trade and commerce, as well as the importance of the fur trade into the conversation.

Other scholars have vastly increased the community’s understanding of the complexities of borders, borderlands, and frontiers. Peter Sahlin’s pioneering work in *Boundaries* created a new model for scholars to work with when attempting to create a borderlands history. Discussing the Catalan Valley between France and Spain, he argues that those living in the region maintained “a local identity centered on the village or valley” that coexisted with a national identity. Sahlin uses the concept of conflicting identities to show how people interacted in a constantly changing borderland, as the region regularly changed hands between Spain and France. Another good model for borderlands histories is Richard White’s *The Middle Ground*, which discusses the attempts by white European settlers to deal with Native Americans that did not share any kind of common language. White developed the idea of a “middle ground,” which he described as places in which Europeans and Native Americans attempted to find common meaning based not on similarities, but on common misunderstandings about each other. In “From Borderlands to Borders” Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron break down the concept of borderlands into three main terms: borders, borderlands, and frontiers. The authors

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argue that borderlands, unlike what many scholars before them allude to, do not remain open indefinitely, and have “discrete turning points.” In this way frontiers, which open as points of initial contact between peoples, eventually develop borderlands around them that have greater imperial or state influence, and finally shift into solid borders under an empire or nation-state. From here many scholars now work on borderlands by considering how concepts of identity play out along a frontier as it shifts with state influence.

The last major historiography that informs the thesis is that of identity, which is important to consider when discussing the growth of communities on boundaries. Much of the literature in this field developed alongside borderlands studies, and help add more complex interpretations as to how borders work and what borders actually are. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* revolutionized the conversation on the concept of imaginary borders and communities. Anderson’s work discusses the idea of how national communities form not from real, concrete similarities between the people of those nations, but instead on imagined concepts of sameness and beliefs of how others are different. In this sense Anderson argues that nationalism, a force in his opinion often misunderstood, is more a way to “bring people together in an ideological and intellectual way.”

Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez’s *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* discusses the Mexican-American border community in terms of social violence. Bringing together elements of both borderland and identity studies, she argues that “racial positioning, gender, and class” coincided with “regional identities…and economic conditions” to produce tensions in certain borderland areas that may not be the case for other regions. Her work argues that the violence that occurred along the Mexican-American border in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not isolated, but instead is indicative of a larger issue surrounding large borders.

The primary goal of this thesis is to better understand how people interacted in complicated regions, and how they dealt with the changing nature of various borders. People in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries lived along the political border between the

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United States and Upper Canada, but they also lived along a plethora of other boundaries as well. Economic, social, religious, and cultural distinctions divided people during this period just as much, if not more so than politics. Attempting to understand how the many people within the Lake Erie watershed coexisted with those living across borders then has a deeper meaning; the lives of people at the time were complicated, and their story should be no less problematic for us to unpack. In reconstructing the distinct world that developed around Lake Erie at the turn of the century, I hope to develop a stronger understanding of what a border is, and exactly why it is important both in the lives of those in the past as well as in our own understanding of the world today.
On August 14, 1795 Edmund Burke, a Loyalist living in the Michigan Territory, wrote a letter to a British officer in Upper Canada concerning the “illicit” movement of people across the border. He voiced concern to a Major Littlehales about a man known as McDougal, a rogue fur trade agent that fled Upper Canada for the United States. Burke tells how McDougal “brought a couple of Indian Assassins with him from Sandusky” for the purpose of murdering “Captain Elliot and poor Adam Brown,” another Indian agent and a translator working for the crown. McDougal and the assassins crossed the lake, but fled before completing the deed. The now infamous fur trading agent ran to Detroit, and used his American contacts there to continue west towards the Mississippi. The Native assassins he hired however did not succeed in fleeing, and “had to recourse under the Indian Law” of the Wyandot. Burke closes his letter urging that “immediate measures” must be taken to protect the Lake Erie region, and Britain’s influence there, from the “sedition” of traitors and foreigners. Burke’s letter encapsulates a complex new world in which politics and states mattered little, and people identified more with who they knew and lived near than with nations or ideologies. In a space so often characterized by widespread violence and distrust in the late eighteenth century, Burke demonstrates the possibility for a unique place of open travel and relations.

In 1795 a new world developed in the Lake Erie watershed following the signing of the Jay Treaty, restoring a sense of peace and stability to a region that dissolved during the Seven Years War. The borderland that existed in the region prior to 1795 persisted in a world of constant conflicts between the Native Americans, the United States, Great Britain, and various frontier settlers. The ceasing of hostilities and the opening of the border between the United States and Upper Canada encouraged people to settle throughout the region, prompting the creation of new communities comprised of peoples from various national and cultural

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18 Ibid 63.

19 Ibid 64.
backgrounds. Lake Erie, which both physically and conceptually existed on the fringe of most societies, provided a distinct landscape well-suited for cross-border interaction.

The lake, which encompasses 9,910 square miles, intersects with various spaces that people chose to occupy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the only real point of sail from the Atlantic came from the Niagara River, connected via the Saint Lawrence River, large ships rarely made their way to the lake’s interior.\(^{20}\) Canoes and small personal crafts defined lake travel in this period, with those not willing to risk Lake Erie’s sometimes violent nature walking or using horse powered locomotion to move around the vast body of water.\(^{21}\) Americans and Native peoples in particular used the lake to their advantage to avoid the Great Black Swamp, which one Ohio resident described as “my great terror.”\(^{22}\) As people moved into this space, whether through frontier settlement or forced displacement, they were compelled to create connections with new people and ideas, as the structures of society that they came from had yet to develop there.\(^{23}\) The Lake Erie world that developed from the movement of people relied on the social and cultural connections that people made with their new neighbors. With less expectation to follow particular social and cultural norms, people formed relationships with those of other nations and races, allowing Americans, Canadians, and Native Americans to bind together along a concept of freedom that did not exist beyond “frontier spaces.” The wide acceptance of new ideas across borders, such as the expansion of Methodism, as well as cultural appropriation of various norms, such as the wearing of Native American garb by non-Indian peoples, demonstrate the development of this new world.

When European settlers first moved into the Great Lakes region they interacted extensively with native peoples, leading to the creation of “middle grounds.” Richard White explains the development of a middle ground, which people created based on cultural

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\(^{21}\) Lake Erie is well known for its choppy waters and unpredictable weather, leading a number of people to avoid traveling directly across it when possible. For this reason coastal travel became popular, leading to the development of regular towns and posts along the shores of the lake.

\(^{22}\) William Woodbridge to Juliana Trumbull Woodbridge, Jan. 18, 1815. Quoted from Taylor 154.

\(^{23}\) While many of the people who moved into the Lake Erie region did so willingly, many American Indians found themselves in a new region based on the forced removal enforced by the Treaty of Greenville.
misunderstandings, as an “involved process of mutual invention.”

White explains that middle grounds originated from different peoples coming into conflict and eventually needing a way to come to common terms. Out of war both settlers and native peoples developed the desire “to gain the cooperation or consent of foreigners,” particularly in terms of economics. The ability of traders to utilize the lake for transit made Lake Erie a profitable area for furs, as they could be carried down the Niagara River and eventually make it all the way to the Atlantic. Fur trading also helped to establish amicable relations in the region that otherwise tended to be violent and unstable. One system in particular, English patriarchy, strengthened ties between natives and settlers by creating relationships that saw Native Americans as part of a larger family. English settlers and diplomats acted as “fathers” to various Native peoples, encouraging regular interactions and trade throughout North America. Systems such as these existed because of the fairly peaceful world created by middle ground. People felt free to expand into new regions and interact with those of other cultures without the general fear of living on the frontier of a state.

This middle ground world in the early eighteenth century created unique opportunities for people, but was disrupted by shifting power structures and forced conflict. The Seven Years’ War led to an unequal distribution of power between settlers and natives that damaged the negotiations that occurred prior to 1754. As French and British imperial forces began fighting in North America, old relationships between colonists and Native Americans broke down. Issues of “commercial opportunism” took precedence over old alliances as various groups across the continent mobilized resources to support whomever seemed to be the most profitable. Various nations within the Algonquin language group, which for so long prior to the outbreak of hostilities remained allies with France, changed sides, giving Britain a powerful advantage. By the end of the war France lost most of its influence in North America, which solidified British imperial authority and severely damaged the middle ground system. In the years following the end of the Seven Years’ War, the areas around the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley became


26 White 98.

27 Ibid 224; Anderson and Cayton, 45.
tumultuous zones of perpetual struggle. British Indian agents no longer saw the need to appease Native nations with gifts, as the power structures of the continent changed with the loss of French power for Indians to negotiate with. What became known as the Ohio Indian Wars led to nearly half a century of continued conflict between Native Americans and Euro-American settlers who has previously enjoyed a somewhat peaceful coexistence in a middle ground.28

Tensions came to a head in the 1790s as the fledgling United States attempted to assert dominance over the Ohio Valley, something that they saw Britain failing to do prior to the American Revolution. Settlers continued to move into the region, and met fierce resistance from native nations there. As tensions mounted in the Lake Erie region the United States sent armed expeditions to investigate. Their objectives were to drive out Native Americans hampering American settlement and to protect those settlers who already established communities. The first two expeditions, led by Revolutionary veterans Josiah Harmar and Arthur St. Claire, failed almost as soon as they began. The Western Confederacy, primarily comprised of Wyandot, Shawnee, Kickapoo, and Iroquois nations, not only had forewarning of the American attacks, but also a healthy supply of weapons, all provided by British Indian Agents and royal forces still operating in the region. The third expedition, however, led by Anthony Wayne, found a great deal more success than the previous two. Following a devastating loss for the native peoples at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, the power structures of the region, much like during the Seven Years’ War, changed drastically. The United States used its new position of authority to force various treaties, of which the Jay Treaty was only a small part.

While the direct results of the fighting in the Lake Erie region led to the Treaty of Greeneville, the movement of peoples across borders, and the issues it brought, led to discussions of a larger nature. The 1794 Jay Treaty, also known as John Jay’s Treaty and The Treaty of London, is the point at which a coherent transnational Lake Erie world first formed, as the treaty harkened back to a time when settlers and Native Americans could coexist in a fairly peaceful way.29 Poorly defined language influenced where people could travel, settle, and operate within the Lake Erie region in the early 1790s, creating a muddled combination of


29 The Jay Treaty also dealt with trade issues, particularly on the Atlantic, with Great Britain as well, but for this story the border issues it attempted to resolve are most pertinent.
British, American, French, and Native American peoples. The British army took advantage of the confusion in the area to establish several forts along the Great Lakes, particularly Fort Mackinac and Fort Miami.\textsuperscript{30} After the discovery of a British garrison at Fort Miami, the American and British governments clashed once again on issues of land rights and border distinctions. The resulting peace talks led in part to the Jay Treaty, which established specific guidelines “by amicable negotiation” as to how “to regulate the boundary line.”\textsuperscript{31}

On the issue of the border itself, the treaty opened up the Lake Erie watershed in a variety of ways that people exploited over the next two decades. The treaty stated that those within the area were free “to pass and repass by land or inland navigation, into the respective territories and countries of the two parties.”\textsuperscript{32} This established that citizens of the United States, subjects of the British Empire in Upper Canada, and Native Americans were free to pass, unhindered, across an established political boundary line set up and acknowledged by multiple governments. While the border itself prior to this point was not protected or under any form of specific administration and people could freely cross as they pleased, the treaty gave a sense of safety by promising a ceasing of hostilities. After nearly six decades of constant conflict throughout the region, the Jay Treaty allowed people to hope that their world could return to the middle ground of amicable negotiation, mutual cooperation, and wide social interaction that was disrupted in 1754.

Not all parties were happy with this organization; the United States government fought to avoid creating an open political and economic border. Despite claims on the western territory, as well as aims towards Upper Canada, much of the frustration on the behalf of the federal powers of America were summed up in a letter from James Madison to John Graves Simcoe. Madison feared that “Indians within those limits” would lose ties with the American government and other interests among the states. His concern revolved around the idea that Americans could not be certain that Native Americans who acted as trade partners in the past would not just leave if the British gave them more lucrative offers. Madison accused Simcoe, who enforced the

\textsuperscript{30} Mackinac is in modern day Michigan and eventually served as an important trading post. Fort Miami, situated at the Maumee River, eventually played a large role in the War of 1812.

\textsuperscript{31} Jay's Treaty, November 18, 1794, Article 4.

\textsuperscript{32} Jay's Treaty, November 18, 1794, Article 3.
restrictions of the treaty, of giving Indians unfair incentives to trade in Upper Canada by bringing “their goods duty free” into the colony.  

The Lake Erie World took shape as people began moving out into the “frontier” regions of their respective states. The United States congress finally ratified the Jay Treaty in 1795, but only under the strict provision that all people in the region, not just native peoples, were to have free and equal access among the various nations and ports within the Northwest. At this time the middle grounds, which for so long supported people in the region, transformed from economic associations between rivals into something far different. With the ending of major hostilities, there was no longer a need to maintain economic and political alliances with nearby powers solely for the purpose of outdoing rivals. Instead of continuing on in a muted, limited fashion, which has so often been argued, the nature of middle grounds changed to suit the needs of those within the region. As people moved into the Lake Erie watershed they found themselves in a position in which they had to negotiate the land with others around them. The peace brought by the Jay Treaty forced these fringe settlers to accommodate neighbors of varying cultural and national backgrounds, leading to greater regional cooperation. This, coupled with the easily accessible border around the lake, contributed to the development of a larger international community.

After 1795, the Lake Erie region saw the creation of a new world in which people could more easily expand and make relationships with others without the looming threat of conflict that persisted before. People moved into the region and forged connections with other settlers and Native Americans along the various coastal regions as well as across the water. Both Anglo-Americans and Native Americans, as seen from the story of McDougle’s assassination attempt, crossed the border without much concern for leaving one nation and entering another. What developed was a unique formation of various, yet highly similar, regional cultures and identities. While people identified more with those they lived immediately close to, they also corresponded to a larder regional identity that connected Americans, Canadians, and Native Americans through a shared body of water. Instead of bifurcating into an American South and a British-Canadian North, as most scholars suggest, what developed was something new entirely: an amalgamation.

33 Cruikshank and Simcoe 83.

34 Jay's Treaty, November 18, 1794, Article 2.
of a new regional culture based on new values and appropriated beliefs from a number of groups. This new sense of identity and belonging to a larger region led to the development of a more inclusive Lake Erie world that had the potential to create a very different North America.

Fig. 2: The movement of people into the Lake Erie region first began in a major way in the years following the Jay Treaty. Using available census records of the time, as well as records from the American Fur Company, this map tracks the growth of populations alongside the extent of the fur trade in 1800.

In the wake of the 1795 treaty, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe set out to change the province of Upper Canada. As it stood, Upper Canada existed as a heterogeneous mixture of various nationalities and ethnicities with no common core. While predominantly English, the colony boasted a large population of German, Irish, Scot, French, Dutch, and Native

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35 Benedict R. O’G Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 10. Anderson argues that communities formed based on perceived commonalities and differences, but it is more that. Identity exists in a variety of facets, especially in terms of special proximity.

36 Peter Sahlins. *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 8. Sahlins argues that communities formed based less on cultural similarities and more on regional proximity. Perceptions of similarity can only happen once there is a common physical space that people share.

American peoples. Accepting that these individuals were a foundational part of the colony, Simcoe intended to rebuild the culture of Canada by using the English model of government, law, and language as a way to unite these people. Simcoe’s colony plan revolved around the idea that the American-British Loyalists who fled after the American Revolution, while still subjects under the British crown, were no longer British. Through this understanding, if they could be brought back to the Crown under Canada’s government, then so too could members of the new American Republic. In this way Simcoe attempted to blur the line that separated a subject of the Empire from a citizen of the Republic.

Simcoe demonstrated an early understanding of the importance of nationality in identity. He recognized that around Lake Erie there was no real sense of loyalty to a national group that would tie people to one particular state. People living on what would become the American side of the lake had yet to develop a clear sense of belonging to those further east, and found more similarities to those living to the north. Though he realized that none of the Americans coming to Canada could officially become subjects of the empire, Simcoe relied on feelings of loyalty to the monarchy that would drive the people to settle throughout the province. Eventually, he hoped, Canada could use the vast numbers of its new settlers to retake the United States for the Crown, creating a continent-wide British Canada. While this radical transformation in power never occurred, Simcoe’s plans did aid in creating an intricately interconnected community between the United States and Upper Canada, strengthening the Lake Erie world that had emerged out of the Jay Treaty. Most had yet to nurture a true sense of national self, and relied primarily on their understandings and interactions with those around them to define themselves. Overall Simcoe’s policies of an open border and vast “columns of migration” remained popular in Upper Canada. It brought economic and population growth to the region, more than doubling the colony’s size in about five years. Upper Canadians in general saw immigrants

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39 Ibid 29.

40 Ibid 43. Simcoe thought that he could win over the hearts and minds of Americans, therefore never firing a shot in his campaign to regain Britain’s lost holdings.

41 Sahlins 21.

from the United States as “worthy of imitation,” and they remained fairly ambivalent towards the continual influx of American immigrants.43

Most Upper Canadians supported Simcoe’s open policies towards Americans and native peoples, but the burgeoning international community of the Lake Erie world did not form without challenge. From early on in the lake world’s development the Loyalist elite in Upper Canada rejected anything involving the United States. Key members of the Upper Canadian parliament attempted to fight against the establishment of the Jay Treaty, fearing that the ensuing entrance of Americans and pro-American Indians would corrupt the British nature of the colony. Following the treaty’s ratification the *Kingston Daily Advertiser*, a conservative paper owned by a Loyalist, claimed that “the inhabitants within the United States territory, near Detroit…are preparing to move to the Canada side of the lake and Detroit River…all much chagrined at the treaty with the United States.”44 As the years progressed, these elites continued to fight against American influence in Upper Canada, and primarily against the perceived spread of Republican values.45

Many loyalists believed that American republicanism corrupted the power structures put in place through English government, particularly the importance of the Church of England. George Mountain, an influential Anglican minister in Quebec who supported the loyalist position, argued succinctly that the “dangerous influence of some,” particularly itinerant Methodists carrying republican values, would lead to the “introduction of doctrines in a high degree injurious to the morals of the community.”46 Mountain rejected the idea that American immigration would lead to a stronger Canada. He did not see the utility in the new international community around Lake Erie, and fought against it until well after the War of 1812. Loyalist elites clung to Mountain’s argument against American influence, using his attacks against Methodist preachers as a rallying point.

Much of the loyalists’ behavior towards the border resulted from perceived political threats from the American Federalist government. Following the enactment of open provisions

43 *Kingston Gazette*, 5 February 1811. Quoted from Errington 36.
44 *Kingston Daily Advertiser*, April 1796.
46 Cruikshank and Simcoe, 263.
for the borderland established by the Jay Treaty in 1795, the republic rarely dealt with the border
directly. With political turmoil brought out by the antifederalists, and the eventual power
exchange to the Jeffersonian Republicans, the United States maintained a general ambivalence
towards Lake Erie and the Northwest.\textsuperscript{47} During this period the nation looked more towards
internal improvements than to international concerns, which contributed to the creation of an
open border community. Much of this political ambivalence towards Methodists crossing into
Canada came from the discontented attitudes of American elites. Many saw Methodists as
overly emotional and open-minded. They challenged the status quo of American society by
emotionally empowering the lower classes, who flocked to revival meetings and Methodist
churches. The fact that Methodists began moving into Canada during this time removed them as
a problem for most American elites.

The Loyalists also saw American Methodism as such a monumental challenge to their
way of life because they feared that it carried republican values. The general fear existed that
Methodist teachings would push people to reconsider their association to the Church of England,
and that this would threaten England’s power in Canada. This resulted from the highly
emotional style of preaching that brought so many of the lower classes to the church. Similar to
the American elites, the Loyalists feared what a Methodist challenge could do to the authority of
the Anglican Church.\textsuperscript{48} As a result in 1798 the Upper Canadian parliament passed a law
prohibiting Methodist ministers from officiating any public affairs, particularly marriage.\textsuperscript{49} The
hope was that the lack of official power would convince the Methodists that they were unwanted
in the province. Legislation such as this combined with the control that loyalists had over certain
popular newspapers, such as the Kingston Daily Advertiser, led to a certain amount of unrest in
the colony’s British and expatriate American elite.

Many of the Methodist ministers, however, claimed that they were there for the people of
Upper Canada, not the government. William Case, one of many itinerant Methodist
missionaries, argued that the people of Canada required “religious instruction,” particularly
because so many were Americans who separated themselves from their families by moving

\textsuperscript{47} Kaufman 140.
\textsuperscript{48} Errington 26.
\textsuperscript{49} Taylor 61.
north.⁵⁰ Case and other ministers like him spread throughout the Lake Erie watershed in this period. As they gained a foothold in Upper Canada, particularly Sandwich and Kingston, the ministers there connected with those remaining in the United States, creating regular circuits through which the church could cycle itinerants and bring followers across borders. Many of the churches and congregations established along the border constituted members from the United States, Upper Canada, and various Native American nations.⁵¹ The “Ottawa Circuit,” operated by a Mr. Perry in 1800, began near Montreal but traveled throughout Canada and ended in Niagara, New York. This particular circuit aimed towards the various Native American nations in the region, hoping to bring them into the same fold as white settlers.⁵² Methodist ministers acted as an important factor in the solidification of the international community in Lake Erie, and their ability to bring people together is indicative of the wider changes taking place across the region.

The Methodists who traveled around the Lake Erie world in the early 1800s, apart from showing how simple it could be to cross the border, demonstrated the dynamic nature of this new world. They belonged to an organization that spanned several states in North America, but also attracted the ire of elites from each. By attracting so much attention from the people living in this new world, the Methodists demonstrate something very interesting about what made this world unique; the world was neither American, Canadian, British, nor Native American in cultural origin. In a way the Lake Erie world existed as an amalgamation of the fringes of each of these cultures, which created not only a new region of new people, but also a new cultural group that did not exist before. Much like the middle ground that existed in North America prior to 1754, the Lake Erie world established on the basis of shared cultural understandings and mutual relationships. There was no American south or British-Canadian north at this time, and the Methodists’ development of a circuit system, as well as the reactions of loyalists against them, demonstrate how the new world developed and what it could have looked like, were it to persist for a long period of time.


⁵¹ Hansen 72.

⁵² John Carroll 109.
Upper Canada played a decisive role in the formation and development of the international community that formed in the Lake Erie world, but the loyalists who resisted it did so by looking for distinct differences between Canadian colonists and new American nationals that otherwise were not self-evident.\textsuperscript{53} Apart from claiming political differences and a lack of American legal rights across the border, the loyalists spent the most effort fighting against the new burgeoning community by attacking Methodist ideology.\textsuperscript{54} In this case, however, a community did not form based on perceived differences between one another, but instead on perceived similarities. The community as a whole, with the Methodists as only a subset, grew based on these shared perceptions and helped to develop a world around Lake Erie that, despite some pushback, developed along the concepts of mutual cooperation that defined North America prior to 1754.\textsuperscript{55}

The Lake Erie world developed based on the perceived cultural and social similarities between people much like the pre 1754 middle grounds, but was also connected by the highly influential fur trade. By the early 1800s major trade companies developed in Lake Erie, and by 1808 the fur trade became the most profitable business west of the Appalachians. The new economic prosperity that came to the Lake Erie watershed relied on three crucial factors. First was the water of the lake itself, which provided transportation throughout the region and allowed trade goods to move smoothly from nation to nation and market to market. The second major factor was the reliance on an established community that needed each other for success. Without the already present connections of Americans, Canadians, and Native peoples in the new Lake Erie world, the fur trade would likely have remained isolated to small companies and local regions in the Northwest. Lastly, the market economy that solidified the community around Lake Erie and gave them a common identity relied on the domination of the natural environment. The various settlements and companies in the region rose to prominence as a result of their


\textsuperscript{55} Anderson 23.
manipulation of the forests and wildlife. The expansion of the fur trade led to fierce competition over resources, which pushed native hunters to gather more furs than ever before.\textsuperscript{56}

One of the first glimpses of the expanded economy that grew from the already social Lake Erie world comes from the accounts of European travelers who saw the changes first hand. In 1804 Robert Sutcliff, an English traveler, wrote of his experiences while exploring the Great Lakes. While stopped in a small tavern near Amherstberg, he commented on large number of Americans he met there. He specifically described a conversation about the tavern’s landlord, and how he “had long been in service of Daniel Offley,” a Pennsylvania merchant who lived in Canada but did business in America.\textsuperscript{57} Much like what Simcoe originally thought opened the border, merchants and their trade led to regular contact between Canada and America. Sutcliff’s experience here is indicative of the new social landscape that developed around the Lake Erie region. With a loose border and encouraging land grants, people began moving all over the region, forming connections that they otherwise may not have had.

Another traveler, John Melish, commented on the unique relationship that existed around Lake Erie with the white residents and the Native Peoples. While discussing the similarities between the United States and Upper Canada, he emphasized how in both “good faith is enjoined with the Indian tribes.”\textsuperscript{58} Throughout his travels Melish talks directly about crossing the border, and how it almost seemed as there was no difference from one side to the other. The language he uses when discussing the various communities he saw emphasizes the notion of a larger community around Lake Erie, particularly when talking about large settlements. While moving through Buffalo on his way to Kingston, he commented on how “a considerable trade is constantly kept up by the influx and reflux of strangers,” many of whom, he noted, were Native Americans.\textsuperscript{59} Melish reinforces the notion of similarity between the United States and Upper Canada by discussing the importance of the peaceful nature around the Lake with the Native Americans. The various Native American nations living around the Lake were as much, if not


\textsuperscript{59} Melish 312.
more so, a part of the transnational community of the region as the Anglo-Europeans and Americans.

While native peoples did find opportunities to live in concert with white settlers around Lake Erie, the most prominent way that they found inclusion in the community was through trade. John Askin, a prominent fur trader and Indian agent in service to the British crown, demonstrates well the interconnected nature of the Native peoples in the Lake Erie world through the fur trade. He came to North America in 1753 with the British military forces fighting in New France. Following France’s defeat, he took up residence in Detroit and became a local justice of the peace and militia captain. He remained here until 1789, when Great Britain ceded Detroit to the United States. He crossed the border and established himself in Sandwich, Upper Canada, leaving behind various friends and his immediate family. By 1797 John Askin, with his fur trading connections, utilized the new and open lake world to reconnect with his son, John Askin Jr. Askin Jr. followed in his father’s footsteps and became a fur trading agent, but worked primarily as an intermediary between the American and European buyers and the local Native American sellers. During negotiations with the Annishnabe over who to sign a deal with, Askin’s company in Upper Canada or American parties, he urged his son to use his “utmost influence not only with the Indians but also with all others.” These two demonstrate the new kind of communities and relationships that formed in the region following the ratification of the Jay Treaty. This Lake Erie world depended on relationships and perceived social and cultural similarities.

The fur trade gave Native Americans, particularly the Algonquin nations in the Northwest, a great deal of power when negotiating with foreign nations and companies. Despite the Treaty of Greenville’s displacement of Native Americans in the southern and central parts of Ohio into the northern areas along the coast of the lake, natives continued to be major actors in the transnational community through trade. Canadians and Americans alike relied on Native trappers to obtain raw furs before trading with intermediaries. Many of the trade goods coming to the native peoples remained the same as they had been for the past century, typically

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60 Cruikshank and Simcoe 38.

consisting of copper or tin cookware, tobacco, and alcohol. Many native nations, such as the Annishnabe that Askin dealt with, saw Euro-American trade as a way to become more prosperous, as well as to gain power by playing the United States and Upper Canada against each other.\textsuperscript{62} While these nations did obtain much of the power they sought, it came at the price of dependency on foreign goods. The more furs native peoples could provide for the various fur trading operations, the more goods they could obtain for themselves. This led to far more extensive hunting of beavers and otters in the Northwest than seen before. The more market forces pushed for product, the faster environmental resources depleted. The environments that once sustained native nations in steady trade began to degrade quickly.\textsuperscript{63} Native peoples, as a result of American and British intervention through market forces, no longer had complete control over the changes in their space.\textsuperscript{64}

Similarly, we cannot understand the Lake Erie world’s burgeoning transnational community without reconciling how the people living there dealt with their natural environment and changing space.\textsuperscript{65} The fur trade specifically, with native peoples at its center, allowed for the development of economic prosperity based on natural resources available from the environment. Beavers, otters, and mink became more important animals than livestock in the Lake Erie world because they provided the largest economic gain. Native peoples participated in this trade by hunting the animals themselves, often spending several weeks to months at a time to bring back as many pelts as possible. After this, they would use natural waterways to meet with fur trading agents, who at this time predominantly belonged to major companies. From there, the pelts were cured and treated, then transported via Lake Erie to its various tributary rivers, allowing furs to move quickly throughout the continent. The shores of Lake Erie saw a good deal of settlement during this time, and major areas of population, such as Detroit, did not see major economic expansion until after the wide-scale implementation of the fur trade in early 1800. Apart from the established community that gave people an opportunity to work

\textsuperscript{62} White 71.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid xvi.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid 69.
\textsuperscript{65} Cronon xv.
transnationally in trade, the waters of Lake Erie were an essential piece in the economic growth the region gained from the trapping and selling of furs.\textsuperscript{66}

Lake Erie soon changed from a wide frontier with sparse settlements into a large fur trading hub, with areas like Detroit creating “a structure of government and courts well suited to a frontier people.”\textsuperscript{67} Old companies, such as the Hudson’s Bay Company, and newer, smaller organizations moved into the region in order to take advantage of the long trading season and plentiful resources. The development of a transnational world around the lake also gave these companies a major incentive, as for the first time in decades there was a stable region with extensive connections that could expand economically. These companies absorbed or worked in tandem with smaller fur trading groups, primarily French Canadians, in order to compete with other groups. One company that rose very quickly to the top of the fur trade in Lake Erie was the American Fur Company. Headed by German immigrant John Jacob Astor, the American Fur Company became a dominant force in the region by forming trade alliances with smaller trading organizations instead of forcefully taking them over.

Taking advantage of the “commodity flows” of fur that drove the trade, company agents met regularly with French fur traders in Upper and Lower Canada to ensure a regular supply of beaver and otter pelts.\textsuperscript{68} Peter Powell, one of Astor’s main fur agents, sent Joseph Baily to meet with the Latnaux clan of Montreal to establish good relations. Upon their first meeting, encapsulated in a report from Baily to Powell, the two met on equal ground. The language of the report itself does not discuss nationality or ethnicity, and focuses on the Latnaux family as trading partners. Apart from the name of the family, the major indicators that they were French fur traders are due to the large prevalence of French trading families throughout the frontier regions of North American in the nineteenth century and that a good portion of the document was written in French.\textsuperscript{69} Baily references an amicable trade of goods, particularly a canoe with

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid 156. Lake Erie provided fur trading companies with a great incentive for long hunting seasons, as the Lake typically only froze over for a few weeks in the winter. This allowed people to move along the Lake often throughout the year.

\textsuperscript{67} Malcolm J. Rorhbough. Trans-Appalacian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions 1775-1850 (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008), 101.

\textsuperscript{68} Cronon xvi. While beaver furs tended to be the most sought after trade good, otters and other small animals tended to be acceptable substitutes.

\textsuperscript{69} Hyde 40. The Campaeus, a mixed Native American-French family from the St. Louis area, operated in a similar fashion to the Lantaux by forming trade agreements and alliances with nearby companies and governments.
“6 pacquets de castor,” or large packages of beaver pelts.\textsuperscript{70} After this first successful meeting, Baily continued to meet the Lantaux, among other families, to form alliances of trade that other companies did not have. The connections that the American Fur Company established through agents like Baily made with small fur trading groups gave them direct access to the vast numbers of furs that native trappers obtained. The company enjoyed this advantage because other companies, such as the Hudson’s Bay Company, tended to pay higher prices for furs from other agents instead of obtaining them from the source.\textsuperscript{71}

The development of the American Fur Company and its competition with other groups is indicative of a larger consolidation of a regional community in an economic and environmental way. Jane Errington concisely states the impact of these companies by explaining how “the continuing personal contact across the border was supplemented by increasingly lucrative economic associations between merchants.”\textsuperscript{72} Cleveland, Detroit, and Sandwich all saw tremendous increases in the production and exportation of rum, whiskey, salt, seed, and tobacco.\textsuperscript{73} Each of these trade goods, and many more, moved around Lake Erie to various Native American trading posts and villages, and tended to exchange for beaver and otter furs. The cities, which sit at three distinct points on Lake Erie, existed by 1810 as only small parts of a larger trade network, which itself was enveloped within a regional community based on perceived cultural and social similarities.\textsuperscript{74}

Expanding fur trading companies, such as the American Fur Company, are also indicative of a wider consolidation of a stronger transnational culture for Americans, Canadians, and Native peoples within the Lake Erie world. Unlike the middle grounds of the previous decades, the social associations that took a firm hold in the region allowed for the creation of stable economic ties that did not rely on direct competition with rivals. The limited operation of governmental forces in Lake Erie after 1800 left the people there to form identities based on the structures already in place. Without the ideological structure of government giving direct influence,

\textsuperscript{70} Joseph Baily report of Packages of a canoe to Peter Powell. Peter Powell Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.


\textsuperscript{72} Errington 37.

\textsuperscript{73} Peter Powell, “Port of Detroit Manifest, 1810.” Peter Powell Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

\textsuperscript{74} Anderson 13.
settlers and merchants clung to concrete concepts through which they could identify with. In Lake Erie the regional economy, which is most prominently displayed through the fur trade, gave people that solid anchor from which to build an identity. The fierce competition that arose between groups however did catch the attention of the Upper Canadian government in a limited way. John Graves Simcoe responded to the fur trading developments within lake community by arguing that the “rivalship of the great commercial companies, must be reconciled and blended in one common interest.”

He, and other powerful figures around the lake, saw the expansion of the fur trade not only as an opportunity to expand regional power, but also to connect with Europe.

As this Lake Erie world continued to develop, old trade goods such as moccasins became hot new commodities that European markets desired. Traditionally a form of Native American footwear, moccasins became a staple for settlers living in frontier regions. Fur trappers especially added them to their wardrobe from the late seventeenth century on, as it gave them a way to establish a combined understanding between Europeans and Native peoples. By early 1800 however moccasins ceased to be a strictly Native form of dress, as many white settlers “appropriated” their use. As their wear spread throughout the frontier regions in both the United States and Upper Canada, moccasins caught the attention of the European market. The desire for a single item brought prosperity to the interconnected Great Lake, with Upper Canadian settlements seeing profit directly from the buying of furs and selling of goods to Native peoples. Cities like Detroit and Cleveland grew as a result through a boom in production by turning the raw furs into moccasins, which they relied on traders, typically through the American Fur Company, to obtain.

The appropriation of Native American garb into a predominantly white European/American population has great significance. It is an important example of the community that defined the Lake Erie world since 1795. By bringing people together in a large border space, then giving them the legal freedom and a sense of peace between nations to pass as

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75 Cruikshank and Simcoe 223.
76 White 41.
78 Ibid 87.
they would, the region developed a unique community based on similar concepts of identity and cultural cohesion. While identity tends to develop based on perceived similarities and differences, as well as a shared cultural past, it is not always so simple a concept to unpack.\textsuperscript{79}

People, especially those living in borderland regions with a porous border, develop multiple senses of identity, each of which is valid for particular interactions and situations. John Askin Jr. held one concept of identity and belonging with the people of Detroit and his family, as that was his primary place of residence. However he also seemed to hold a particular identity with the Annishnabe he worked with, as he knew their language and held a great deal of respect for them.\textsuperscript{80} In this way identities blurred throughout the Lake Erie region. Mutual benefit and perceptions of similarity gave these people a way to create an identity with a solid structural anchor.

The language and structure of early American Fur Company documents demonstrate, perhaps more than anything, the kind of borderland structure at play in Lake Erie. While the documents themselves lend credence to the idea that the environment and economy intertwined to strengthen the region, their composition shows the development of a blurred homogenous regional identity based on appropriations of various social and cultural norms. In most of the early American Fur Company trade records, there is little information about the specific identities of individuals. Typical manifests hold three columns: “Shippers,” “Consigners,” and “Ports of Destination.”\textsuperscript{81} Under the Shippers and Consigners columns, there is no reference at all towards the nationality of the men working with the company, though they come from both Upper Canada and the United States. James Abbott, one of the regular names on the manifest, was an American fur trading agent for the company. By the 1810s Abbott became a respected merchant and an important political figure in Detroit.\textsuperscript{82} William Forsyth, the next name on the list, was a known Upper Canadian merchant and resident of Kingston. He and many other Canadian merchants had regular contact with the fur company. In both cases there is no

\textsuperscript{79} Anderson 22; Anthony D. Smith. \textit{The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant and Republic} (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2008), 17.

\textsuperscript{80} Cruikshank and Simcoe 223.

\textsuperscript{81} James Nalson, Peter Powell Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

\textsuperscript{82} James Abbot “Shipping Manifest.” Silas Farmer Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
information about where the men came from, where they lived, or to what nationality they belonged.

In a similar way the language for ports of destination is very simplistic. The only thing written on the manifests are simple denominating terms, such as “Chicago,” “Michilimacinae,” and “Sandwich.”\textsuperscript{83} Much like the way the document discusses the men running the trade, there is no specification over where specifically these ports are, or whether the ships would be passing from one country to another. Other early documents, such as a short manifest from Peter Powell, show very few signs of bureaucracy when crossing the border. Powell wrote that his furs were “navigated by two men…bound from Michilimacinae to Kingston…”\textsuperscript{84} Nationality had yet to matter significantly in the day-to-day operations of the fur trading company; the documents are indicative of a broader blurring of identity and culture for the sake of smooth trade.

Complex forces led to the development of this unique world following the signing of the Jay Treaty. People in and around Lake Erie saw the political discord between the United States and Britain as more of an opportunity than a hindrance. National and ethnic identity mattered little in this region, as people came together both around perceived social and cultural similarities as well as the mutual benefit they gained from cooperation. Settlements developed in both Upper Canada and the United States that not only acted as frontiers for their specific nation, but also as transnational hubs for border settlers in a dynamic borderland region. Native Americans lived within and near these settlements, joining the community, but never truly becoming a part of it. They brought the fur trade to the center stage of the Lake Erie world, allowing the region to prosper while they fell into a cycle of dependency on American and Canadian goods. From 1795 through 1810 a series of cross-border relationships developed around Lake Erie that did not exist before. These relationships did not rely on the middle grounds of the previous decades, and they were not, as Richard White argues, a version of “life support” for a declining way of life. Instead, people relied on forming amicable relationships with their neighbors to effectively negotiate the space in which they now shared.

Over time however this new Lake Erie world, which had an interesting trajectory without state interference, began to falter. While it flourished during a period of relative peace between

\textsuperscript{83} James Nalson, Peter Powell Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

\textsuperscript{84} Peter Powell, “Report 1807.” Peter Powell Collection. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
the United States, Upper Canada, Great Britain, and Native peoples, the years following 1810 saw the rise of new threats and political tensions. Tempers ran high in the Atlantic, as French and British ships attacked American merchant vessels attempting to trade to both sides during the Napoleonic Wars. Public sentiment in America called for war against both nations, but the nervous Republican government under James Madison hoped to avoid a three-sided conflict. At the same time people in the Northwest dealt with the rising Indian Confederacy under the Shawnee warrior Tecumseh. Rumors abound throughout the Lake Erie region that the British were supplying weapons to the confederacy while secretly inciting them against the western settlers of the United States. These rumors were vindicated in 1811 following the conflict at Tippecanoe Creek between General William Henry Harrison and Tecumseh’s confederacy. By late 1811 war seemed inevitable with Great Britain, as Upper Canada began stationing soldiers as various border crossing to “keep a look out” for British subjects who might be “inclined to make a run to the American side.”

In 1812 the borders that so many people ignored suddenly mattered. Many of the fur trading companies pulled their resources out of the opposite state and dealt only with their own people. Cities like Detroit, while still open to foreign visitors, became far less friendly. The entire region seemed to wait with bated breath while the future of the United States and Upper Canada was decided. Finally, on June 18, 1812, James Madison declared war against Great Britain for crimes against American sailing rights and frontier security. The coming war, which would see American invasions of Canada and solidification of national borders, was a death knell for the growing Lake Erie world that could have led to a far different North America than we remember today.

85 Melish 319.
CHAPTER 2: FROM BORDERLANDS TO BATTLEGROUNDS

In the summer of 1812 the Lake Erie world, which developed out of a shared sense of hope in a lasting peace, met a significant challenge. People who before traded and interacted as friends suddenly saw threats all around, and the distrust that characterized the majority of the eighteenth century returned. It was during this time that Detroit resident Anne Roe, the widow of an American soldier, stood accused of treason against the United States. Held in the main Detroit Courthouse Roe stood trial based on the testimony of neighboring woman named Sally Harvey. Local judge John Griffin heard the case, which claimed that on 20 October 1814 Roe “interrogated” several individuals at a funeral about the operations of the United States military. Harvey, who gave a written statement to the court, claimed that while attending a service for the widow of a man named W. Laurus Baby, Roe began “to ask of General McArthur and his mounted men,” particularly as to the location they were travelling to.\(^{86}\) In an attempt to cement Roe’s guilt as a Canadian spy working for the British army, Harvey emphatically pronounced that Roe was “a subject of his Britannic (sic) Majority” and hailed “from Upper Canada.”\(^{87}\) The declaration of Roe’s origin is all that was necessary to solidify her as a willing participant in the British war effort in the minds of Detroiter. Without a real chance to defend herself in court, Anne Roe was found guilty of treason to the United States by November 1814. It is unclear how long Roe lived in Detroit, but she held a dual identity; she was a subject of the British crown through birth and a citizen of the United States through marriage. If Roe lived in Detroit long enough to marry and become a member of the community, why then was she singled out for what could have been a passing comment about the state of the war? Why did her Canadian identity, which before remained unimportant, suddenly become such a matter of conflict?

The constructed Lake Erie World of the early 1800s began to falter as a result of renewed hostilities and widespread fear resulting from the War of 1812. Prior to the start of the war

\(^{86}\) Sally Harvey. *Statement from Sally Harvey for Anne Roe Trial, 20 Oct. 1814* Legal Statement. Silas Farmer Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library. Interestingly enough, Laurus Baby belonged to a prominent fur trading family based in Upper Canada. The fact that his funeral took place in Detroit reflects the remnants of the Lake Erie world.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.
tentative trust helped people around the lake to disregard national identity to form unique communities. In the face of open war however, that trust dissolved with the movement of armed men across the border. Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez claims that “in the borderlands you are in the battleground where enemies are kin to each other.”

The war did not completely dismantle the complex and diverse world that developed over the previous two decades. Relations between Canadians, Americans, and Native peoples continued, but the war caused irreparable damage to the social and cultural ties that formed as a result of extended cross-border kinship networks. People who formed kinship relations found themselves fighting against former family and friends. Just as with the story of Anne Roe, identity began to matter more that perceptions of similarity or difference, and fear about what could come from across the border grew to a fevered pitch.

Canadians, Americans, and Native Americans all saw a social and cultural schism form as a result of the violence that severely damaged the ties they made in the preceding decades. Combined with this overall break, Native peoples saw divides form within their own people, as some joined with Tecumseh and his Pan-Indian movement with the British while other claimed loyalty to the United States. Both groups hoped to garner favor with who they saw to be the victor, though by the war’s end this strategy alienated them from white communities even more than before.

The Lake Erie world saw these same changes during the war, but not nearly as soon. Unlike most communities that faced pressing issues from the war starting in 1812, the Lake Erie community did not truly begin battling with issues of distrust and fear until late 1813. This is mainly due to the strong kinship networks and economic ties that people made in the past two decades. Eventually however people within the community began to see each other as enemies, particularly after the major damages from warfare occurred on both sides of the border. People such as Ann Roe, who were members of the wider community, suddenly became “outsiders” and “others” that would be neither trusted nor wanted. The war and its effects

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88 Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernandez. *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 133. Although the author’s primary goal is to discuss the issues surrounding the American-Mexican borderland, many of the same contemporary issues were at play in the early nineteenth century as well.

89 Alan Taylor. *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subject, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Random House 2010), 206. Groups like the Shawnee almost literally divided in half, with each side hoping that the war would end in their favor. As the war drew to a close, however, neither Canadians nor Americans were willing to place much faith in a people that they saw as a whole to be untrustworthy.
demonstrate the fragile nature of a world that, given time, could have created a uniquely transnational space in North America.\textsuperscript{90}

In the years leading up to the war tensions ran high between the governments of the United States and Great Britain. Political issues regarding the neutrality of ships on the Atlantic, as well as general participation in the conflicts with France, stood at the forefront. While these specific problems did not directly affect most people living in North America, especially along the interior in the Lake Erie world, tensions still continued to rise.\textsuperscript{91} As Canadian, American, and Native American peoples continued to mingle and coexist around the social and economic ties they formed through the lake, most could not help from “becoming conscious of the apparent contradiction of their position and of their evolving ideology.”\textsuperscript{92} The multiple identities that people in the region held, including loyalty to those who shared a similar space as well as their nation, continued to evolve and conflict. Political rhetoric continued to pervade within the communities of the lake, and the various peoples there began to see themselves within the context of their state and their fellow residents. Political turmoil between the United States and Great Britain began to drive a wedge between the American and Canadian settlers throughout the region, and the draw of the Pan-Indian confederacy under Tecumseh caused tensions within Native American culture as well as with their neighbors. In 1810 a journalist for the \textit{Kingston Gazette} feared that the inhabitants of the Northwest were “in danger of becoming habituated to mutual prejudices, jealousies, reflections, and reproaches and all that process of national alienation which had, in the progress of ages, rendered the British and French so inveterate in their hostility as to call each other natural enemies.”\textsuperscript{93} By the early months of 1812 the journalists fears began to form into reality, as the various powers of the continent braced for what many saw as the inevitable coming of war.

President James Madison addressed Congress on 18 June, 1812 with a declaration of war. In the document he laid out three specific reasons as to why the United States should enter into a


\textsuperscript{91} Jason Andrew Kaufman. \textit{The Origins of Canadian and American Political Differences} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 140.

\textsuperscript{92} Elizabeth Jane Errington. \textit{The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology} (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 55.

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Kingston Gazette} 10 December 1810.
war with Britain. The first he claimed revolved around the nation “asserting an obligation” as “a neutral power.” This neutrality, he argued, should grant the nation the rights of free trade, which the British violated over the past decade and a half. Madison claimed that “our commerce has been plundered in every sea, the great staples of our country have been cut off from their legitimate markets.” Again he emphasized the issues of open trade and the ability for the United States to act as a free nation among the powers of the world. The second reason for war revolved around the search for deserters on the behalf of the British. Madison claimed here that “thousands of American citizens, under the safeguard of public law and their national flag, have been torn from their country” as a result, and that further British infringements of American rights could not be tolerated. Madison’s final reason for war brings into context the “warfare just renewed by the savages on one of our extensive frontiers.” Here he discusses the supposed British incitement of Native peoples in the Northwest Territory, arguing that the United States could not allow foreign manipulations within its own borders. The House of Representatives agreed 79 to 49, as well as the Senate 19 to 13. The address reflects the various international issues that the United States dealt with in the years after its formation, but how where was the rhetoric of the popular War Hawks that pushed for the war in the first place? Was the war really about the issues argued in Madison’s speech, or was there more to it?  

When the declaration of war reached the American people, there was a mix of reactions. Several of the New England states however had a violent reaction to the declaration of war, claiming that it would only hamper trade rights with Britain that supported the American economy. Many of the merchants living within the New England states saw the war only as an obstacle to continued business, and refused to support the war effort. Others, such as those living in states such as Ohio and Kentucky, saw the war as a welcome end to what they felt was unjust British interference. Ever since the Indian Wars of the 1790s people in these frontier territories complained about continual British influence. The war allowed them to finally take


95 Kaufman 151. Several New England states, including New Hampshire and Maryland, threatened to secede from the union twice during this period. Once during the Hartford Convention before the war and again near the war’s end. They found their own interests aligning more with Great Britain, but did not want to be subject to British colonial rule again. The start of the war as well as its peaceful resolution through the Treaty of Ghent calmed down the tensions of breaking up the nation.
charge over their own spaces. Finally, the vast majority of those living within the Lake Erie world wanted to operate under a concept of “self-imposed neutrality.” The American citizens living within the Lake Erie world, both within the United States and Upper Canada, hoped to remain out of the war to protect the businesses and families that they built there. Neither the American nor the Canadian government recognized this neutrality, eventually forcing citizens living within that community to rethink their and loyalties.

The loyalist elite of Upper Canada, who in the past decade fought against the formation of Republican-inspired Methodist churches, began preparing the province for war nearly two years before the United States declared it. Upper Canadian elites began a campaign in the early 1810s to convince their fellow colonists that connections with Britain and participation in a colony-wide discussion about the United States was necessary. Papers such as the Kingston Gazette distributed information about what the United States was likely to do in war, as well as what should be done about Americans living within the province. One of the most important aspects that the Loyalists pushed was the expulsion of American citizens from Canada, calling also for the revocation of lands granted under John Graves Simcoe’s policies and distributing it to Canadian subjects. Both Canadian and British officials also pushed for a continuation of “gift exchanges” with the Pan-Indian confederacy, as it would embody the “relations of friendship, leadership, power, and domination.” By continually pushing Canadians closer to the Native peoples friendly to the British Empire, there was a greater chance that they would aid in a war against the United States. Both native peoples and Canadians were forced in the years leading up to the War of 1812 to reconsider the kinship networks that they formed with people across the border. For many, relations continued well past the start of the war. But continual political pressure, along with the mounting violence and destruction of the war itself, would sway the hearts and minds of many people in the Lake Erie world.

97 Errington 65.
98 Hansen 92.
Various scholars have wrestled with the issue of why the United States pushed for war with Britain in 1812. When viewed in the context of the nation’s earlier dealings with Canada, as well as considering the vast American presence within the province around the Lake Erie world, the war can easily be seen as both an attempt to protect international rights and a push for territorial expansion into Canada. During the Revolutionary War “Americans occupied Montreal” for a short time, and though they did find some local support “they left astonished at their failure to win Canadian hearts and minds.” Even from the start of the nation American politicians saw Canada as an extension of America, with the same values and beliefs in common. The vast expansion of American settlement into Upper Canada within the Lake Erie world also gave the American government the incentive to see Canada as the next logical progression in American expansion. As a result Thomas Jefferson believed that a war with Canada would be “a mere matter of marching,” requiring little effort for the province to fall within American control. Combined with this was the belief by the War Hawks that “the conquest of the provinces would be the first achievement of American arms,” demonstrating American power and authority within the world. Instead of a short conflict they entered into a protracted war. A war that, by its very nature, pitted friends and families who lived across borders against each other.

Shortly after the start of war the United States planned to implement a three-fold invasion of Upper Canada. By attacking across the St. Lawrence, the Niagara, and the Detroit Rivers, thus preventing British use of those transportation systems, the American government hoped that the war would come to a swift and decisive end. Two invasion points, across the Detroit River and the Niagara River, were expected to be the only necessary victories to end the war quickly. Michigan Territorial Governor William Hull led an expedition from Detroit into Upper Canada in July of 1812 with the intent of capturing the region. Upon arriving in the province, he promised the residents there that they did not have to fear the American army, and only needed to remain docile for the conflict to end. When faced with violent resistance on the behalf of the subjects of Upper Canada, he fought a slow retreat back to Detroit. Similar fortune found the American army that attempted to invade across the Niagara River from Lewiston, New York to

100 Kafuman 99.
101 Hansen 91.
Queenston Heights, Upper Canada. Upon crossing the river over half of the American forces, comprised of state militias, decided to remain within the nation, claiming that they did not sign up to invade a foreign body. Without access to its otherwise overwhelming forces, the American army retreated back across the river.

The most contested region during the War of 1812 was the Niagara Peninsula. The United States desired this space because it gave unfettered access to the entirety of the Great Lakes, allowing for expanded economic prosperity. As a result British, Canadian, and Native forces attacked across both the Niagara and St. Lawrence Rivers, intending to cut off American access to communication and transportation. This placed the inexperienced “citizen soldiers” of the American army in a difficult position, forcing them to hold their ground within the United States instead of invading foreign spaces. In 1813 American forces successfully invaded the Niagara Peninsula and captured the Upper Canadian capital of York. During the occupation a fire began; starting in the dockyards it quickly swept through and destroyed the majority of the city. While the true origin of the fire is unknown, American forces accepted responsibility, claiming the act as a by-product of the invasion. Following the destruction of York American forces were swiftly repulsed back across the river. Canadian forces never forgot the destruction of their capital, and convinced British forces to mount a similar expedition; this eventually culminated in a retaliatory strike against Washington D.C. in 1814. Similar military reprisals took place all along the Niagara River throughout the course of the war. After American forces captured Fort Niagara in 1813, British, Canadian, and Native American forces crossed the river and burned Lewiston and Buffalo.

The Lake Erie region also saw extensive combat, though heavy fighting did not occur here until 1813. Following William Hull’s failed invasion of Upper Canada, British forces and their Native allies quickly demolished American outposts along the frontier. The British captured a fur trading post at Michilimacinac, decimated a small American force at Fort

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103 Morris Zaslow. The Defended Border; Upper Canada and the War of 1812 (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1964), 205.
107 Zaslow 184. Tuscarora natives that sided with the United States prevented the citizens of Buffalo from being captured or killed by the Six Nations warriors fighting with the British.
Dearborn, and used a rouse to capture Detroit and the standing army of the Northwest.\textsuperscript{108} Within the first six months of the war’s beginning the United States lost all of the territory they held from the U.S.-Canada border to the Maumee River in Ohio. The American army eventually attained a victory under William Henry Harrison at the rapids of the Maumee River. The new Army of the Northwest repelled British attacks on Fort Meigs across two separate sieges, and maintained a defensive posture long enough for Oliver Hazard Perry to capture Lake Erie for the Americans.\textsuperscript{109} Following a string of victories American forces eventually reclaimed Detroit and entered into a period of prolonged fighting along the Detroit River. Much like in the Niagara region, the extended exposure to conflict caused people to become insular and isolated in consideration to “others.” The transformation of space from a home into a battleground pushed people to cut ties with their cross-border kinship relations and consider their place within their own nation.

By far the most damaging aspect of the war along the U.S.-Canada border were not the large scale battles. The development of raiding parties on the behalf of the United States, Great Britain, and the various Native American nations embroiled in the conflict caused vast amounts of fear, distrust, and hate. As a result of the failed attempt by the American army to end the war quickly, the conflict devolved into a series of back-and-forth attacks across the border. After the burning of York, the fighting became much more personal. In a way the war degenerated into a series of violent retaliatory strikes rather than a coherent conflict. People burned and plundered the homes of enemies, both as a way to hurt their opponent and to satisfy a need for revenge for past transgressions. Officially the American and British governments denounced those men who took part in the destruction of property, but took no real action against it. Both groups agreed as well that it was inevitable for Native peoples to partake in this style of warfare, but found it disappointing that their men would stoop to the level of “savages.”\textsuperscript{110} The people of the region found the behavior of all involved to be barbarous, as they lost their land and possessions to encroaching armies. This style of warfare pushed “Indians, whites, and metis people” that

\textsuperscript{108} Larry Nelson, \textit{Men of Courage, Patriotism, and Enterprise! Fort Meigs in the War of 1812} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 43.


“coexisted peacefully as neighbors, relatives, employers, and workers” before the war began into “hopeless conflicts.” The trust that formed in the preceding decades, especially in the Lake Erie region, collapsed with the potentiality of an attack from friend and foe alike.

An early example of the raids that broke the borderlands took place in late 1812 along the Niagara River. After the American army captured Fort Niagara, British, Canadian, and Native forces crossed the river and sacked the town of Lewiston. Charles Askin, a captain in the Canadian Militia, explained that “12 or 13 of the Enemy killed at Lewiston, some of them Residents of the place.” Without much resistance to the British forces, most residents of the town capitulated into giving up whatever was necessary for the “enemy” to leave. Askin explains that “the Indians plundered the houses then set fire to them.” He claimed that “indeed the Indians got so drunk that they did not know what they were about.” Whether Askin shifts the blame to the Native peoples to avoid discussing what his own men did or if the Indians did indeed drunkenly burn the town to cinders, the same message was clear to American residents. People did not feel as though they could trust invading forces from Canada to hold their word, and saw them as barbarians ready to pillage the nation.

Following the destruction of Lewiston, American forces near Fort Niagara approached the town the town of Niagara with torches in hand. The commander gave “the four hundred remaining inhabitants [of Niagara]” about a half an hour before the town was to be engulfed in flames. Within minutes more than “three hundred homes worth an estimated 37, 625 pounds were reduced to ash.” A local man fleeing the blaze asked why the Americans acted in such a brutal fashion, and Colonel John Campbell responded in saying that “it was done in retaliation for the British raids on Buffalo and Lewiston.” In the same way that the British attacked Lewiston for the capture of Fort Niagara, the Americans responded in kind by destroying a Canadian town. The destructive tendencies by both sides alienated people on both sides of the border from each other, as it gave them no reason to trust anyone. The Canadian Popular

111 Cayton 271.
113 Ibid 718.1
114 Sheppard 103.
115 Ibid 103.
116 Ibid 107.
Assembly denounced the American army, similarly to how American citizens castigated British forces. They warned subjects of the crown to avoid accepting the ‘delusive promises’ of Americans, and urged them to trust only in their fellow countrymen. As the war became more brutal, more vindictive, people living along the border regions of the Lake Erie watershed became insular and isolated.

On the other side of the Lake Erie world, where the Detroit River spills out into the lake, the war took a different shape. Whereas along the Niagara combat began in a back-and-forth manner, fighting on this side of the lake involved fewer people and more land. During Hull’s invasion of Upper Canada, the port city of Sandwich became a specific target due to the in-land water access granted by the Thames River. He believed that if a significant American force occupied British-Canadian territory, it would “neutralize the Indians” by convincing them that the British were not strong enough allies to warrant full support. Hull did very little upon arrival in Sandwich apart from garrisoning his men within the town. Unlike many of the commanders in the Niagara Theater, he did not give permission to his men to plunder or destroy Canadian property. During the occupation John Askin, living in his Sandwich estate at the time, wrote that “I would not prefer any man, to the present William Hull.” Because Hull protected the property of British subjects in the region, relations between Americans and Canadians along this part of the border did not sour as quickly as it did near the Niagara.

Though relations between the various peoples on the western end of the Lake Erie world did not degrade as quickly as they did in the East, early tensions still remained. The prosperity of Detroit, its surrounding region, and many of the small towns around it relied heavily on the growth and perpetuation of the fur trade. The outbreak of war threatened that trade, as most companies, such as the American Fur Company, relied heavily on Native American hunters to

117 Ibid 104.
118 Taylor 155.
119 Askin 709.
121 Catherine Cangany. *Frontier Seaport: The Transformation of Detroit from a Frontier Town to an Atlantic Entrepot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). Prior to the start of the war Detroit grew drastically as a result of the fur trade. The transformation of raw furs into moccasins not only acted as a symbol of cultural unity, but also a product that could be mass produced and sold to European interests. Other developing towns like Cleveland and Sandwich also relied heavily on a continuing fur market.
bring furs in. Finding reliable labor for the acquisition of furs became troublesome at best even in the years before the war, as Tecumseh and his Pan-Indian movement drew many seasonal workers away. Those who did not immediately side with the new confederation also refused to work, fearing what their fellow natives might do. When the war began nearly all trade ended across the border, leaving men such as John Jacob Astor and James Abbot without laborers and an influx of new commodities.\textsuperscript{122} Without regular access to the beaver pelts that helped solidify the community as a transnational Lake Erie world, cross-border relations suffered.

Issues of the fur trade, particularly the supply of beaver, were not a main issue to many of the people living in the Lake Erie world at this time. However, many of the practices of soldiers were detrimental towards the natural environment and would come to haunt the Lake Erie world in the years following the war. As armies marched throughout the Old Northwest, where most fur trapping took place, they cut through swathes of dense forest. This was done so that troops, cannon, and wagons could push through the unsettled areas faster. James Larwill, a lieutenant under William Henry Harrison, describes the scene in which he and his men built fortifications along the Maumee River. He explains how “all trees are cut down within a mile of the fort.”\textsuperscript{123} In clearing the land for strategic use, the men incidentally destroyed habitats for beaver, leaving less areas for them to spawn in the future. Jane Errington describes these practices as “sapping the wealth and prosperity of the land.”\textsuperscript{124} When fur trading resurged following the end of the war, these issues returned with resounding significance.

Although the latent tensions of the temporarily halted fur trade continued, more overt concerns entered the minds of those within the western Lake Erie region. After Hull’s occupation of Upper Canada failed and he was captured along with Detroit, citizens within Michigan and Ohio began to fear impending Indian raids. One of the catalyzing agents of that fear was the British capture of Frenchtown, a small fur trading post along the River Raisin. A small American force attempted to push the British out, but superior numbers prevailed, leading to an American defeat. General Henry Proctor promised that the wounded Americans would

\textsuperscript{122} Even if these men had the ability to acquire new furs they could do nothing with them. The British control over Lake Erie prevented them from shipping anything out through to the Atlantic. Even after the United States gained control over the lake they still could not send out goods, as both Astor and Abbot were seen as suspicious for their long-standing connections with British and Canadian officials.


\textsuperscript{124} Errington 78.
receive fair treatment, but shortly after the battle the Natives under Tecumseh allegedly killed and scalped the fallen soldiers. They also raided the rest of the town, setting fire to several homes and killing some civilians. Though many of the stories coming from Frenchtown were rumors, the message was clear to American citizens in the region. Despite the connections that people in the region formed before war, they realized what was at stake and who they should see as an enemy.

Canadian subjects in the western Lake Erie region had a similar revelation as to whom they should fear, regardless of how they interacted and bonded in the past. Following the capture of Lake Erie by the American navy, the United States moved men into Ontario for a final confrontation with the British army in that region. Along the Thames River, near Moraviantown, American forces defeated Henry Proctor and Tecumseh, officially ended the war in the west.\textsuperscript{125} After the battle the American troops were welcomed openly into to Moravian community. Despite their loyalty to the crown the people within the town saw the Americans as similar and friendly. The cordial atmosphere turned violent quickly however after an American soldier found a box in the home of a Moravian minister with General Proctor’s papers. Accusing the townspeople of hiding important information, the army ransacked the town, looting and burning homes as they went. Much as the destruction at Frenchtown informed Americans that they could no longer trust their Native American or Canadian friends, the devastation of Moraviantown pushed many Canadians to consider themselves in a more isolated and insular way. Following the path of the crown and rejecting American republicanism quickly became a more popular idea.

Before the war began many people living in the Lake Erie world regularly crossed borders. These included ethnic, political, cultural, economic, and racial borders, making the Lake Erie world a unique and diverse space within North America. When the war began those connections became tense. Depending on where within the Lake Erie world a person lived, those connections began to split and eventually break faster than others. All throughout the Lake Erie world however everyone recognized the fear associated with the war, particularly the uncertainty that came with the vindictive style the war was fought in. As the war came to a close it became

\textsuperscript{125} Antal 21. While the war was not truly over until the official signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1815, there were no more major battles fought on the western end of Lake Erie.
much more personal, yet at the same time made people think in a more national sense. The fear that came with the conflict made it personal by causing people to consider if those they considered friends were actually enemies, and to whom they felt most loyal to. It made people think more nationally by taking those personal relationships that formed across borders and juxtaposing them with the horrors of the war.\textsuperscript{126}

As the war progressed, the fissures between Americans and Canadians continued to widen. With continual militia raids and the influx of thieves, people in the Lake Erie watershed polarized against each other in an “apparent unity.”\textsuperscript{127} Where before there existed a stable relationship, particularly between those sharing the same residential space, Americans and Canadians began to see each other as fundamentally different. The various spaces of the Lake Erie World, whether along the Niagara River or the Detroit River, in the East or the West, showed signs of degradation by 1813. All across the region people who once shared cross-border kinship relations, such as the Askin family of Upper Canada, began to turn to each other with distrust and fear. The constant attacks across the border, combined with the fear of Native American raids, pushed people here to become more insular and nationally focused than they had been before. The shared physical space that defined the Lake Erie experience that brought people together did not hold the same meaning during the war. The British Navy cut off lake travel early in 1812, and the Americans held control over it from late 1813 till the end of the war.\textsuperscript{128} People in the region could no longer trade freely amongst themselves and their neighbors across the border. All of these factors contributed to the bifurcation of attitudes between Americans, Canadians, and Native peoples.\textsuperscript{129}

At the war’s start British forces captured Detroit, one of the most populous centers in the region, following an American surrender. Despite the change in political power, however, little changed in the day-to-day life of residents. Most of the people living within the city and outlying regions already existed within a polyglot world for the past few decades, so a regime change did not have a drastic effect. Major changes occurred following the American


\textsuperscript{127} Errington 80.

\textsuperscript{128} Sahlins. The importance of physical space is seen in various borderland regions throughout the world. People tend to rely on the ability to see and trade with one another to form and hold meaningful relationships.

\textsuperscript{129} Errington 7-8.
occupation of Detroit in late 1813 under General Duncan MacArthur, who commanded a contingent of Ohio militia and Kentucky dragoons. After accomplishing this, he attempted to root out any remaining British influence from the region to prevent subversion of his forces. At this point Detroit residents, who for so long coexisted with people from other cultures and ethnicities, began searching for differences among themselves. In order to define themselves as American, and thus on the “correct” side of the conflict, they had to differentiate themselves from what they identified as the “enemy.”

James Abbot, chief field agent for the American Fur Company under John Jacob Astor, was one recipient of the “hunt for outsiders.” Abbot began as an Indian Agent with the AFC in the early 1800s, but quickly rose through the ranks as a result of the connections he formed with fur trading groups in Canada, as well as various Native nations. Abbot helped the company affiliate with prominent families such as the Askins and the Babys, and excelled in bringing cross-border interests together. Prior to the start of the war he was named Postmaster General of Detroit, and achieved high standing there. As a result of these two positions, as well as his high socio-economic status, the United States Army offered Abbot a commission as the general quartermaster for the Michigan Territorial Volunteers. Abbot seemingly cooperated completely with the American army and government throughout the war, but ran into trouble after MacArthur’s recapture of Detroit in late 1813. Nearly overnight he became a pariah in his own city, with citizens threatening him and accusing him of conspiring with the British Army during their occupation of the city.

On 8 November 1814, Abraham Bradley, a Detroit resident, sent a letter to James Abbot. The letter discusses Bradley’s concern against a recent “attempt to displace” Abbot from “employment under this office.” As Abbot was a member of a major fur trading company, he

130 Berton 207.
131 Sahlins 13.
133 James Abbot. Official Enlistment Slip, 14 July, 1812. Enlistment Form. Silas Farmer Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; Skeen. This type of enlistment was common during the War of 1812, as citizens with unique talents (such as accounting and book-keeping) were prized by the army.
maintained ties with a variety of international business partners and investors. In this case certain high ranking citizens of Detroit wished to have him forcibly removed from office due to his connections with British and Canadian merchants. They likely felt that his position of Postmaster General and his enlistment as an army quartermaster threatened the integrity of American success and control around Lake Erie. Bradley informed Abbot that this sudden push against him was caused by a fear that “the British get information of events…through your connections.”

At the time the war broke out the AFC held ties with Britain, Canada, France, Spain, and a host of Native American nations. Based simply on his economic involvement with parties deemed as enemies Abbot became the target of a purge against enemy sympathizers. Bradley’s letter gives a glimpse into the fear and sense of paranoia that the American people in the Lake Erie region felt during the war. The letter also showcases the destruction of the fragile Lake Erie world that formed in the preceding decades, as the social ties that once connected a man like Abbot to people on both sides of the border now condemned him as a traitor and a collaborator. This instance curtly demonstrates the widespread fear that gripped the Lake Erie region, and was in no way an isolated incident.

In the same year a woman named Ann Roe, discussed above, stood accused of treason against the United States. Like Abbot Roe and her husband were well established members of the community in Detroit, as well as the surrounding region. While officially subjects of the British Empire due to their original residency in Upper Canada, both Roe and her husband lived in America for over two decades. Roe’s husband, unnamed in the various court documents discussing her case, is even listed as having served in the American campaign under William Hull into Upper Canada in 1812, where he died in action. Yet again however, following MacArthur’s control of Detroit, Roe found herself at odds with the neighbors that she long shared amiable relations with. She is specifically accused of attempting “to ask of General McArthur and his mounted men,” as the unit that her husband served in was engaged on a campaign within Upper Canada. At this time American forces were on route to Burlington.

135 Ibid.
136 Sahlins 19.
137 “Affidavit #2” Wayne County Court Records, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
138 Sally Harvey. Statement from Sally Harvey for Anne Roe Trial, 20 Oct. 1814. Legal Statement. Silas Farmer Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
Heights to engage with Canadian militia forces that, when captured earlier in the war, participated in a “parole-rush” to get home, only to turn back around and sign up with the militia again.\textsuperscript{139}

As there is no original record of these women’s conversation, it is difficult to judge the culpability of Roe. While at first this seems as just a trial based merely on excessive protective measures during wartime, the case complicates the story further by emphasizing how Roe was “a subject of his Britannic (sic) Majority” and originally “from Upper Canada.”\textsuperscript{140} Using Roe’s regional and national background, Sally Harvey continues on to make an accusation about where her loyalties may lie. If Roe lived in Detroit long enough to marry and become a member of the community, why then was she singled out for what could have been a passing comment about the state of the war? Much like the letter from Bradley this court document suggests a massive change in the ways that Americans saw themselves and others. While it does not explicitly say anything about Americans, the fact that an Americanized widow who happened to be from Upper Canada originally became the object of an inquiry about treason speaks deeply about the shifting patterns of identity during the war. Much like concepts of race throughout the century, these documents demonstrate how identity was determined both through personal interaction as well as general appearance within the public sphere.\textsuperscript{141} Both Roe’s trial and Abbot’s removal from office also demonstrate an important change in how the Lake Erie community identified itself. During these interwar years perceived similarities were no longer enough to bring people of various cultures together, and indeed were superseded by an urge to support a dominant political power.\textsuperscript{142} During a time of crisis, especially one in which people who before shared kinship relations now fought each other in a brutal back-and-forth fashion, nationalism and support for one’s nation becomes a dominant driving force.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{139} Sheppard 83.
\textsuperscript{140} Sally Harvey.
\textsuperscript{141} Gross 53-54.
\textsuperscript{142} Kaufman 65.
\textsuperscript{143} Guidotti-Hernandez. These same concepts and tropes occur again and again throughout borderland histories. The Mexican-American War, among others, stands as a distinct point of comparison to how people reacted to a major conflict in an ambiguous space.
The war also caused tensions and anguish in many families, particularly those with cross-border kinship relations like Roe. John Askin, a well-known Canadian fur trade merchant, lived in Sandwich, Upper Canada but did most of his business in Detroit. When the war broke out the vast majority of his family supported the British Crown, with twelve separate members serving in the military. While the outward support of the main family was towards the British, Askin did lose a daughter and a son-in-law named Elijah Brush as a result, as they lived in Detroit and decided to aid in the American war effort. As the war first began tensions ran low within the family. Even when William Hull invaded Upper Canada and occupied Sandwich, Brush visited the Askin estate of Strabane and was welcomed. These feelings did not last long, however, when in 1813 the war took a more violent turn within the Lake Erie world. Brush participated in raids with the American Army into Upper Canada, and on multiple occasions fought with well-established friends of the Askin family. In the fall of 1813 Brush’s company captured Captain Elliot, a friend of John Askin. Elliot claimed that he was nothing more than a courier, but Brush allegedly “thought it was a forgery and he…an imposter.” Elliot was held and Brush “threatened to hang him,” but eventually paroled him back to the British army. Relations between John Askin and his son-in-law strained throughout the war as a result of these instances. Brush embraced the raiding mentality that took over the latter half of the war, and was committed enough to the American war effort to willingly fight against his family and friends. The last reference that Askin makes about Brush is in a letter regarding his reputation within the United States. Brush allegedly spread malicious information about Askin to various merchants in Detroit, preventing him from receiving further business from long time partners. In a response he asked for “an opportunity of contradicting any representations derogatory to my character.” Askin repaired his business relationships in Detroit, but never reconciled with his son-in-law. By the time of his death in 1813, John Askin had cut all contact with Brush and his daughter. Various other examples from around the Lake Erie world display the changes in peoples’ understanding and perceptions of “others.” Newspapers give an excellent idea of how people in

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144 Brunsman 14.
145 Askin 720.
146 Ibid 720.
147 Ibid 720.
the Lake Erie world understood each other at this time, and shows a significant difference from prior to the war’s start. Most newspapers that circulated around the Lake Erie region were American publications. While Canadian news outlets existed, such as the *Kingston Gazette* and the *York Gazette*, their coverage tended to be sporadic, typically reaching a local audience within Upper Canada. Established American papers however traveled across the continent, with periodicals such as the *American Mercury*, the *American Register*, and the *Buffalo Gazette* reaching throughout the Lake Erie community, both in Canada and the United States. This reliance on American newspapers however became detrimental to Canadian colonists after the start of the war, as papers in certain regions, particularly along the Niagara River, began to restrict circulation. In the Lake Erie world news circulation did not cease until the occupation of Detroit by General Duncan MacArthur.

Of the various cases to come the Wayne County Court in Detroit throughout the war, two stand out as being particularly interesting in regards to the spread of news throughout the region. Along with the treason case of Ann Roe and the attempted dismissal of James Abbot from public office, these cases came to the court as a result of MacArthur’s attempt to solidify American influence and authority around the lake. The first, *Michigan v. Denny*, accuses Mr. Denny of publishing opinionated pieces in his newspaper about the activities of MacArthur and his men during their raids into Upper Canada. He is instructed by the court to cease the publicity of “false, base, maligning, and unwarrantable remarks against the General.” The specification about not publicly attacking an American general during a time of war is significant. In this case the rights to free speech, promised by the American Constitution, are denied because they threaten to undermine American control in the Lake Erie region. The threat existed primarily because of the extensive cross-border news network that still existed in the Lake Erie world by early 1814. Because of the distrust that developed during this time within the larger community,

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148 Errington 38-39. Most Canadians in this period received the vast majority of their news from American sources. Prior to the war, Canadian colonists felt that they had enough in common with Americans that the same publications would be valid to them.

149 “Affidavit #3” Wayne County Court Records, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

150 Douglas Bradburn. “A Clamor in the Public Mind: Opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 2008), pp. 565-600. This seems to be a resonance from the Alien and Sedition acts, which were officially abolished in the late 1790s.
people feared allowing anyone other than Americans access to information pertinent to the war.\textsuperscript{151}

The second case discussed another private newspaper, but focused primarily on the perceptions of Native Americans in the public eye. In \textit{Michigan v. W. Godfrey}, Godfrey’s untitled paper is accused of spreading malicious information about “Tecumseh and the natives” to the people of the region.\textsuperscript{152} This in itself is interesting, as very few sources from this period refer to Tecumseh specifically as an individual. Typically when people at this time refer to Native Americans, they talk about them in broad tribal terms or the coverall of “Indian.”\textsuperscript{153} The fact that the court recognizes Tecumseh as both a significant individual and an acute threat, even after his death at the Battle of the Thames in 1813, speaks to his significance in the region.

Despite this importance Godfrey’s paper is seen as too sympathetic towards a group of people that those within the United States grew to distrust. Two decades prior native peoples, Canadians, and Americans coexisted in a shared space along the shores of Lake Erie. The war however demonstrated to most people that Native Americans could not be trusted, as they turned on the community that they participated in for so long during the bloody conflict.\textsuperscript{154} Canadian families like the Askins complained that they had “been so plagued with Indians” and that “they have done much damage here.”\textsuperscript{155} What most whites in the Lake Erie world did not realize was that, for many of the Native peoples, the War of 1812 was both an international war and a civil war. Infighting within and between nations not only alienated Natives from themselves, but also made them seem untrustworthy to the broader community that they were part of.\textsuperscript{156} The case against Godfrey for being too sympathetic towards Native Americans demonstrates yet again how much damage the Lake Erie World sustained as a result of the war.

\textsuperscript{152} “Affidavit #4” Wayne County Court Records, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
\textsuperscript{154} Sheppard 20.
\textsuperscript{155} Askin 743. Native Americans that served with the British army often stayed with respected members of the Canadian elite while on the move. Towards the end of the war, complaints such as this became fairly common. For more information on this subject, see Sheppard
\textsuperscript{156} Taylor 203.
Where before Americans, Canadians, and Indians shared a common space in which they traded and interacted regularly there now was a shattered landscape with isolated, nationalistic communities that dared not to trust outsiders. It took about a year for the war’s full effects to strike, and the Lake Erie world felt the full brunt of the fear and paranoia brought by the conflict. The constructed community that formed in the late 1790s relied both on a shared physical space and a shared sense of frontier culture. The War of 1812 did not remove the common space that people lived on, but it did shatter the kinship bonds that people felt with those across borders, whether those be political, ideological, ethnic, or racial borders. Instances such as Ann Roe’s trial, the damage incurred on John Askin’s family, and the silencing of sympathetic voices towards native peoples demonstrate how the social and cultural connections that first helped the Lake Erie World establish now worked against the stability of the cross-border region.

Jane Errington succinctly summarizes the conflict between the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and the various Native American nations in saying that “The War of 1812…left bitterness in its wake.” After a long two year conflict both the United States and Great Britain looked for a way to end a war that was neither profitable nor beneficial. Beginning peace talks in August, American and British diplomats spent five months discussing terms in Ghent, Belgium. On 24 December 1814 they found a peaceful resolution, and needed only to ratify it through the countries’ respective legislatures. When ratification came in 1815, the United States, Canada, and Great Britain all felt victorious, considering the end of the war as successful towards the majority of their aims. The United States, while not annexing any territory in Canada, achieved sailing and trade rights on the Atlantic, as well as acceptance into a global world. Canada felt successful in the war because they repelled several American invasions and maintained the sovereignty of their territory. Great Britain protected Canada and kept the United States from trading with Napoleonic France, and thus saw the conflict as fairly successful.

While it is not clear who won the war, if anyone did at all, the Native Americans on both sides were the only ones who lost. The peace talks in Ghent did not address the concerns of native peoples, and left them completely isolated from the diplomatic process. The lack of

157 Errington 83
158 Due to a lack quick communication both the United States and Great Britain prepared for new invasions in the winter of 1814. While the American army prepared to make a final push into the Niagara Peninsula, British military units, fresh from the Napoleonic Wars, arrived in Louisiana with the intent of capturing the important port city of New Orleans.
political representation in Belgium reflects the social isolation that Native peoples began to see following the end of the war, especially within the Lake Erie world. Before the war began Native Americans belonged both to their own distinct ethnic groups as well as a larger, regional community defined by a large shared space. The division of those ethnic groups along American and British political lines damaged internal kinship dynamics. After the end of the war groups that supported the United States found it difficult to reconcile with those who sided with Great Britain. Native peoples also hampered their own participation within a wider community, much like Canadians and Americans did to themselves. By choosing sides in a larger conflict instead of supporting the lake community that they helped found, they isolated themselves from future inclusion. These effects are not unique to the Native American peoples of the Lake Erie world, but they did suffer from the most drastic effects.

In the years following 1815 the Lake Erie World persisted, but struggled to hold together. The strong social bonds that people formed, primarily through a shared culture based on special relationships, deteriorated through a harsh retaliating conflict. While still living in and using the same space, many people began to identify in nationalistic terms, understanding that they belonged first and foremost to the United States or Upper Canada. However trade relations, the activities that solidified the Lake Erie world’s already strong kinship networks, continued on. Primarily through the revivification of the fur trade, economic connections remained between the various powers active in Lake Erie. Identity at this point relied less on the perceptions of similarity and difference between people, and became much more simple and cynical. Instead of seeing someone as a member of the community based on similarities, it became more a matter of needs and wants; how could a person bring benefits to the community? This economic community would carry on, at least for as long as the furs continued to flow.

159 A distinct example of this comes from the Shawnee tribe, which split down the middle at the beginning of the war. Those who followed Tecumseh and sided with the British found it difficult to associate with those who followed sided with the United States. Black Hoof, the chief who sided with the Americans, continued this divide by attempting to acculturate to white lifestyles.
CHAPTER 3: (IN)VISIBLE BORDERS

On 20 June 1820 David Stone wrote a letter to his superior Robert Stuart about the declining state of the American Fur Company in the Detroit River region. He explained that recent reports showed trappers near Chicago bringing in “1800 Musk Rat [packs]” in one season, and that the company “received $1000 more than total from last Fall.” With only “53 packs of rats in the last season” from the regions around Lake Erie, the fur trade did not seem sustainable without massive expansion. He recommended to Stuart that, should the trapping and production of furs continue to decline, that they should enter “into contemplation to discontinue that Establishment” and move further west. Stone lamented that the lucrative trade that supported the company for so long around Lake Erie was falling apart, and that future ventures might not afford them the ability to work with friends and allies. He specifically stated that he would rather “trust in those who have been faithful” to the American Fur Company over the past years, and that he was afraid to put its economic future into the hands of “Strangers” outside of the Lake Erie region. Stone strictly emphasized that the friends the company stood to lose were the Algonquian fur trappers, not the vast networks of Canadian merchants and employees from across the lake that were for so long integral to the survival of international trade. By moving west, those allies would not be available for continual work, and the company would need to rely on the “denizens of Lac Du Flambæu” who had yet to prove themselves trustworthy in Stone’s eyes. The world that Stone describes to Stuart is vastly different to the one that existed at the turn of the nineteenth century: why did the relationships around Lake Erie, which for so long sustained a thriving community, begin to break down? Why did organizations such as the American Fur Company decide to abandon the Lake Erie world by the 1820s?

The War of 1812 did more than destabilize national borders and political tensions. It set in motion the decline of the new Lake Erie World that began in the late eighteenth century.

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161 Ibid.
through a cascade of economic and social alienations. The exodus of important political and economic organizations like the American Fur Company from Lake Erie, as well as the rise in nationalistic feelings throughout the region, contributed to the breakdown of the social environment Lake Erie World by 1825. The sheer damage and chaos caused by the back-and-forth nature of the war created innumerable tensions between American, Canadian, and Native American peoples throughout the region, breaking apart families and friends alike. Those living in the region began to see the cultural, political, social, and economic borders rise to prominence, leading to a greater enforcement of various boundaries. The loyalties people adhered to during the conflict remained rigid, with the Lake Erie World persisting mainly through the social extensions maintained by trade. The shared economic prosperity of a vibrant fur trade encouraged people to continue traveling and working across the border, though by the late 1810s however it became clear to many merchants that the steady stream of pelts that made the region profitable was quickly disappearing. This further pushed people to consider their identity in relation to their nation more so than to the region in which they lived.

Stone’s letter encapsulates many of the changes that took place within the Lake Erie World’s societies in the late 1810s and early 1820s. Before the War of 1812, a sense of belonging within the transnational community derived primarily through a shared experience based on the physical space that people lived and operated in. Merchants, farmers, and travelers of various nationalities all used the same waterways and physical landscapes to make their living. Towns such as Detroit and Niagara saw massive expansion as a result, with polyglot communities consisting of American, Canadian, British, Native, and various other peoples. The War of 1812 changed much of this by breaking the communal bonds that people formed in the years prior to the conflict. The physical space itself changed little, with the waterways and landscapes remaining as they were, however the ways that people experienced them changed drastically. The expansion of populations into the Lake Erie world led to a decrease in the acceptance of ‘‘frontier cultures.’’ Larger national cultures began to override the native appropriations people in region made in previous years, which helped to further cement the distinct differences made between those of different nationalities started by the war. The cultural boundaries between people with cross-border relationships rose prominently during this period, and as time carried on the once diverse community of the lake transitioned into bifurcated cultural groups reinforced by political pressures. Conflict drove people to make decisions based
on their own nationality, as well as whom they felt loyalty towards. Instead of a close community of various peoples, the Lake Erie region became a loose grouping of nationalistic residencies connected only through trade. The experience that bound them together was gone.\footnote{Catherine Cangany.  
Peter Sahlins.  
Nicole Marie Guidotti-Hernández.  
In this respect the Lake Erie world is similar to several other borderland regions throughout history.  
The French-Spanish border region known as the Cerdanya encountered similar difficulties after multiple wars, resulting in various invasions into the established border communities people established.  
On the American-Mexican border following the annexation of Northern Mexico, violence continued well after both nations reached an established peace.  
Remaining tensions made it very difficult for border communities to coexist.}

Stone’s letter to Stuart also demonstrates the shift in how people saw themselves and others during the post-1812 period in the Lake Erie world. The ways in which people saw members of different cultural groups began to change drastically, moving quickly from friendly acknowledgement to bitter suspicion.\footnote{Benedict R. O’G Anderson.  
Anthony D. Smith.  
*Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant and Republic* (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2008), 17.}

The Lake Erie world quickly bureaucratized during this period, with officials from both Canada and the United States attempting to keep track of who came and went from their space. Groups like the American Fur Company became obsessed with “Aliens” and “Foreigners,” and kept lists of which non-American citizens were in their employ.

Native Americans similarly underwent an extreme change during the post-war years. Due to the split nature of Native involvement in the War of 1812, they were not considered to be as trustworthy as before. Beyond representing an opposing cultural group to the various English-speakers of the region, Native peoples also began to be seen as resources or burdens by other people. As shown in Stone’s letter about the American Fur Company’s operations in Lake Erie, Native Americans transformed from friends and allies into commodities and possessions. People like John Jacob Astor went as far as to call groups of Indian traders that worked with the company “our Indians,” implying a sense of ownership that no other group could claim. Each of these transformations match up with the overall attitudes of people within the Lake Erie world at the time. Without the common social bonds that they had in the years prior to the war, the lake community could not recover from the devastating violence of the conflict. When people no longer needed to work together to achieve even common economic goals, the cross-border community, John Graves Simcoe’s great socioeconomic experiment, finally ended.
From 1815 on the Lake Erie watershed faced various political and economic challenges, many of which continued to degrade the already decrepit social world that developed in the preceding decades. The brutality of the war, forced many into “distressing situations” under the torment of former neighbors turned “Miscreants” and “Blackguards.”164 The governments of both the United States and Upper Canada sought in this period to solidify their power along the various border regions. In the most practical respect both states wanted to strengthen border defenses in the event that peace did not last. They also began to give their borders more attention to have a better idea of who traveled into and out of their territory. This became a distinct issue in Upper Canada, as the issue of citizenship arose for the many American settlers still in the colony after the war. As politicians in both states continued to push for more and more protective policies, which in the end would effectively cut off the free access people enjoyed for three decades across the border, the communities that formed in these regions continued to degrade. The Lake Erie world, where Canadian, American, and Native American nationalism originally blended into a homogenous Lake identity, saw this decline occur rapidly after the war. Instead of seeing themselves as belonging to a larger community, people in the Lake Erie watershed began to adopt their own national identities, which “coincided with the territorial definition of national sovereignty.”165

During this period Upper Canada slowly matured into its own unique entity; still recognizably British in origin, yet at the same time a new nation with a burgeoning community. Many of the policies enacted in the immediate postwar years led to this transformation, but also contributed to attempts by the United States to quickly polarize against outside intervention.166 A great deal of this tension developed based on American perceptions of the colonial Canadian elite, who following the war pushed for a more conservative and traditional approach to governance and policy. “Regionally based elites” controlled the postwar government in Upper

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164 John Askin and Milo Milton Quaife. *The John Askin Papers* (Detroit: Detroit Library Commission, 1928), 771. Here Askin refers to the Americans he was forced to share a space with during his time on Mackinaw Island, which was taken by British forces early in the war. He complained that Americans refused to share provisions and that he and other Canadians were likely to starve before the end of the winter.

165 Sahlins 236; Wittes and Singh 101.

166 Elizabeth Jane Errington. *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Kingston [Ont.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 89; This period is seen as one of major transformation for Upper Canada as a colony. While the war caused them to split from their American neighbors, it also pushed Upper Canadians to see other members of their colony as part of a larger community.
Canada and they quickly became political, social, and cultural leaders within the colony.\textsuperscript{167} Many of the men ruling the province in this period were the same who originally opposed the creation of an open border and smooth relations with the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Families such as the Askins and Babys obtained power during this period, and used their ability to change the way the colony functioned in the wake of what they saw as Republican aggression.\textsuperscript{168} Once in power these elites attempted to reshape the colony in the image that they originally thought it should take. Using anti-American sentiment, prevalent particularly in populous border regions after the war, they made it far more difficult for American citizens to maintain residency within the colony. Unlike domestic policies before the war, which favored loose boundaries and open settlement rights, much of the new legislation chose not to extend property and labor rights to American citizens unless they chose to transfer citizenship to the British crown.\textsuperscript{169} Other policies included the gradual removal of Methodist circuits from Upper Canada. The implementation of Methodist churches throughout both the Province and the United States worried loyalist elites prior to the war, as they feared that the “contagion” of democracy would spread through evangelical ministries.\textsuperscript{170} While not successful in their first attempt, anti-American sentiment successfully propelled the loyalist platform throughout the 1810s.\textsuperscript{171}

The aggressive policies of the Loyalist elites in the immediate postwar years combined with several other factors in the degradation of the Lake Erie World, as well as other border spaces. One important issue that angered many people within the watershed was the forced removal of American citizens from their property in Upper Canada without due compensation. Many of the initial settlers of Upper Canada in the early nineteenth century were Americans in search for cheap land; land which Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe only too eagerly

\textsuperscript{167} Errington 90.


\textsuperscript{169} Errington 92.

\textsuperscript{170} John Carroll. \textit{Case and His Contemporaries; Or, The Canadian Itinerant's Memorial: Constituting a Biographical History of Methodism in Canada, from Its Introduction into the Province, Till the Death of the Rev. Wm. Case in 1855} (Toronto: S. Rose, 1867), 109. Quote from George Mountain.

offered up. But by 1816 the colony’s population began to grow quickly, with the number of new immigrants far outweighing the remaining American colonists who sat on large tracts of fertile land along the shores of Lake Erie. In the same year new land policies determined that unless each American land owner swore allegiance to Canada and the British Crown, as well as denounced their citizenship, they would be seen as squatters and be forcibly removed. This directly impacted the stability of the Lake Erie world by forcing yet another wedge between the various national groups that occupied the region. The transnational community around the lake already suffered significantly from the war, and the continual forced separation of people in the region served only to dismantle it further.

The continual impressment of American sailors within the Great Lakes also led to more drastic border limitations. Impressment carried on for a few months following the end of the war in the Great Lakes, with British naval officers forcing their way onto American ships. Great Britain at this time still recognized the lakes as sovereign territory under the control of the Canadian provinces. The continual allowance of impressment mainly provided British naval officers an opportunity to watch the border, which they feared could possibly flare up again into a renewed conflict. American politicians fought long and hard to achieve sailors’ rights on the Atlantic, and saw the practice of impressment on the lakes as unforgivable. The practice finally ended when the American government threatened to support already hostile neighbors to continue fighting along the Detroit River border. The threat of renewed conflict soothed border tensions, but both the United States and Upper Canada understood that regions like Lake Erie would remain tense zones until a firmer border was established. In response to this combination of factors American politicians rallied towards a more defined and established border, thus further separating America and Upper Canada into two unique and distinct states.

Continued tensions in border regions led to a joint solution; a group of politicians and surveyors to decide once and for all where the boundaries should lie between the United States and the Canadian colonies. The four separate Ghent Committees spent the next eighteen months

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working their way across the North American continent, arguing over where American land ended and Canadian land began. Many of the disagreements sparked during this time resulted from settlers on either side “encroaching on the borderlands” as well as the “conflicting interests” of the committee members themselves. In the end the border became fairly concrete in most regions save for the Great Lakes, which due to the wide expanse of water proved difficult to mark. The Lake Erie World relied on the large amount of open water that people couple use to their advantage, and indeed it was how the communities there grew so large in the prewar years. Now however the wide expanse of the lake became more of a boundary; an obstacle to prevent unwanted neighbors from being too close. Porter and Barclay, two of the border commissioners assigned following the Treaty of Ghent, argued heavily on where to designate the breaking point between American and Canadian sovereign waters. While deciding that dividing each major water way down the middle sufficed for a basic understanding, they could not agree on where legal jurisdiction ended, as well as how to clearly demarcate where Canadian law began and American law ended. Despite the accepted failure of the boundary commission to mark a hard border, the act demonstrated a shifting mindset for those living within the Lake Erie watershed. The fact that both sides willingly and actively attempted to separate themselves from each other shows how much the transnational community degraded in this period.

Despite the adversity brought upon by both an increased politicization in the region and a more regulated border, the Lake Erie world continued to function through the fur trade. As already seen the social and cultural connections that existed between people in the region largely dissipated during the War of 1812, but what little remained stayed strong through the economic benefit of the fur trade. Complex cross-border communication and interaction continued throughout the watershed into the early 1820s. The solidification of the border, both politically and mentally, left friendly travel at a minimum, but did not stop commerce from

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175 Piper 11.
176 Carroll 96-97.
flowing. The fur trade, which all but ceased due to the heavy fighting in the region, returned with force in the 1810s. With the war over companies like the American Fur Company were eager to start trapping again to recuperate their losses from the past few years. Although Americans, Canadians, and Native Americans in the Lake Erie world tended to distrust each other at this point, the various groups begrudgingly worked together in order to gain a profit; one that neither group by 1816-17 could gain alone. Though fur trading was not the only economic activity to take place within the Lake Erie world, it was by far the most lucrative in the 1810s. It also held the special quality of being one of the foundational pillars of the Lake Erie world, and by this point was the only one left intact.

Fig. 3: As populations continued to expand around Lake Erie, fur trading operations outside of the purview of the American Fur Company dwindled, creating a more streamlined business.178

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The fur trading operations that took place in the years immediately following the war held a different, more controlled form than what it was before. The Upper Canadian parliament, American government, and even high-ranking members of the American Fur Company all held concern about dealing with those outside their own nation. John Jacob Astor, founder and head of the company, went so far as to claim that “foreigners,” a term not seen before in reference to Canadians, could not be trusted to deal honestly with the United States and its allies. The major concerns about who sold furs to whom led to a startling increase in bureaucracy in the fur trade. Shipping manifests now took a different form, with more specific information written as to where explicitly a ship sailed from and to. In the early 1800s when the fur trade first picked up in Lake Erie most manifests listed the name of the ship, its captain, and its cargo, but rarely if ever specific destinations. An early example can be seen from an itemized list for J.B. Berthelot, an American ship captain. His invoice lists out items such as “3 bales of tobacco” and “5 kegs of sugar” bound for the “Prairie du Chien” out from “Michilimacina on 11 August 1816.” Prairie du Chien, a small town in modern day Wisconsin, existed as a border trading post, with French fur traders, Canadians, Americans, and Native peoples all working out of the same area. Another manifest from John Johnston, an outfitter from Detroit, specifically details his route from “the port of Detroit” to “Kingston” of Upper Canada. As time progressed shipping manifests came to be attached with “a descriptive list of foreigners” working on the ship, as well as “their ports of destination.” This process of bureaucratization continued to attach itself to foreign trade, and shows the latent animosity still felt within the Lake Erie world by Americans.

Economic stability in the Lake Erie region did not rely completely on the perpetuation of the fur trade, but the continuation of international interaction and cooperation did. The social connections that made the Lake Erie world the cosmopolitan community that it was needed the fur trade, as the development of nationalistic culture groups between the various denizens of the area made it difficult for new meaningful relationships to form across the border. At this point none of the major players in the lake realized that the beaver and muskrat populations, the main

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180 J.B. Berthelot. “Shipping manifest,” Peter Powell Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
182 Anonymous. “Descriptive list of foreigners, 1818.” Ramsey Crooks Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
sources for expensive pelts, dwindled rapidly. The quick return of the fur trade, which led to vastly increased hunting quotas than before, coupled with the damage dealt to woodland habitats during the War of 1812, leaving valuable animal populations unstable and at a nearly unsustainable level. Increased economic legislation designed to protect national interests on the behalf of the United States and Upper Canada in the following years only served to expedite this process, as competition for the best furs continued to mount.  

Through the border disputes of the immediate postwar period arrived an era in both the United States and Upper Canada that focused intently on national cohesion and the protection of sovereign territory. Legislation developed in both nations that favored and protected national commercial enterprises while pushing people to avoid trading and interacting with international interests. The intent at this juncture was to reverse as much damage as possible that was caused by the War of 1812, as well as to solidify the nation against potential enemies. These policies obviously damaged political international relations, but also contributed to the quickly declining state of regions such as the Lake Erie world. Despite sharing a common space, the fact that peoples’ governments delineated a specific border and gave them incentives not to contact others across the border hampered any further development of a transnational community.

Political and social responses international relations in Upper Canada took on a fairly mild stance. While in the years immediately following the war most in Upper Canada distrusted and often feared Americans, concerned that a “ruthless spirit of cruelty and lawless revenge” may still arise, most legislation put in place was not designed to completely shut out the neighboring republic. Though abrupt government action following the settlement of peace displaced many American landowners within the province, Upper Canada hoped to maintain a regular working relationship with the United States. Most Canadian legislation during the 1810s dealt with internal improvements, such as education, communication, transportation, and expansion. Loyalist elites hoped that, should there ever be another conflict between the province and its southern neighbor, they would not be caught as unprepared as they were during the last

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183 Cangany 16, Taylor 446.
184 Kaufman 155; Errington 90; Carroll 85; Bukowczyk, Guidotti-Hernandez; The formation of tense relations along a bifurcated border is not isolated to the Lake Erie World. The northern reaches of Mexico, which became the American Southwest, saw very similar patterns, especially in the years immediately following the Mexican-American War.
185 Kingston Chronicle, 16 April 1820.
conflict. A main concern relied around the expansion of settlers west and its association with the fur trade. Knowing that pelt trading accounted for a large percentage of the Canadian economy, ruling elites understood that traders needed to maintain positive ties with Native American trappers in order to be successful. As a result the government made numerous informal agreements with First Nations tribes in the western parts of Upper Canada promising to strictly limit and regulate settlement expansion in return for continued cooperation. Organizations such as the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company, rivals of the American Fur Company, became powerful in these regions, and acted almost as extensions of governmental authority.186

Upper Canada also attempted to give a more homogenous character to its population. Instead of isolating themselves directly from the United States, the colony endeavored to forge stronger connections with Great Britain, hoping that peace in Europe might translate into increased commerce and immigration. Robert Gourlay, a political writer and activist, commented extensively on the state of immigration within the colony. He argued that bringing more British colonists into the province would promote “a spirit of order and peace.”187 By 1817 the rhetoric used in Upper Canada about foreigners began to change. While many Canadians still saw their southern cousins as highly similar, at this time colonial elites and state reverends began to emphasize to the “depravity of the American character” seen during the War of 1812.188 Many Canadians accepted Gourlay’s vision of buffering against their southern neighbors while also embracing the influx of new European immigrants.

Upper Canadians did not hope for all connections between them and the United States cease, as they gained a great deal from continued contact. The vast majority of news, communication, and information about the world made its way into Upper Canada through the United States. Papers like the *Niagara Herald* and the *Buffalo Gazette* informed many of Upper Canada’s most important news outlets, often taking stories directly from the original source. Continued inclusion in the fur trade also allowed Canadian businesses to recover from the war, much like it

186 Hansen 95; Kaufman 165.


188 Errington 166. Quote from Rev. John Strachan, an influential Scottish bishop in Upper Canada.
did for American enterprises, while also funneling wealth into the colony. The connections that Canadian merchants made with Americans, especially those that continued to have contact with members of the American Fur Company, ensured prosperity for years to come in their eyes. Though people like Robert Gourlay called for more protection against the United States, primarily through a buffer zone of British colonists, a complete separation had the potential to set back Upper Canada a great deal.¹⁸⁹

Upper Canada remained fairly open to outside influence, focusing more on internal improvements and defensive economic policies. The legislation coming from the northern side of the border did little to hamper continued transnational interaction and communication. The same cannot be said however of their southern neighbors, as a far more isolationist ideology developed in the United States following the war. Many people within the republic, particularly those living along border regions, feared repeated invasions, and accepted the new national direction of focusing solely on the state. Much of this new ideology about defined borders and difference illuminates explicitly through the enactment of the Tariff of 1816. The tariff was a “restrictive foreign and economic executive” policy that prevented the intervention of outside influence on American political and corporate interests.¹⁹⁰ Much of the legislation developed after the war, including the Tariff of 1816, derived from the destruction caused by border fighting. Due to the back-and-forth nature of the war, British and American troops continually captured and lost what they saw as key assets in the region. Many of these were fur trading outposts, as the armies requisitioned furs, food, and other provisions to aid in their fight. By the time the war came to an end, however, many fur trading organizations, as well as other regional businesses, found themselves ruined out of a lack of resources. The Tariff of 1816, which had one of the most significant impacts on the development of transnational trade and interaction in the Lake Erie region, gave American enterprises an opportunity to rebuild by giving them incentives for not doing business with foreign interests.¹⁹¹ In a letter written by John Jacob Astor, the head of the American Fur Company, to Secretary of State James Monroe he praised the enactment of the tariff, claiming that he was “glad that this Law has passed, it ought to have

¹⁸⁹ Errington 107-108; Taylor 448-449; Henson 79.
¹⁹¹ Charles McFarland and Nevin E. Neal. 30.
been so some years ago…” In a way this tariff was the first major expansion of federal power following the war that attempted to consolidate its American power and, effectively isolating itself from foreign states and rigidifying its legal and political boundaries.

In his discussion of the 1816 tariff, Astor comments extensively on two separate groups (which he makes sure to separate from his own people): Native Americans and Canadians. He interestingly comments on a particular clause of the 1816 tariff in the beginning of the letter, remarking on the “regulation of trade with the Indians within the territory of the United States.” In the prewar years Indian trade held no regulation, and private businesses had the opportunity to participate in free trade. Following the end of the war the American government put in place measures to prevent open trade, particularly over a fear of outsiders corrupting what they felt was a hard fought peace. It is here that the borders of Lake Erie, which remained open to free trade and unhindered movement since the inception of the United States, fell under regulation that caused political hardening that would only strengthen as the century progressed. This legal entrenchment of borders influenced all parties involved, seen particularly when Astor wrote that “by this act none but Citizens of the United States are permitted to come among our Indians unless by special permission of the President.” Astor specifically comments that only citizens of the United States may participate in Indian trade, unless otherwise granted privileges by the President. Knowing that Astor’s letter deals with the 1816 tariff, the conversation here definitely suggests that there is a solidification of ties between not just America and Canada, but also with the native nations that participated in the trade.

Again, however, Astor’s letter reveals a great deal of information that complicates the story. While legal borders during the post-1815 years cemented, contact still continued among a variety of people across official boundaries. As Astor remarks as he continues the letter “It is however to be feared that unless some few Canadian traders are permitted to go in this year we will not find a sufficient number of men acquainted with the trade…” Here Astor discusses

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192 Porter 1145.
193 Carroll xv.
194 Porter 1145.
195 Carroll 95.
196 Porter 1145.
197 Ibid 1145.
the inclusion of Canadian workers within trade, despite governmental attempts to prevent outside interference with American business. Astor emphasizes the need for Canadian laborers in his company, otherwise he would not “find a sufficient number of men” to fill out his work orders for the year. He quickly places a caveat on this request, claiming that “next year” the natives “shall have no need for foreigners.” He bluntly tells Monroe that if Canadian traders could not serve with his company, they would lose Native American support, causing a decrease in business; the opposite effect that the 1816 tariff intended. Yet at the same time Astor is fully prepared to phase out Canadian influence in his company, shutting out many of the people, such as the Askins family, who were responsible for the American Fur Company’s original rise to prominence.

A significant change takes place during this period in the ways that Americans and Canadians viewed each other. In the opening days of the Lake Erie world people shared a common experience of living in a similar space and utilizing an open-water resource. They came to know each other as neighbors and eventually friends without much cause to concern themselves about national identity. As the War of 1812 began and raged, national representation slowly became more and more important, demonstrating a person’s support and loyalty to one side or the other in the conflict. As a result in the months following the end of the war the terms “American” and “Canadian” became far more common when describing another person, specifying their country of origin. Eventually by the late 1810s these descriptors changed again, with an extra descriptor of “foreigner” or “alien” adding on to the national identifier. The “cultural drift” experienced by those living in the region changed how people perceived the identities of others, and says a great deal about the state of the Lake Erie world in the postwar period. People who once considered themselves as friends and neighbors now bifurcated into specific national communities. Much of this influence came from the population increases that the region saw immediately following the war, as the large influx of people into

198 Ibid 1145.
199 Sahlins 13.
201 Beth Preston. A Philosophy of Material Culture: Action, Function, and Mind (New York: Routledge, 2013), 154. In discussing cultural drift, Preston describes what can be a very sudden change in the way a large group of people understand a concept or idea. She compares it to the same unpredictability of a natural disaster shifting the biological responses and interactions of animals.
both American and Canadian territories prompted an increase in government intervention there.²⁰²

The shift in American and Canadian perceptions was not unique during this period. Let us return to something that Astor mentioned casually in the middle of the letter that demonstrates a very important shift in the perception of a group of “others.” In discussing the state of international trade, he specifically refers to Native peoples associated with his enterprise as “our Indians.”²⁰³ This implies a sort of possession that the company held over the Native groups of the Lake Erie watershed, particularly the Shawnee, Fox, and Ottawa tribes.²⁰⁴ Astor’s possessive tone points to the idea that the company felt that they controlled these Indians and welcomed the fact that others could not trade with them, giving Astor and his business stricter control over the market. Much like how Canadians earned the title of foreigners, this single statement shows a great deal about the ways in which people in the Lake Erie world perceived their former neighbors in a post-war setting. From the period at which the Lake Erie world first developed Native Americans transformed from savages to allies, from allies to friends, and then from friends to commodities. The changes here speak extensively towards an increasingly isolationist and nationalist attitude developing among Americans, which continued to disrupt cross-border relations to the point at which regular interaction came to a crashing halt.

While the United States and Upper Canada took different approaches to their postwar development, they shared one thing in common: a declining transnational community in Lake Erie. Canadian settlers and officials were not directly opposed to continual interaction between the two nations, and largely moved past the war by the late 1810s. This perceived eagerness however troubled American politicians and border settlers, who already embraced the new nationalist notion of state protection. By this point the American and Canadian governments, as well as the people within the Lake Erie watershed caught in the middle, already set the course for how the community would continue to develop. With one strongly isolationist nation on one

²⁰² Hansen 95; Sahlins 20; Bukowczyk, Carroll xv.
²⁰³ Ibid 1145. When looking at American Fur Company records, the phrase “our Indians” pops up again and again, but only in the years following the end of the War of 1812. It points to a distinctive shift in the ways that people viewed Native Americans and understood their value.
side and a foreign-minded colony on the other, the nationalist attitudes of the various people in
between could not be resolved.

In the years following the development of American legislation designed to protect
citizens and push away outsiders, the borders between the United States and other nations
solidified. As already seen many of the cross-border connections that people maintained from
1815-1819 were economic in origin, usually revolving around the ever-lucrative fur trade. Yet
as the region entered into the second decade of the nineteenth century these strained connections
were insufficient to keep viable communication and interaction going between Americans,
Canadians, and Native peoples. Even John Jacob Astor, who understood that at times foreign
cooperation was necessary to conduct good business, exclaimed that Americans should “exclude
Canada traders from our Country.” As such the American Fur Company in the 1810s was as
much of a political entity as it was an economic one. Benefitting greatly from American policies
of isolation that favored national enterprises, the company acted as a vanguard for new
governmental ideologies in frontier regions. By using its status as a leading organization within
the Lake Erie region to denounce Canadian economic interests, the company stood at the
forefront of American foreign policy within North America.205

The newfound sense of American isolationism and nationalism was a manifestation of the
cultural boundaries between citizens of the republic and the rest of the continent. The affinity
that Americans once felt for Native Americans and Canadians faded away with the fixed
establishment of a political border, giving rise to a stronger and far less porous cultural border.
The momentum of American nationalism in the post war period contributed heavily to the
decline of the Lake Erie world and the transnational community that used to exist there. The
almost fervent patriotism within the United States made it difficult for any lasting transnational
relationships, whether social, cultural, or economic, to form and remain. While tensions came
from various aspects around the border, the isolationist mentality of the United States in the “Era
of Good Feelings” left many who were once considered friends and allies out in the cold.

Documents from the American Fur Company encapsulate the general attitude of the
United States towards other powers during this period. As an organization that benefitted
immensely from American protective tariffs and a major force along the nation’s frontiers, the

205 Porter 1144.
company shared many similarities with the general desires and beliefs of the American public.\footnote{Ibid 1145.} By the 1820s most documents referred to specific nationalities and races when regarding trading partners, a trend begun in 1816 after the implementation of the new tariff. The development of foreign labor contracts and shipping manifests continued as well, and demonstrate the cemented view that Americans had of outsiders. Both served as a method of tracking Native American trade in the Great Lakes, primarily in Lakes Erie and Huron, as well as knowing to whom the majority of trade flowed. In October 1821 William H. Wallace contracted to the American Fur Company for trade with the Wabash tribe, and completed a section that asked for those employed who “are not of the United States, in said trade.”\footnote{William H. Wallace. “Contract for Trade with Native Americans, 22 August 1821.” Legal Contract. Ramsey Crooks Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.} Along with this contract he turned in a “Descriptive List of Aliens” that would be under his advisement. Each entry in the list asked for complexion, age, and nationality. The fact that each entry marking completion as “Dark” and nationality as “Canadian” is in bolded print further underscores the differences ascribed to those who did not qualify as American. These documents also distinguish laborers between English speakers and non-English speakers. Apart from giving information on the ability for certain workers to communicate, this also serves as a further method through which to delineate separate and distinct cultural groups.\footnote{Ibid.  John Jacob Astor explained in his letter to James Monroe about the 1816 tariff that Canadian traders would be necessary to perpetuate the fur trade for a short while longer, as they had ties to some Native American groups that American traders did not. The descriptive list of aliens that becomes a part of the labor contract is a method through which to limit and track those few Canadians allowed to participate in the American trade.}

Another strong example of this is another labor contract made out “by Benjamin Clapp for James Kinzie.”\footnote{Benjamin Clapp for James Kinzie. “Contract for Trade with Native Americans, 1 October 1821.” Legal Contract, Silas Farmer Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.} Under the direction of Ramsey Crooks, a leading American Fur Company officer, Kinzie had permission to trade with the Indians of “Milwaukee and its dependencies,” operating primarily out of Michilimacinac but answering directly to Detroit. Attached to the document is another “Descriptive List of Aliens under the Employ of the American Fur Company,” much like the contract that Wallace signed. The two contracts share a large variety of similarities, including descriptions of completion, age, and stature. Yet again the document
emphasizes the employees’ nationality through a section specified as “By Birth.” Under this column two different entries appear: “Canadian” and “Half-Breed.” Clapp, like Wallace, also made sure to emphasize those who could speak English and those who could potentially act as translators for the company’s various contacts. Again this contract and its accompanying document demonstrate the transition in how Americans viewed those outside of their own nation.

What is even more significant than the language however is the physical document itself, primarily the way in which it was created. Unlike the numerous letters, contracts, and shipping manifests created in years past, these new documents were not hand written. Both contracts, as well as others like it, are professionally printed and standardized; even the portion containing the list of foreigners is precisely printed. The emphasis on officially printed documents reflects the “novel construction” of the isolationist and protective American culture of the period, and suggests that standardized bureaucracy acts as a function of cementing that culture. As the decade progressed, this type of material culture only became more rigid within groups like the American Fur Company, showing a continuation of American backlash against foreign groups. The more concrete this culture of isolation became in the United States, the faster international relationships within the Lake Erie watershed disappeared. The Lake Erie world originally began based on similar social-cultural ties and a shared experience of the physical landscape, and grew much stronger with the inclusion of international trade. By 1820 the social aspects of the Lake Erie world dissolved through American attitudes of centrality, as seen through the various American Fur Company documents. At this point the only regular interaction that occurred across the border was that of the fur trade; the economic anchor that originally solidified the region and the various communities around the lake. By 1825, even that strong connector between Americans, Canadians, and Native peoples fell apart, leaving a shattered region behind.

211 Ibid. It is not directly stated as to what the company meant by the term half breed, though in most situations it refers to a person of mixed race. Those under the employ of the company in 1821 could likely have had split African or Native American heritage, although it is possible that they also used this term in referring to someone with both an American and Canadian origin.

212 Preston 156.
Fig. 4: As the American Fur Company consolidated its fur trading assets towards a western hunting ground, fewer and fewer outside traders gained the opportunity to do business with the region’s most significant economic, and in some ways political, power.  

Throughout the 1790s and the 1800s fur trading carried on at a regular, controlled pace, with various people competing for the ability to purchase furs from the many Native nations that took part. After the War of 1812 however many of the old fur trading groups could not recover from the damages done to their infrastructure during the war, leaving less competition and more open trade. The few large groups that remained, such as the American Fur Company, drastically raised their hunting quotas in order to make a much larger profit. What most in the Lake Erie world did not and could not know, at least until it was too late to do anything about it,


214 White 16; Cangany 54.

215 Porter 1140.
was that the populations of animals such as Raccoons, Muskrats, and Beavers dropped to dangerously low levels during the late 1810s and early 1820s.

During the War of 1812 soldiers from every side foraged through dense, difficult, and undeveloped terrain as their army moved across the North American landscape. They also found the need to protect themselves when remaining in one position for too long, and often built fortifications out of nearby materials. Along the Miami of the Lake, soldiers like Daniel Cushing of the 2nd U.S. Artillery created cut their way through miles of dense forest and felled “enough trees to see a mile in any direction.” Another soldier, Shadrach Byfield of the British 41st Regiment of Foote, explained in his diary that as Americans retreated, they regularly built large fortifications, “which they promptly burned on our arrival.” While not apparent to the men at the time, many of these soldiers contributed to the destruction of many natural habitats that animals like beavers and muskrats needed to survive. The damage went unnoticed however, since fur trapping during the war nearly stopped and did not pick up again until after the United States, Canada, and Britain came to terms.

The effects of the war on the natural environment became apparent to those within the crumbling Lake Erie world in the early 1820s. By this point the only significant transnational relationships that remained relied heavily on the economic advantages found in cooperation over the fur trade. However many high ranking members of the American Fur Company recognized the signs of decreasing business already by 1821, and made plans to remedy their situation. In a letter from company head John Jacob Astor to Ramsey Crooks, he mournfully explained that he was “sorry to say, the prospect for this article [pelts] is bad.” As returns came in from the past year, Astor realized that the number of pelts the company received from the Lake Erie region were drastically lower than they were in years past. In the same letter he told Crooks that “should there be an improvement in the price of Raccoon and Deer of which there is no great prospect, I shall hope that the trade will pay well next year, but you and all the gentlemen agents

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216 Daniel Cushing, Journal. Detroit Public Library. 36. The Miami of the Lake, as it was known at the time, is also understood as the Maumee River, and flows through valuable fur trapping land up to Lake Erie.


219 Porter 1174.
must be prudent...”

Astor planned to give the Lake Erie market a chance to recover in 1822, but already began shifting materials and men further west. As explained in Stuart and Stone’s letter, the American Fur Company discovered a valuable new hunting ground near Chicago; a region at this point much more plentiful in furs than what could be found near Lake Erie.

Astor started moving company operations away from Lake Erie as early as 1820, using the island of Michilimacinac as a main base. Through Michilimacinac company business could more easily reach large markets, such as Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, while still maintaining connections to the main headquarters in Detroit. Astor explains why he began shifting the business west in a letter discussing the financial status of the American Fur Company in Lake Erie. Most significantly he says that “what strikes me very forceable in the account is the large amount of which the company is in debt...in Detroit.”

Knowing that the fur trade was dying out around him, he pushed operations into a new region that would provide more wealth. Many of the high ranking company members knew that Chicago would be a better market than Lake Erie based on preliminary findings discovered by their agents. Reports such as the one detailed in David Stone’s letter to Robert Stuart demonstrated that a vast amount of furs merely awaited someone to find them. The main goods that moved out towards Michilimacinac consisted of “Beads,” “Barley,” and “Tobacco, with smaller numbers of “Knives, Ladles, arrows, Trowels” and “Shovels.” The movement of trade goods into the region were intended for the Native Americans in the new hunting areas. Astor hoped that agents could use these goods to obtain good relations with local tribes, finally fulfilling the promise he made to James Monroe in 1816 to cut Canadian translators and merchants out of the fur trading business.

The economy of Lake Erie did not collapse with the fall of the fur trade, as Atlantic shipping and other activities still gave relevance to the region. The fur trade however was as much of a social connector as it was an economic one, and when it faded it removed the last

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220 Ibid 1176.
221 Ibid 1174.
222 David Stone to Robert Stuart.
223 George Mitchell, Ramsey Crooks Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; W.W. Matthews, Peter Powell Collection, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.
224 Porter 1167.
foundational pillar of the original Lake Erie world. Without the social institutions lost during the war, the culture derived from a commonly shared space, and the regular interaction of the fur trade, the transnational community within Lake Erie could not sustain itself. Though Astor and the AFC left due to a lack of furs in the region, their departure hurt the social stability of cross-border relations more than anything else. One of the most important incentives for Astor, Crooks, and the company to move further west, which also would allow the areas around Lake Erie to remain fairly economically viable, were the announced plans for the construction of a canal system that would connect Lake Erie more directly to the Atlantic Ocean, thus giving merchants swift access to European markets. And as the company picked up its operations in Lake Erie and moved west, the last remaining pillar of the Lake Erie world toppled and collapsed.

The Erie Canal, a major artery that would bring the Atlantic world much closer to most in North America, first began in 1817 during a celebration near Rome, New York. A local judge held a ceremony at which he used a spade to remove the first piece of land, promising “a great highway” through which people would be able to “transport their surplus productions to the shores of the Atlantic.” The canal, part of a series of internal improvements within the United States, became highly sought after from the moment of its announcement by Americans and Canadians alike. Both saw the advantages of having a direct route to the ocean, and thus lucrative European markets, and both received promises of full access upon the canal’s completion. The transformation of natural space into a human-developed second nature fell in line with the Jeffersonian notion of expansion, which held the attention of many people throughout the United States. Upon the completion of the Erie Canal, many people celebrated the new economic freedom that they would be able to enjoy, although the joy was short-lived. Many of those promised access to the canal, such as farmers and Canadian merchants, found themselves denied entry, with only wealthy merchants receiving the privilege to use it. While this angered many, those who now had a quick route to the Atlantic, such as the traders of the American Fur Company, benefitted greatly from the canal.

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225 *Utica Gazette*, July 15, 1817.

The canal brought wealth and prosperity to regions such as Lake Erie over time, particularly when more people received access to the waterway. After the solidification of its community around the valuable fur trade in the early 1800s, the transnational Lake Erie relied on stable economic ties to remain a viable structure within North America. Despite the social tensions caused by the War of 1812, the Lake Erie world remained an open economic community through which cross-border trade continued to take place. Groups like the American Fur Company remained in the region because it was stable, unlike the possibilities that awaited should they venture further west. By 1825 both the depletion of furs and the promise of ready access to the Atlantic gave the company a reason to leave the Lake Erie watershed.

The 1820s saw the ruination of a community over three decades in the making; one that crossed boundaries of race, class, and nationality. While the behaviors of average people and politicians alike throughout the Lake Erie watershed contributed to the downfall of this unique world, it had several root causes that did more damage than anything else. The rise in nationalist sentiment within the United States, coupled with the egress of the American Fur Company from Lake Erie, led to a complete dismantling of the Lake Erie world. American thoughts about outsiders, particularly their description of them as “foreigners” or “aliens” illuminate the changes that took place in the United States in the late 1810s. This change is also strikingly evident through the concrete nature in which they used this language in official documents, reflecting the new cultural standards that people held against denizens of other nations. The transformation of American perceptions of the world outside their own state finally broke the already weak social pillar that the Lake Erie world was established on. The movement of the American Fur Company into the west was equally as damaging, though took a hammer to the economic pillar that supported the community around Lake Erie for so long. With few animals to trap due to war and overhunting, the company acted in its own best interest by following their valuable resources, but at the cost of a transnational community.

In a way, the collapse of the Lake Erie world fulfils the desires of John Graves Simcoe, who helped the community condense in the 1790s. Simcoe promoted border crossing in the hopes of strengthening Upper Canada as a province. He hoped that the “rising Generation” of Upper Canadians would overcome any influence that they fell under from American settlers and
create a nation that would rival Great Britain itself.\textsuperscript{227} The development of a large Lake Erie world accomplished the first of Simcoe’s goals by giving the province a large number of taxable colonists to promote the growth of the province. It also established lucrative trade relations that allowed Canadian enterprises to expand, becoming as influential as the American Fur Company was in the United States. The collapse of the Lake Erie world in 1825 effectively accomplished the second half of Simcoe’s goal by severing ties with the United States, which allowed for the colony to eventually grow into a nation of its own.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a Lake Erie World assembled from the disjointed political, cultural, social, and economic borders of the various powers in North America. This unique space, which existed along an undefined boundary line between the United States and Upper Canada, saw the creation of polyglot communities in which ethnic Americans, Canadians, French, British, and Native Americans found active roles. The people living around Lake Erie did not need to find common ground as a result of conflict, unlike those living within the middle grounds of the early to mid-eighteenth century. Instead of forging economic alliances to avoid future wars, those in the forthcoming Lake Erie World developed solid social relationships that spanned across international boundaries. Much like the Atlantic and Mediterranean worlds, the water of the lake itself united people in a way that did not occur in other border regions. This world, despite its strong foundations, met a significant challenge during the War of 1812. People polarized to larger national communities for feelings of safety during the war, and maintained those affinities long after. Persisting loyalties to the national culture led to increased tensions in the closing days of the war, and eventually broke many of the social ties people formed after its end.

The main goals that I had coming into this project included demonstrating the creation of a distinct social construct along artificial borders as well as showing how events typically seen as minor historical footnotes actually had a greater impact on the world. Unlike other borderlands histories, this project attempted to demonstrate how borders always exist, as long as there are people nearby a physical space to apply them. In arguing that there is no such thing as a “borderless space,” it challenges accepted concepts of frontiers and borderlands that many historians work with. The project effectively demonstrates that various borders existed throughout the Lake Erie region, but that they only mattered when the people living there recognized them and emphasized their importance. Overall the thesis acts as a possible model for how borders work in general, drawing many parallels with a wide variety of other scholarly works.228 It demonstrates how people tend not to actively think about borders unless there is a

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larger national concern about them, which often leads to transnational communities similar to what developed in Lake Erie. Where this project stands out however is in its approach to both borders and water. By complicating typical border studies by analyzing the importance of a body of water, the thesis emphasizes how a lake or river can act as a conduit just as effectively as it does a boundary. The water of Lake Erie and its surrounding river system also brought the importance of the Atlantic world to the border region, linking those on the interior of North America with the thriving market of the ocean. Unlike other isolated border areas, the people of the Lake Erie region contended both with the issues of the immediate states around them as well as the influence of other powers across the Atlantic. In this way, the thesis brings new concepts to a long-studied historical problem and brings the potential for a unique contribution to the field.

As with every project, the thesis leaves several issues not fully addressed. The project does not cover the Native American aspects of the Lake Erie world in the same kinds of detail as it does for American and Canadian people. This is due to a lack of accessible source material in comparison to the myriad of information available for the United States and Upper Canada. Similarly the project does not delve as far into environmental issues as it does social and cultural ones, leaving some issues with the later arguments about the collapse of the fur trade in the Lake Erie region. While I do address some significant environmental concerns that impacted the Lake Erie world, the project overall is more focused on social and cultural concerns. By leaving out some details about the environmental issues in the region, I was able to focus more attention on the shifting nature of the borders and the ways that people reacted. In future work on this project, I want to further these two aspects and incorporate them fully into the work, balancing out the analysis and providing a wider perspective. Other issues that would make this research more effective include expanding the time period to historicize the eighteenth world on the continental interior, and attempting to see what larger implications the attitudes of Lake Erie residents had on the policies and attitudes of various governments. Overall, although the project could use more attention in some areas, it makes a strong contribution to the historiography of Lake Erie and the War of 1812.

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