

In Spite of Sleeper-Smith's Allegations Catholic Kin Networks Did Not Control the Fur Trade
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Although some people consider Susan Sleeper-Smith, author of *Indian Women and French Men* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), an authority on the fur trade and the involvement of *métis* women in the fur trade, a close examination of her allegations reveals:

1. That Sleeper-Smith often makes allegations or statements but does not cite any sources to support her allegations;
2. The sources used to allegedly support her statements often contradict her statements;
3. She also frequently ignores conflicting sources.

I believe that when an author misrepresents a source and neglects to discuss conflicting sources, they have lost their credibility, and their right to be considered an expert in that field.

Please read the profiles on the Réaume family and the Chevalier family on the French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan's website for proof that Sleeper-Smith's allegations regarding these families should be disregarded. The Réaume Family is covered on the following page: http://www.habitantheheritage.org/native_american/french_canadian_and_native_families while the Chevalier Family is discussed on the following page: http://www.habitantheheritage.org/french-canadian_resources/fort_st_joseph_michilimackinac_and_river_raisinfrenchtown.

One of Sleeper-Smith's allegations is that Catholic Kin Networks controlled the fur trade from 1697 through the end of the French Regime. As with her allegations regarding the Réaume and Chevalier Family, these allegations should also be disregarded.

Following are Sleeper-Smith's allegations on pages 42-44 along with the facts regarding Catholic Kin Networks. **No sources are offered for any of Sleeper-Smith's statements! They are just her opinions.**

Allegations “. . . A new kinship structure grew out of the marriage of French Fur traders to Native Women that not only incorporated their mixed ancestry offspring, but also facilitated the expansion of the trade. **The Catholic kin network that appeared during the years of the fur trade ban, 1697-1714,** was firmly established by the time many of the western posts were reopened between 1718-1720.”

“Godparents ensured entrée into the trade, and well-known traders and their wives were frequent godparents.”

“Entrée into the eighteenth-century trade was increasingly governed by Catholic kin networks, rather than by the regulating authority of the New France government.”

“. . . the behavior of inclusionary practices fostered by intermarriage and trade within kin networks was not changed by the reinstatement of trade licenses. **Without kin and allies, one could neither govern nor trade.**”

Facts:

Regarding the “new” kinship structure and the allegation that the marriage of French Fur Traders to Native Women “facilitated the expansion of the [fur] trade.”:

1. Although a number of *métis* women and their husbands were documented as living in Michilimackinac or Detroit during the period of 1697 – 1714, only one couple was documented to

have married in present-day Michigan during this period, Pierre Roy and Marguerite OuabanKiKoué. Sleeper-Smith's focus is on Michigan in this particular of her book.

2. A number of marriages between French-Canadians and Native Americans also occurred the Mississippi Valley during this period.
3. There is no documentary evidence that these marriages “facilitated the expansion of the fur trade.”
4. For a list of *métis* Families through 1800, see Denis Beaugard's list at: <http://www.francogene.com/gfna/gfna/998/metis.htm>. The date of the marriage appears in the spouse column. Be sure to consult the introductory material.

Regarding the “fur trade ban:” Although Fort St. Joseph and Michilimackinac were officially closed as forts from 1697 – 1714, the missionaries remained at the posts and hundreds of individuals were hired to travel to Detroit, Fort Frontenac, Fort St. Louis in Illinois; others were hired to transport the missionaries, or to bring them necessary supplies.¹

Regarding godparents ensuring entrée into the fur trade, Catholic kin networks governing the fur trade, or Sleeper-Smith's allegation that without kin and allies, one could neither govern nor trade:

1. The pattern of grandparents, siblings, neighbors, and business associates, acting as godparents or marriage witnesses was firmly established in the St. Lawrence settlements during the 17th century. For an example, see the article about Pierre Chesne *dit* St. Onge on the Individuals or Families' Page on the FCHSM website: http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian_resources/individuals_or_families
2. During the earlier years of Michigan's forts, the choice of a godparent was limited by who lived in the fort.
3. Once the forts were established, the residents followed the long-established practices from the 17th century. See the article Pierre Chesne *dit* Labutte II on the French Canadian and Native Families' Page on the FCHSM website: http://www.habitantheritage.org/native_americans/french_canadian_and_native_families
4. 196 Fur-Trade or Military Expedition families were firmly established during the 17th century – See the Fur Trade Page for a list of these families: http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian_resources/the_fur_trade

Although some individuals traded illegally, after 1681 the fur trade in New France was highly regulated and the Governor appointed *commandants* to govern a fort.

Control of the Fur Trade: From 1701 to 1714 – The fur trade in the Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley was controlled by the:

- Officials of New France (Governor and Intendant)
- the Company of the Colony (*Compagnie de la Colonie*),
- or the *Commandants* of the posts that remained open

¹ E.Z. Massicotte, “Répertoire des engagements pour l'ouest conservés dans les Archives Judiciaires de Montréal (1670-1778),” *Rapport de L'archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1929-1930* (Québec: Rédempti Paradis, 1930), pp. 205-216. Sleeper-Smith was aware of this report or source when she wrote this book and even cited it in connection to the Réaume family.

From 1701 – 1714, in addition to the *voyageurs* and other individuals hired by the *commandants*, the following types of individuals were permitted to travel to the Great Lakes or Mississippi Valley, but not to trade:

Voyageurs were permitted to transport needed supplies to the *commandants* at the posts and to the Jesuits at Michilimackinac, and Fort St. Joseph and to transport missionaries to the Mississippi Valley.

A limited number of **individuals**, such as Marguerite Messier, the Baudreau Brothers, and Charles Juchereau, were also given permission to travel to the Great Lakes or Mississippi Valley.

Officers who were ordered to travel to the Great Lakes or Mississippi Valley were not permitted to trade. Vaudreuil was chastised for allowing the Officers to take merchandise with them and Bissot de Vincennes was punished for trading.

From 1714 – 1760, the fur trade was controlled by the following individuals at a post:

- The *commandants*
- Merchants who leased the post from the *commandants*
- Merchants or others who were granted permission by the governor
- Merchants who purchased or were granted a license (*cong *)

Evidence of involvement in the fur trade include the following documents: engagements, obligations, merchant records, societies, partnerships, associations, and official records such as permissions, licenses (*cong s*), and correspondence.

If an individual is not named in one of these types of documents, there is no evidence that they controlled the fur trade at a post! We cannot rely on assumptions regarding an individual's participation in the Fur Trade.

Representative translations of fur trade contracts appear on our website on The Fur Trade Page: http://www.habitantheritage.org/french-canadian_resources/the_fur_trade