

## **Tobacco Trade and Indigenous Manitoba**

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In my opinion, the most remarkable advance in Manitoba archaeology within the past 25 years has been the discovery of evidence for domesticated plant-use hereabouts in Precontact times. We now have good reason to believe (1) that corn was not only cultivated in the southern reaches of the province where agriculture was climatically feasible, but also (2) that it was traded far to the North into the boreal forest. My focus here will be on tobacco in particular.

Pipe fragments archaeologically uncovered at The Forks in 2008 (Quaternary Consultants Ltd 2013:307-309) bear witness to the local use of tobacco in Late Precontact history. Also discovered were the fragmentary remains of scapula hoes. Tobacco has never been a major crop in Manitoba, possibly in large part because of a challenging climate, but the Peguis First Nation (2016) has recently shown that its cultivation is possible in the central Interlake.

Nonetheless, it cannot at this time be conclusively demonstrated that tobacco was actually *grown* at The Forks. Rather, it may have been traded in from elsewhere; “the presence of tobacco could suggest [that] trade was occurring with places in southern Canada or slightly further south where tobacco is more easily grown” (Quaternary Consultants Ltd 2013:740). This inter-regional/inter-tribal trade theme is the one that I would like to pursue here.

My main literature source for this article is William W. Warren’s “History of the Ojibway Nation” that was researched, written, and first published in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Among the many historical topics that Warren presented in his book was that of tobacco cultivation and trade by the Gros Ventre (Hidatsa) nation of the Mississippi headwaters region of northern Minnesota. A perusal of Warren’s brief account may afford us some clues as to how tobacco found its way into and among the Late Precontact deposits at The Forks.

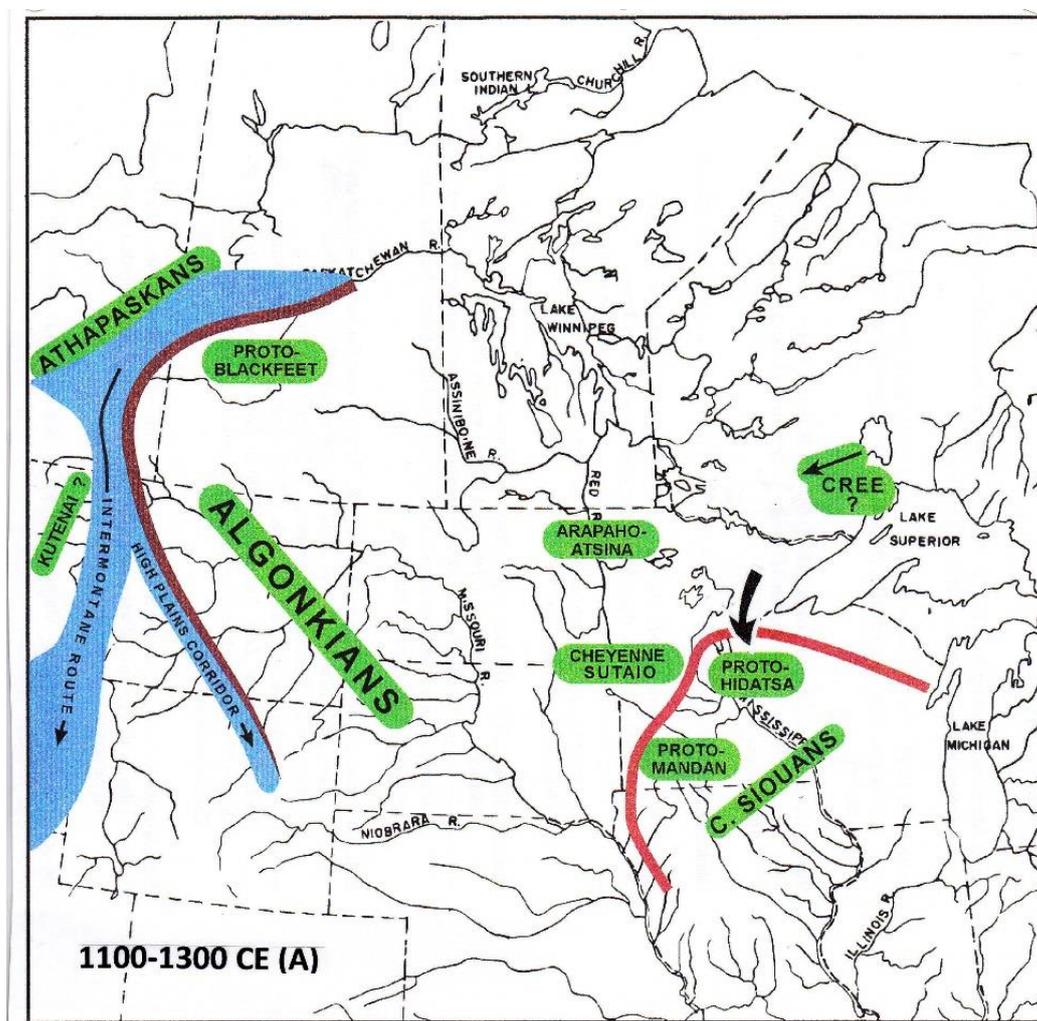
From an Ojibwa informant, Warren learned that in earlier times the Gros Ventres “used to raise small quantities of tobacco, the leaf of which, as obtained from them, was considered of great value, and for which their fellow Indians paid large prices. Peace parties of the Knistenos [Creeps] and Ojibways often proceeded hundreds of miles to visit their villages, chiefly for the purpose of procuring their much-coveted tobacco leaf” (pp. 179-180).

This quotation is interesting for a number of reasons. First, note that there is reference in it to “peace parties.” In her 2002 booklet *The Heritage Beneath Our Feet*, archaeologist Pam Goundry writes under the heading “The Peace Meeting” the following anecdote: “Aboriginal Elder oral history tells of a Peace Meeting of several tribes, held at The Forks, over 500 years ago.” Can it be that two recently discovered potsherds with handles at The Forks bespeak of cultural influences from the Siouan plains to the south (Syms and Halwas 2019:8) and of the Hidatsa exchange networks of the sort documented by Warren?

Because he was writing in the mid-1800s, Warren was in no position to draw upon radiocarbon-dated archaeological recoveries to disclose the timing of the Hidatsa-Cree-Ojibwa trade; the best he could do was use words like “formerly” and “the olden time” to acknowledge any notion of time depth. However, on maps published as far back as 1948, archaeologist Dr Gordon Hewes located the “Proto-Hidatsa” in central Minnesota at between 1100 and 1300 CE (Fig. 1). By 1400 CE, they had migrated

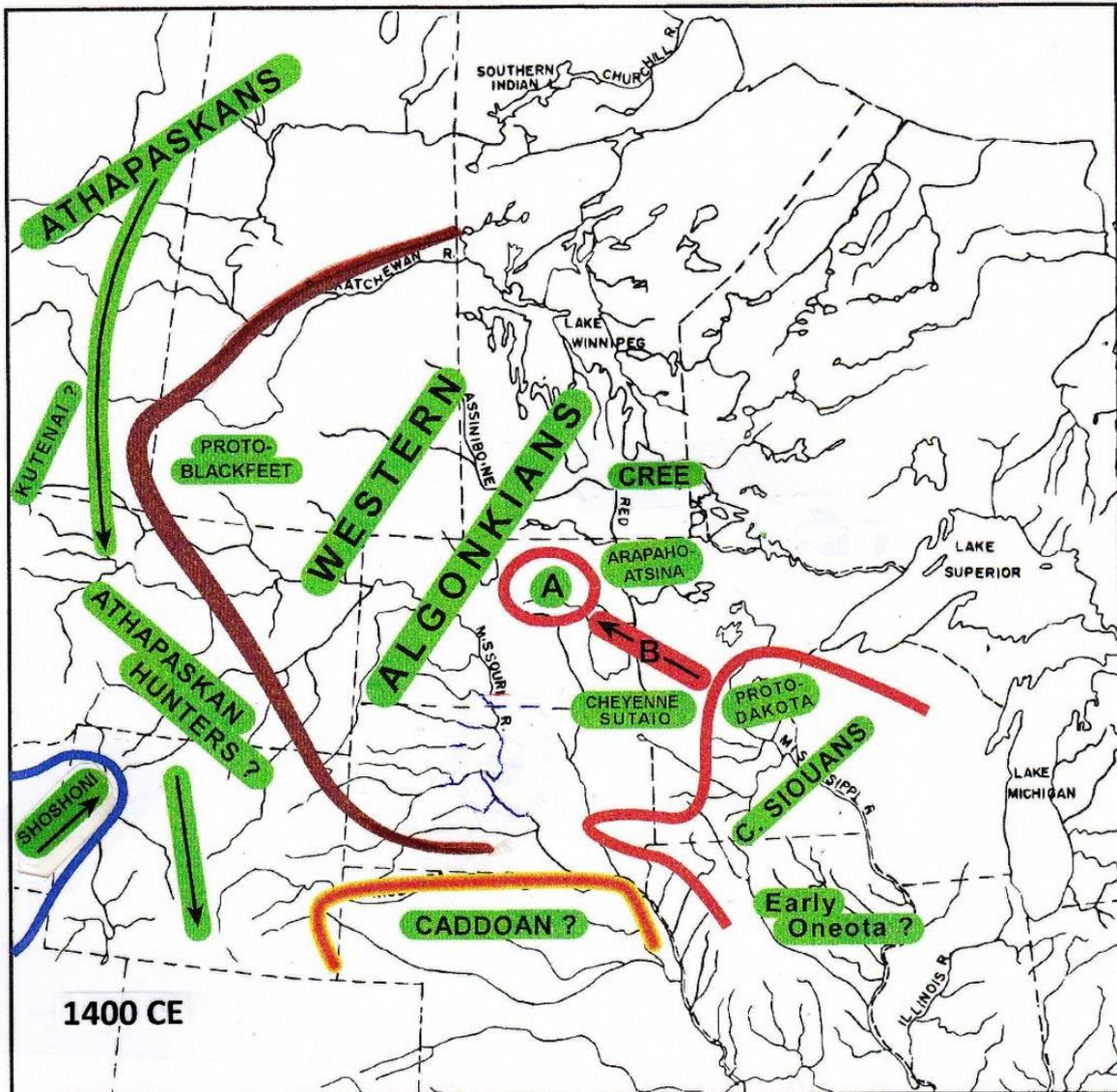
to northern North Dakota and were, by this token, geographically nearer to Manitoba and in closer reach of trading parties travelling from The Forks (Fig. 2). It is unclear what his criteria were in the late 1940s for coming up with these temporal parameters, but more recent archaeological research has shown that Hewes' results were highly credible.

For example, a suite of radiocarbon dates, running between 1040 to 1450 CE (Morlan *et al*/2000:147-148; Quaternary Consulting Ltd 2013:33-42) from widely-spaced archaeological loci at The Forks bears witness to "Late Woodland" and "Blackduck" habitation activity by Algonquian-speakers.<sup>1</sup> This time span also equates with the "Northeastern Plains Village" (NEPV) complex that Dr Dennis Toom (2004:281) correlates with Siouan-speaking Hidatsas.<sup>2</sup> The known distribution of NEPV culture, characterised by earthlodge villages and farming, encompasses a significant portion of western Minnesota (Hamilton *et al*/2011:Fig. 4.12), and is dated to 900-1650 CE (Syms *et al*/2014:92).



**Fig. 1. Location of the ancestral "Proto-Hidatsas" (arrow) between 1100 and 1300 CE. "C. Siouans" = Central Siouans. Cultural content after Hewes 1948. Graphic by Gary Wowchuk.**

<sup>1</sup> These people were probably Crees and possibly Arapahos, since Ojibwas did not arrive in the lower Red River valley until the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.



**Fig. 2. Location of Hidatsas (A) and contemporary peoples c. 1400 CE following Hidatsa migration (B) from the Minnesota. Cultural content principally after Hewes 1948. Graphic by Gary Wowchuk.**

Also, we find that the Mississippi headwaters area of Minnesota, wherein Warren locates the Hidatsa villages that were involved in the tobacco trade, encompassed a part of the “Devils Lake-Sourisford (DL-S) burial complex” home territory. Dr E. Leigh Syms *et al* (2014: Table C1) place the DL-S complex within the 900-1400 CE Hidatsa segment of the NEPV tradition. Note the overlap between these time spreads and the above-cited occupational time spectrum of 1040-1450 CE from The Forks.

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