

# The Death of Barbue, a Kutchin Trading Chief

SHEPARD KRECH III

**ABSTRACT.** A richly detailed account of the demise and death of a Kutchin leader in the early 19th century, preserved in Hudson's Bay Company journals, is presented and analyzed for what it reveals of Northern Athapaskan adaptations in the early fur trade era.

**Key words:** Kutchin, Northern Athapaskan, fur trade, Hudson's Bay Company, ethnohistory

**RÉSUMÉ.** Un compte rendu richement détaillé du décès d'un chef Kutchin au début de 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, préservé dans les journaux de la Compagnie de la baie d'Hudson, est présenté et étudié en ce qui a trait aux données qu'il signale quant aux adaptations des Athabascans du nord aux débuts de l'époque de la traite des fourrures.

**Mots clés:** Kutchin, Athabascans du nord, traite des fourrures, Compagnie de la baie d'Hudson, ethnohistoire

Traduit pour le journal par Maurice Guibord.

## INTRODUCTION

In January, 1827, the Hudson's Bay Company clerk at Fort Good Hope, a post in the western Canadian Subarctic, reported in his journal that a Kutchin Indian named Barbue was dying (HBCA B.80/a/5). Barbue, an "old Chief" and "old man" by that time, survived that winter, although in the summer of 1828 he finally succumbed to some debilitating disease.

In itself Barbue's death was not extraordinary. In the 1820s, many Kutchin and other Northern Athapaskan Indians who traded at Fort Good Hope were dying from epidemic diseases. Nonetheless, Barbue's decline attracted the attention of the Company clerks, in part because he was a so-called "chief" — a Hudson's Bay Company-designated representative of his band in its exchanges with the Company — and in part because the clerks witnessed the therapeutic techniques of "jugglers" or shamans at Fort Good Hope.

Barbue's relations with the Hudson's Bay Company and his declining health, which span the years 1823-28, are the subject of this essay, because this account, although focused on an individual, offers fresh historical data on therapeutic techniques and adaptations of the Kutchin shortly after they had been drawn into the fur trade. Furthermore, a discussion of the major episodes in the account will enable a contribution to be made to Kutchin ethnohistory.

## BARBUE IN THE EARLY FUR TRADE ERA

The death of Barbue (whose name, bestowed probably by French-speaking employees of the North West Company, means "bearded" and was used also to refer to a catfish [Franklin, 1823:93]), took place in what is called here the *early fur trade era*. In the analysis of events in the western Canadian Subarctic in the post-European contact period, it has been customary to divide the historic continuum into several stages or eras. Labels suggested for the era that includes the early 19th century in this region

are: "aboriginal-early contact horizon" (Helm and Damas, 1963); "era of early contacts" and "stabilized fur and mission stage" (Helm and Leacock, 1971); and "incipient-early contact" and "contact-traditional" stages (Helm *et al.*, 1975). The terms preferred here, because they do not presume stability, tradition, or change are: *protohistoric* (Bishop and Ray, 1976) for the stage that begins with the first knowledge of European presence; and the *early fur trade era*, which is initiated by fairly regular, direct trade with Eurocanadians — either at a post in or near a particular group's territory, or by travel to a more distant post.

For the Kutchin, the protohistoric era began probably sometime following the fifth decade of the 18th century (greater precision awaits the results of archaeological work in this region). In 1789, these boreal forest fishers and moose and caribou hunters were initially contacted by whites. That year, Alexander Mackenzie made his celebrated (though disappointing) voyage to the Beaufort Sea. Mackenzie called the Kutchin "Quarrellers," and the traders who followed called them Squinters, Squinteyes, or Loucheux, the latter being adopted by these easternmost Kutchin by the close of the 19th century.

The early fur trade era began for the Kutchin in 1806, with the establishment of Fort Good Hope at the mouth of Blue Fish River (McKenzie, Ms.; Wentzel, 1822: Pl. XVII). At some point in the next decade — surely before 1811 (Wentzel, 1960:110) — Fort Good Hope was moved downstream to a spot on the left bank opposite the mouth of Hare Indian River (Wentzel, Ms.).

The Kutchin seem to have become involved quite rapidly in the trade at Fort Good Hope. The few glimpses provided of them prior to 1820 stress their commercial tendencies. In 1806, Kutchin traded beaver and marten for blue and white beads and for some iron works (McKenzie, Ms.). Beads and dentalia were desired from the beginning of the trade, and in 1814, Kutchin were "near creating an uproar" because there were too few beads at Fort Good Hope; "for the want of this, their favorite article, they preferred taking back to their tents the peltries they had brought to trade" (Wentzel, 1960:110).

<sup>1</sup>Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY, U.S.A. Present address: Associate Professor, Anthropology Program, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia 22030, U.S.A.

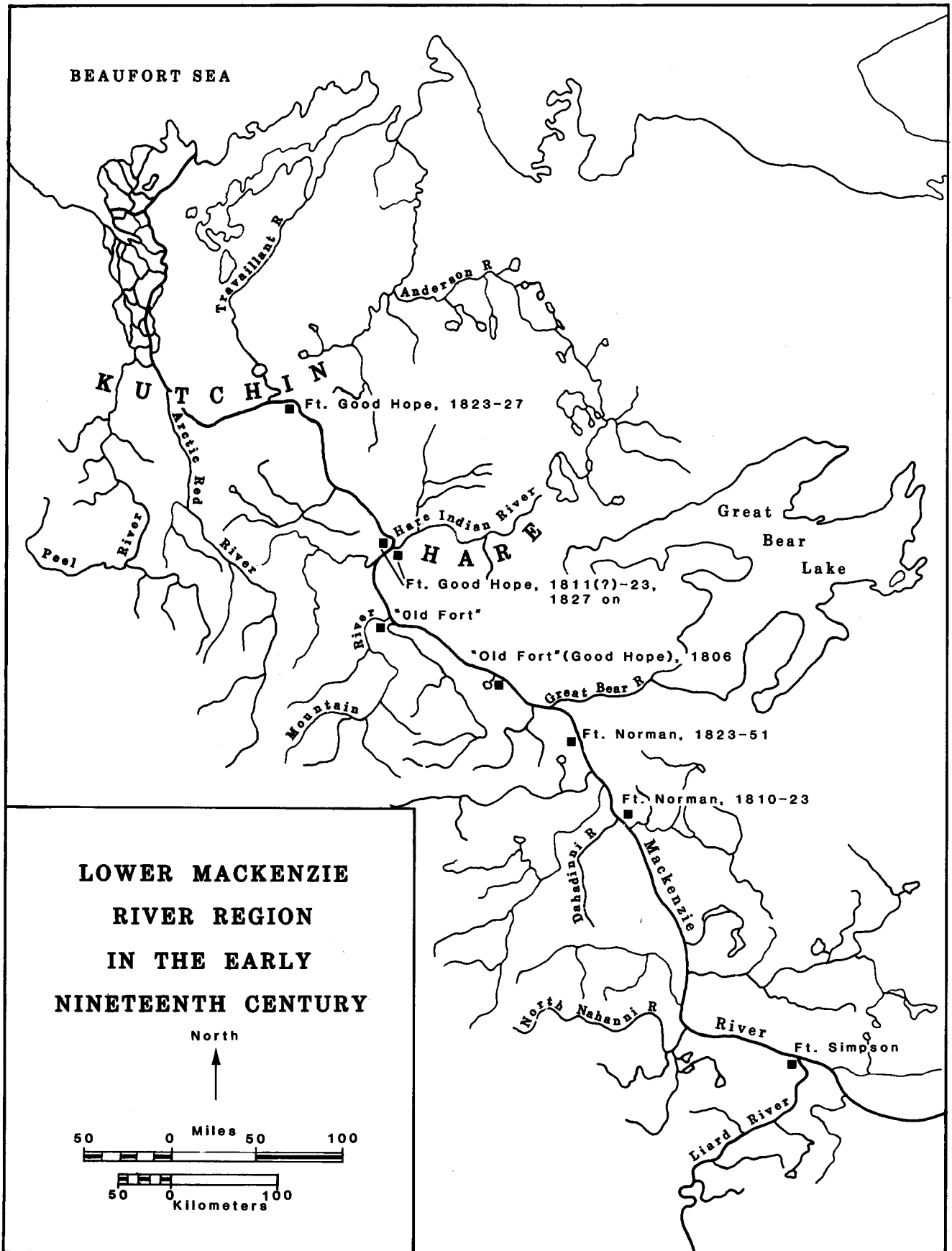


FIG. 1. Lower Mackenzie River region in the early nineteenth century.

In 1823, Barbue came to Fort Good Hope and was identified as a "clothed" Hudson's Bay Company "chief" or trading leader. As chief, he received four years later "1 coat Shirt 1 pr Leggins & 1 lb beads" (HBCA B.80/a/2,6). At the time (and until 1840) Fort Good Hope was the northernmost post in the Mackenzie River District, itself the northwesternmost district in the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department.

In 1825, Barbue arrived again, after a "long stay from the Fort", to trade beaver and over 1500 muskrats, and promised his services for John Franklin's second polar expedition (HBCA B.80/a/4/fo.2). (Franklin [1828:183] does mention meeting Barbue at Arctic Red River in 1826.)

In the 1820s, Barbue and other Kutchin brought mainly muskrats, marten and provisions to exchange for approximately 30 different trade items. In volume and price, the most valuable furs traded in the Mackenzie River District in the late 1820s were beaver, marten, lynx, muskrat, and bear. In these years, Kutchin and Hare who traded at Fort Good Hope annually traded roughly 20 000 muskrats and 2000 martens, or three-quarters and one-third of the district totals respectively; they brought few beaver and no lynx, these pelts being traded mainly at Forts Simpson and Liard. The provision trade was important also: in 1826, Fort Good Hope received approximately 10 000 pounds of fresh meat, 3500 pounds of dry meat, 1000 caribou tongues, and 3000 fish (HBCA B.200/d/4,11,17).

These furs and provisions were exchanged for various iron works (kettles, knives, daggers, files, flints, fire steels, and ice trenches); dry goods (bonnets, belts, capotes, gartering, blankets, and leggings); items such as combs, powder horns, and tobacco boxes; and especially guns and ammunition (powder, ball, and shot), beads, and tobacco (HBCA B.200/d/4, B.200/d/17).

Beads continued to be highly desired as trade goods, and Kutchin threatened not to trade unless they received large, white beads (HBCA B.80/a/7-14 *passim*). In the 1830s, some western Kutchin who were drawn to the trade at Fort Good Hope boycotted the trade when there were no beads. The presence of Russian knives, kettles and other metal items among these Kutchin pointed to an alternative market for their furs: Russian traders to the west, to whom the Kutchin had access through middlemen (see Krech, 1976).

While the trade in beads was of enormous potential profit to the Hudson's Bay Company, it is of interest that George Simpson, Governor of the Northern Department, encouraged weaning the Kutchin from their dependence on "beads and baubles" in favour of dry goods and iron works which "will soon become necessaries to them and tender them dependent on us whereas [beads] can easily be dispensed with, and when no longer fashionable the attraction to our establishments will be at an end. The Sale of the latter certainly affords us the largest immediate profits but, in the long run, the former will be found the most advantageous trade, we therefore wish it to be encour-

aged" (HBCA D.4/22/fo.41d-42). In Barbue's day, however, beads were traded whenever possible, and for decades they remained "necessaries", not baubles, to the Kutchin, who used them not simply for decoration, but increasingly as a general-purpose money (see Krech, 1976).

Guns were also highly valued, both as items of prestige and for use in hunting and warfare. During the 1820s and 1830s, Kutchin took large quantities of ammunition for defense against the Inuit (Krech, 1979b). The policy of the HBC to exchange powder, ball and shot for provisions, in order to encourage the provision trade, reinforced the trade in guns and ammunition. Guns remained popular, in spite of the fact that some were "very subject to freezing" (HBCA B.80/a/4/fo.6) and others broke easily; one brand, Wilson's guns, was particularly prone to defective workmanship: "many is the crible his Guns have made among the Indians" (HBCA B.200/a/11/fo.29).

In 1826 and 1827, intratribal conflict, Kutchin-Inuit hostility, disease and starvation affected the adaptations of Barbue, his band, and other Kutchin. In spring, Barbue was sick and in some difficulty with his Kutchin neighbors because "his youngest son had in a frantic fit shot his wife" (HBCA B.80/a/4/fo.14). Evidently, his son's wife belonged to another Kutchin band, for in late August, Barbue announced that "he is going to accompany his Son to the Lower Loucheux's Lands, to settle an affair which I fear much will not terminate to his satisfaction. His Son in a jealous fit killed his wife last winter and his Father in law threatened to revenge his Daughter's Death. This unfortunate affair has been the cause of preventing the Lower Loucheuxs from coming to the F<sup>l</sup> this Summer as customary w<sup>th</sup> Furs being in dread of the Upper Indians" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.6; see Franklin, 1828:184).

The next year, Barbue interpreted for the Hudson's Bay Company a conversation between John Bell, the clerk at Fort Good Hope, and these other Kutchin. Bell reported, "had a long conversation with the Lower Chief through Barbue 2nd Int<sup>t</sup> to prevail upon him to come with his relations next season & bring their furs, & told him if he came & brought good hunts I would recompense him, which he promises to do. He styles himself the Principle Chief of the Lower Tribe & says he has a Son who is also looked upon as Chief & as he is getting an old man he would wish his son to succeed him as Chief — This I could not promise but told him that if his Son's conduct was satisfactory he would be rewarded accordingly. Made the Old Man a present of a Bonnet of Strouds. 1 knife. 1 steel & a few Beads with which he was pleased" (HBCA B.80/a/6/fo.6d-7).

As these accounts indicate, relations between different Kutchin bands were not always smooth. Barbue was the leader of one Kutchin band, the "Upper Loucheux" or Nakotcho Kutchin (see Krech, 1979a), and he was linked — through the marriage of his son, and through trade and other interactions — to the "Lower Loucheux," a band living to the north. Such interband marriages, coupled

with band exogamy, served probably to offset the dangers of long-term feuds. Barbue was a trading leader and he may have functioned as leader in other contexts as well, although this did not necessarily have to be the case.

Leadership among the Kutchin was more sharply defined than in other Athapaskan groups living along the Mackenzie River; in the early 1820s, approximately 120 Kutchin were said to "have two Chiefs who has nearly an absolute authority among them" (HBCA B.200/e/3/fo.3d). Descent of leadership among "Upper Loucheux" and "Lower Loucheux" was patrilineal. After Barbue died, "We asked their opinion regarding a successor to the deceased Old Chief, which they gave unanimously in favor of his eldest Son present who will in future be their leader" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.11d); the role of the HBC clerk in the selection of a new trading leader could be more active, as in the case of the "Lower Tribe" discussed above.

Some friction between Kutchin bands may have been due to middleman profits. Barbue was a middleman to other Kutchin living to the north and west and to Mackenzie Inuit, and he appears to have acted no differently than many other Kutchin, who in the first half of the 19th century were quick to seize mercantilist opportunities and exact favorable profits from more distant groups (Krech, 1976).

Also in the spring of 1826, Barbue's band had trouble from Mackenzie Inuit, who "came up to [Arctic] Red River. There were 60 boats manned with from eight to nine men each, besides a great number of small Canoes. They fell in with a small Party of Loucheuxs consisting of 30 men between whom they and the Esquimauxs a Misunderstanding took place about the Trading of Furs, which terminated by the latter's pillaging the former of some trifling articles with impunity" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.2d).

Barbue's relations with Mackenzie Inuit were complex: while all meetings between these two ethnic groups were potentially volatile and fatalities did occur, they also engaged in trade and took part in cooperative hunts. Inuit tended to be contemptuous of Athapaskans, including Kutchin, unless the latter possessed guns. The Kutchin had received guns by the early 1820s, however, and with them prevented Inuit from having access to Fort Good Hope, and later to Peel River Post. Without firearms, it seems unlikely that the Kutchin could have maintained their balance of power and their middleman trading position. They did not relinquish the latter until after midcentury, by which time many Kutchin had died from disease. By this time also, the Kutchin placed a higher evaluation on peace and direct access to muskrats — whose optimum habitat was the dangerous Upper Mackenzie delta no-man's land separating Kutchin and Inuit — than on feuding and middleman profits. Finally, in the 1850s, the HBC obtained Kutchin interpreters to open a trade, and the company traders had become bold enough to overcome the traditional suspicious, hostile and occasionally violent climate that marked their relationship with Inuit (Krech, 1979b).

Another difficulty in these years was hunger; in the winter of 1827, Barbue's sickness was exacerbated by there being "no Deer this year consequently they have suffered privations all winter" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.20). In the spring of 1828, the early return of caribou to their summer grounds on the Arctic Coast left many Kutchin hungry. For reasons traceable to hunger, fear of the Inuit, sickness, and a paucity of trade goods, Barbue was disinclined to travel to Fort Good Hope. Bell said that Barbue felt "a very evident disappointment at our Poverty". Inuit, ascending the Mackenzie to the Narrows to trade, were more hostile than usual, perhaps because as the Company reported, the Kutchin "were destitute of ammunition & could not use such firearms as they had of which they are in great dread. they say that there will be a great demand for Power & Balls by the Loucheux," but the Company had no guns (or kettles) left for the trade (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.3-3d).

"Our poverty" was a recurrent problem for the Hudson's Bay Company. In the late 1820s (and again in the 1840s and 1850s), the Company was in debt to natives in the Mackenzie River District. By 1830, the HBC was 1500 MB in debt in the Mackenzie River District (HBCA B.200/d/27/fo.3d; D.5/3/fo.419d-420). In 1829 at Fort Good Hope, "again the same complaint Stores full and Shops empty of Goods;" there were no white beads for the Kutchin trade, but the natives took dry goods, even though these were "not to [their] liking" (HBCA B.200/a/10/fo.25). Company indebtedness — the reverse of the expectation that natives were always in debt and paying off a preceding season's advances — was produced in part by too many furs being brought to trade and in part by the inability of the Company to provide for enough men to transport sufficient trade goods, once those men were in the Mackenzie River District.

Securing adequate provisions plagued HBC traders at Fort Good Hope and other posts in the Mackenzie River District. Hardship was due in part to the poor understanding traders had of the distribution and habits of animals in particular regions and in part to plain ineptitude (Krech, 1976). Other problems stemmed from natives not provisioning posts.

Fort Good Hope provides a perfect example of the effects of these and other difficulties. In the summer of 1823, the post was moved roughly 100 miles downstream for the convenience of the Kutchin and their potentially lucrative trade (HBCA B.200/e/3/fo.3d). But sickness and hunger conspired against the trade in the next few years. Evidently, Kutchin agreed to provision new Fort Good Hope, but in June 1825, Chief Factor Edward Smith spoke to Kutchin "on their indifference about the supplying the Post with provisions — they complained in their turn of Starvation, sickness, and the early Spring, which disappointed them in their usual hunt of the Rein Deer" (HBCA B.200/a/6/fo.29). In 1826 sickness again took a toll and few Kutchin came to Fort Good Hope.

In the meantime, the Company was being pressured by

Hare and Indians living near Great Bear Lake to move the post back upriver. The "Outer Half-Breed Loucheux," — a Hare band — "renewed the old subject of their wish to have the Fort removed from here to its former site at the Rapid" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.14). Some Hare "did not want the Post so high as the Rapid — but a convenient distance between the two places — they now dread to approach the vicinity of the Rapid being the receptacle of so many of their deceased relations" (HBCA B.200/b/3/fo.6d-7d).

The possibility of hostility from Inuit also conspired against the trade at the downstream location of Fort Good Hope. John Franklin, in the region on his second polar expedition, received an "unwelcome reception" from the "ferocious savages," the Inuit (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.7). This weighed heavily on the mind of Chief Factor Smith, who said in June 1827 that Fort Good Hope "is the worst situated and the most exposed of any in the River — and what renders it more so is its proximity to the lands of the Esquimaux — who have too often proved themselves to be turbulent and hostile to Whites — Could the Loucheux Indians be made to consent to the removal of the Post back to its former site at the Rapids — this danger would be removed and the situation better in every respect and as good for returns" (HBCA B.200/e/7/fo.2d-3). This may have led George Simpson to write that "new" Fort Good Hope was abandoned because "the Indians of the Interior were averse to going so near the Camps of the Esquimaux, with whom they are continually at war" (HBCA D.4/92/fo.29).

But it is clear that other factors were involved, and when Chief Factor Smith arrived at Fort Good Hope in June 1827 to inform the Kutchin and Hare of the move upriver, he stressed as reasons "the difficulties we experienced in coming this distance twice a year, the risk of their supplies being stopped by the Ice — together with the General Scarcity of Provisions to subsist the people during the long winter season." The Kutchin "consented more readily" to the move than John Bell had thought they would (HBCA B.80/a/6/fo.1).

Barbue, other Kutchin, and other Athapaskans were not exempt from the hunger and starvation which were such problems for the Hudson's Bay Company traders. Simpson remarked of this region that "there is more danger to be apprehended of starvation here than in any part of North America" (Rich, 1938:393). Several winters stood out in their extreme difficulty for natives and whites alike, beginning in 1810-11, when several traders died at The Forks (later Fort Simpson) (Wentzel, 1960:106-107). The early 1830s and early 1840s were difficult also. Starvation was caused by various factors. Ecological cycles, faunal movements, and gross climatic conditions were certainly important; most critical, perhaps, were (1) the approximately 10-year hare cycle and (2) the amount of precipitation which, together with temperature, affected caribou foraging, hence their availability. Equally important were several factors clearly related to the presence of fur trad-

ers and the fur trade itself: epidemic diseases; faunal depletions; and the tendency of natives to go toward trading posts for provisioning in times of extreme hardship only to discover that the traders were often unable to provide for themselves, much less the natives, and that the posts were located in areas poor from the standpoint of game (although convenient for transportation).

#### THE DEMISE AND DEATH OF BARBUE

Another difficulty for Barbue in the spring of 1826 (in addition to hostilities between Kutchin and Inuit and tension between two Kutchin bands) stemmed from disease. In June 1826, Barbue and thirty of his band arrived at Fort Good Hope and brought fewer furs than Bell had anticipated, "which is doubtless to be attributed to the mortality so prevalent among the Natives of the Lower part of the River" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.2d). Included in the deaths was the chief's son-in-law, "a man of Consequence . . . he was an Indian much respected & beloved by his relations, and his death is much lamented by the Loucheuxs. I have never witnessed among savages such an affecting Scene of sorrow. Two of the Deceased's Brothers were at the f<sup>t</sup> at the time, one of which made a rash attempt to Drown himself, by running head foremost into the middle of the River but was fortunately extricated from his perilous situation by his relatives" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.2d).

Barbue complained of sickness in 1827, and in January and May of that year, reports reached Fort Good Hope that he was dying. Bell was implicated in Barbue's illness: "The Chief is dying and but slender hopes entertained of his recovery, and according to Indian superstition did not hesitate to say that I was the cause of his sickness by throwing bad Medicine upon him! in Consequence of his Sons having destroyed the Boat left by Capt<sup>n</sup> Franklin & Party last fall below Red River. so much for Savage Superstition!" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.20). Bell sent Barbue some medicine, and Barbue later appeared, improved and denying that Bell had been the cause of his sickness.

The following year, Barbue was again sick. On 2 July 1828, Barbue arrived at Fort Good Hope, complaining "much of a difficulty of breathing & violent palpitation of the Heart." Four days later, he was "much troubled by spasms which almost cause Suffocation when he sleeps;" on the 6th, Chief Factor Peter W. Dease, who was the officer in charge at Fort Good Hope that year, "gave him a dose salts" and on the 10th "a dose of Physic." The salts had "a good Effect" and the Physic provided "some relief," but "In order to get more relief it seems he got himself bled by making Deep incisions with a Knife in the Legs & Breast (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.4-5).

While not in itself unusual (see below), this mid-July phlebotomy initiated a sequence of events noted in detail by Dease. On Monday 14 July, he reported: "Contrary to my advice the Old Chief allowed himself to bleed all night from about 6 P.M. yesterday to 11 A.M. today profusely

and then according to his intentions, prepared his Canoe etc. to leave this with his family & join his relations below. when he was down near the Water Side I heard an alarming Cry & immediately was told the Old Chief was Expiring. on going to the spot found him in a very pitiful State. he had fallen in a kind of Fit from Extreme weakness. complaining much administered such restoratives as we have which recovered him from that State which I attribute chiefly to the quantity of blood he lost since yesterday — In this precarious situation of the old man I feel much anxiety as his death may be the cause of warfare among his Relatives & the Lower Loucheux or Rat hunters, as it is said the latter said they would throw bad medicines on him on account of some family fueds & the old man's Sons threaten to make war if he Dies. a Courier was sent by them for some of the Jugglers above to attend him & a hatchet & Tin Dish sent as a Fee. accordingly 3 of them came with their wares etc. as much as I think for the sake of Getting something to eat from us, as an attempt to cure the Old Chief as all their Art consists of puffing & blowing upon the Patient & using some mysterious words" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.5d)

Two days later, Barbue ate "a few Hartle berries" gathered by Kutchin women, and the "jugglers" left, for he appeared improved, although "He complains that the palpitation will not allow him any Sleep, as soon as he slumbers he almost Suffocates, and I dread giving him any opiates" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.6).

On 17 July, Barbue, unable still to sleep, again sent for a shaman, who arrived the following day. In the meantime, Dease "applied a Blistering Plaister to his Breast but the Pain it gives him makes him Complain a great deal. he was warned of its effects & it was applied only at his own request". The following day, "the Blister (after the Plaster had been Distributed and the blister broken) I cut this morning & found it had drawn a great deal" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.6).

But Barbue still did not get the relief he wished, and then followed what apparently was an unusual therapeutic technique: "This evening we were witnesses to a remedy of their own of a rather Singular Nature & one they say resorted to only in Extreme cases, which I may say is nothing more or less than burying the Patient alive, the manner thus — a hole is dug out or rather a kind of Grave about 1½ ft. deep & sufficiently long & broad to contain the body. it is then partly filled with moss the Patient then laid in & covered with moss every part except the face then Earth or Sand laid over that. on the middle of the body a fire was kindled & allowed to burn untill the Patient can not endure the Heat of it underneath. it was then taken away & 4 other fires kindled one on each side & one at the feet, also at the head. after the old man had complained some time while the first fire was burning it was removed & in the space of 20 minutes time when Mr. Bell & I saw him again with the 4 other fires around him, he appeared to be & in fact was in a profound sleep & breathing very

freely. It is such an uncommon manner of treating a weak Patient that the novelty induced me to insert it in my Journal. I sincerely wish the effects may be beneficial in restoring the old man so that he may rejoin his relatives again" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.6-6d).

That night, Barbue slept; beyond this, however, he did not improve. On 20 July, "a Different remedy was tried which consists of the skin of a Muskrat. they singe it & the Patient then eats the skin & drinks the liquor." But he defecated often, "pass[ing] a very bad & unsightly bilious kind of matter." He also ate some "fresh bustard [goose]" which an Indian brought (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.6d). This was Barbue's last meal, and he declined rapidly. At 2:00 A.M. on 21 July 1828, Dease and Bell "were awakened by the cries of one of the Loucheux who came to tell us that the old chief had Expired. On going to the Spot, we found but too true. he breathed his last without a struggle while in the act of taking a drink of water and retained his speech & recollection all along" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.7). Subsequently, Barbue seems to have been buried, for there were placed "Pickets round the Grave;" he was mourned, and his widow was "incessant in her lamentations & frequently joined by the other women & men" and she later "threw herself into the Water" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.7).

While Barbue's death might have been blamed on the sorcery of other Kutchin, it was not. He was succeeded as chief by his eldest son. Finally, two days after he died, the Indian "Travaillant went to pay a visit to some Indians above in order to the restitution of some articles that were given to them for Juggling, as the Old Chief Died they now wish them to be restored & put in his Grave. Dease added, "If the same custom was observed in all countries, the Medical profession would require to be cautious in receiving patients so as to Effect a Cure" (see Appendix) (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.7d).

#### DISEASE, CURING AND DEATHS

Surely one of the more interesting aspects of the account of Barbue's demise is its documentation of disease, mortality, indigenous disease theory, and therapeutic techniques.

Although the account gives only a brief indication of the "mortality so prevalent" (HBCA B.80/a/5/fo.2d) among Kutchin and Hare in 1825 and 1826, it is important that Barbue's death be put in the context of diseases which affected Athapaskans during the early fur trade era (see Krech, 1978).

These diseases were often introduced to the region with the annual summer transport of trading goods, and infected Eurocanadians and Indians alike, although the latter, without immunity, suffered far more. In the period from 1819 to 1823, measles, dysentery and influenza ravaged Chipewyan and Beaver who lived in the region drained by the Slave, Hay, and Peace rivers (Rich, 1938:81; Franklin, 1823:137, 158; HBCA B.39/b/2, B.181/a/2,4). In the mid-1820s, diseases travelled north to Fort Good Hope and

Fort Norman; an unknown affliction, a "contagious distemper," seems to have been worst at Fort Good Hope, where by 1826 it was said to have killed "a great number of men, women and children indiscriminately . . . Among the former were some of the principal hunters" (HBCA B.80/a/4/fo.10d, B.80/a/5/fo.5d). By January 1827, it was reported that "Many of the Loucheux and Hare Indians have dropped into the Grave" but by the end of that month, this particular disease had run its course (HBCA B.200/b/3/fo.16).

While Kutchin disease theory was surely complex, with explanations ranging from taboo infraction to spirit loss and sorcery, there is some evidence that sorcerers were blamed for epidemics. Sorcerers, or other shamans, could be Kutchin, other Athapaskans, Inuit, or Eurocanadians. Thus, in the course of Barbue's illness, John Bell was accused of "throwing bad Medicine". In later decades, other traders were blamed for diseases (see Krech, 1981).

Figuring prominently in Barbue's account is the "jug-gler" (medicine man or shaman); the shaman who attempted to cure Barbue was either Kutchin or Hare. While Kutchin shamans were renowned, so also were Hare, at least during this period (Franklin, 1823:291). In cases like Barbue's, the job of the shaman was usually to divine or otherwise identify the cause of sickness; to extract the sickness by sucking, blowing, or biting out disease believed to have been magically introjected; to prescribe some other cure or therapy; and in some instances, to undertake revenge (see Hardisty, 1872).

During this period, the Kutchin, like other Northern Athapaskans, were firm believers in the powers of their shamans. A Kutchin medicine-man, most of whom were male, began to acquire his power during adolescence, when an animal (e.g., weasel, wolf, marten, or mink) came to him in dreams and forged an alliance. With the aid of animal spirit-helpers and various songs and fetishes, a shaman undertook magical flight, wounded himself without leaving a scar, and performed other miracles; forecast hunting success and death and foretold other events; changed the weather to more auspicious conditions for hunting; killed his or others' enemies; and cured the sick. By the mid-19th century, Kutchin shamans were wealthy, prestigious, and powerful, since they were paid for their performances and in the prevailing context of epidemic disease (ascribed to sorcery), their services were greatly in demand (Hardisty, 1872; Jones, 1872; Osgood, 1936; McKennan, 1965). In fact, beginning in the 1820s shamanic abilities must have been sorely tested by epidemics which killed so many, and there may have begun an erosion of belief in sorcery, setting the stage for the acceptance of some aspects of Christianity in the late 19th century.

The description of the attempted cure of Barbue is important because so little has been recorded on the curing techniques of shamans. The short-term efficacy of the steaming fires lit on and around Barbue the day before he died was clear. The steam-fire brought him immediate

relief — although he died two days later. It may have been significant that four fires were lit, since the number four had a special meaning for some Northern Athapaskans and perhaps for the Kutchin as well (Osgood, 1936:161-162). The significance of eating muskrat skin or fresh bustard (goose) is not known.

The only two physical therapeutic techniques mentioned in the account are the application of steam-heat and bleeding or phlebotomy. The Kutchin were said to practice phlebotomy "ad libitum, and for every complaint, from a headache to a pain in the big toe" (Jones, 1872:325). Both phlebotomy and the use of steam (lying on moss-covered hot rocks) persisted into the 20th century (McKennan, 1965). Kutchin medicine-men also used surgical techniques. In the late 1890s, a Klondiker named George Mitchell went toward the Yukon goldfields via the Mackenzie and Peel rivers and wintered in Kutchin territory. On a trip with some Kutchin, Mitchell broke his kneecap and he described in detail the immediate effort to immobilize the leg, and the later diagnosis and surgery — each by a different woman. The surgeon made three cuts around the knee with a flint blade to release blood, pinned and joined together the split cap halves with caribou bone and sinew, and placed a poultice made from the inner bark of willow and herbs on the wound, which healed without infection. Mitchell also described the skillful repair of a badly slit stomach and of an upper chest bullet wound, and noted the use of a spruce decoction for scurvy and of a caribou bladder and revolver barrel for an enema (Graham, 1930, 1935).

The use of plants in Barbue's therapy may have been overlooked. The 20th-century Kutchin were aware of the healing properties of a number of plants, including yarrow (*Achillea*), alder (*Alnus*), anemone (*Anemone*), mossberry or crowberry (*Empetrum*), juniper (*Juniperus*), Labrador tea (*Ledum*), puffballs (*Lycoperdon*), and spruce (*Picea*). The use of these plants varied with specific symptoms: for example, boiled yarrow roots were used for headaches, boiled alder bark for colds and tuberculosis, and alder buds for venereal disease; a boiled anemone-leaf poultice was placed on wounds, or roots given as a tonic; mossberry was used for stomach-ache; juniper berries were prescribed for chest pains, Labrador tea to increase urine flow, and puffballs for sores; and spruce gum, cones and twigs were used widely for a variety of ailments (Leechman, 1954; Osgood, 1936; McKennan, 1965; *vide* McClellan, 1975 on the Tutchone and Tagish; Morice, 1904 on other Northern Athapaskans). (Yarrow, alder, anemone and juniper each form a base for botanical drugs listed in the United States Pharmacopeia or National Formulary [Vogel, 1973]).

When Barbue died, he was mourned by his wife and others and buried. This mourning and others described in Barbue's account were typical of the behavior of Kutchin and other Northern Athapaskans, who, upon the death of a relative, destroyed their food and property, singed their hair, cut and otherwise mutilated their bodies, and threw

themselves into the water (see, e.g., Franklin, 1828; Hardisty, 1872; Keith, 1960). The burial of Barbue is puzzling. Although the burial was, so Dease said, "according to their own custom" (HBCA B.80/a/7/fo.7), it does not seem to have been typical of the Kutchin, or for that matter of the Hare, and it may have resulted from the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company and the fact that Barbue, a leading man, died at the post. The Kutchin seemed to prefer placing one of their dead on a stage or scaffold, or hanging him in a tree, enclosed in hollow wood; later, after a year or so, the body was burned to keep maggots from eating the corpse (Hardisty, 1872; Jones, 1872; Kirkby, 1872). For the Kutchin, "the idea of their bodies being destroyed by worms is horrible" (Hardisty, 1872:319)

Barbue's death does not appear to have marked the end of a significant period in Kutchin ethnohistory. Barbue was succeeded by his son, and these Kutchin continued to live, for the most part, a traditional way of life in the bush. Of course, they also continued periodically to visit Fort Good Hope, where they exchanged furs, provisions and some services for various goods. While many traditional cultural sentiments and values surely persisted, the Kutchin were increasingly affected by the trade. By 1840 — the year when for the first time a post was established in Kutchin territory and a full 18 years before missionaries penetrated north to this region — the trade itself, the diseases brought by traders, and the dependence of Kutchin on the post for provisions in times of starvation had had an impact on Barbue and other Kutchin. The story of Barbue's demise affords insights into these processes.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the Hudson's Bay Company for permission to research in and quote from its archives; to Shirlee Smith, Keeper, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, for assistance; and to the American Philosophical Society for support. Thanks are due to Jack Censer, Sheila Grover, and John Victor for their comments and to Carl Mehler for the map. The shortcomings that remain are mine alone.

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## APPENDIX

## HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY MEDICAL PRACTICES IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

The treatment that John Bell and Peter W. Dease provided Barbue — a dose of salts, a dose of physic, and a blistering plaster — and Dease's parting, wry statement on the "restitution" of items paid a shaman for treatment that was not successful are of great interest and, while not the topic of this paper, deserve some comment in this Appendix.

What was Hudson's Bay Company therapy in the preantiseptic and preanaesthetic 1820s? Certainly, Barbue was willing to try the dose of salts, the physic, the plaster, and perhaps other medicines offered him by the clerks, although in the end it was his shaman's remedy "of a rather singular Nature" — the steam-heat burial — that brought him temporary relief. John Franklin noted that other Indians "set a great value upon medicine" and that John Richardson, the doctor on Franklin's expedition, made up small packets of medicines for them to use (Franklin, 1823:312).

In the 1820s, the Hudson's Bay Company pharmacopeia was limited. In 1823 for example, the medicines distributed to Fort Good Hope included flour and roll of brimston, camphor, harts-horn, white lint, Spanish liquorice, castor oil, blue vitriol, blistering plaster, essence of peppermint, rhubarb, magnitia (magnesia?), Glauber salts, Turlington balsam, purges, assorted vials, and vomits. In the mid-1830s, the inventory at Fort Simpson added to this list the following: alcohol, alum, aquafortis, asafoetida, peruvian and cinnamon bark, refined borax, cream of tartar, several ointments (basilicon, calomel, sturnine), epsom salts, olive oil, lavender, white vitriol, and tincture of opium (HBCA B.200/d/4,44). The list is dominated by purgatives, carminatives, and emetics — purges, vomits, Glauber salts (sulphate of sodium), epsom salts, cream of tartar, cinnamon bark, lavender, rhubarb, castor oil, magnitia (magnesia? — a cathartic), camphor, blue vitriol (sulphur of copper), and essence of peppermint. Included also were expectorants (Spanish liquorice, flour of brimston); tonics like hartshorn; Turlington's Balsam, useful to treat wounds and as an expectorant; peruvian bark, a febrifuge; blistering plaster, a solid covering used to irritate and raise blisters on the flesh; and tincture of opium, a sedative.

Although it is beyond the scope of this Appendix to make an exhaustive study of the ways in which these medicines were used at Fort Good Hope and other posts in this region in the early 19th century (see Rich, 1976 for some general comments), post journals do occasionally provide some information on this point. At Fort Resolution, for example, one man arrived with a sore toe "which emits matter, but by applying lint & salves, promises to cure very fast" (HBCA B.181/a/8/fo.9); a report reached the post of another man "who has not had a stool these 11 days. Sent him 1½ Purge, and if this will not do, some Grease will effect it" (HBCA B.181/a/9/fo.4). In other cases, a man suffering "indisposition" was given a physic (usually a purgative) "which operated copiously and afforded him relief"; another with sores and swelling on his head also received a physic; and a man with an inflamed hand received a poultice (HBCA B.181/a/9/fo.12, 32; B.181/a/12/fo.25). Some cases were regarded as incurable, such

as the Indian who arrived at Fort Resolution in 1822 "dreadfully eat up with the venereal Disease — and I [Robert McVicar] regret to observe that there is no Medicine in the Fort calculated to effect a cure of that nature" (HBCA B.181/a/4/fo.21). And in many other instances, as in the 1835 influenza outbreak, there was no treatment for the sick, and it was clearly expected that "nature must effect a change" (HBCA B.181/a/11/fo.18).

Barbue and the clerks shared a belief in the efficacy of phlebotomy. Dease objected to the bleeding of Barbue only because it went on too long. In Canada and the United States in this period, the belief in the usefulness of dry and wet cupping and the application of leeches (where available) was widespread (Brockbank, 1954). Leeches were used to treat colic, fevers, and whooping cough. Some fevers were believed to be caused by violent passions or "atmospheric vicissitudes" and treated by blood letting. Gastritis, caused, it was thought, by too much alcohol, by exposure to cold and damp, or by some other irritation, was cured by a proper diet and by leeches placed, or blisters raised, on the stomach (Eberle, 1834). Bleeding was a common treatment at Mackenzie River posts. In 1806, Alexander McKenzie said, "I found myself very unwell and delerous. I bled myself after I recovered a little" (Ms.:13). At Fort Resolution, one man who "over stressed by carrying a large log of wood is on the sick list, bled him, immediately which gave him some ease" (HBCA B.181/a/5/fo.5); another, ill for some time, had two pounds of blood removed from his arm (HBCA B.181/a/12/fo.31).

These brief comments, it is hoped, will alert readers to what is a fascinating topic in its own right and deserving of further study: Hudson's Bay Company medical practices in the early fur trade era in this region.