

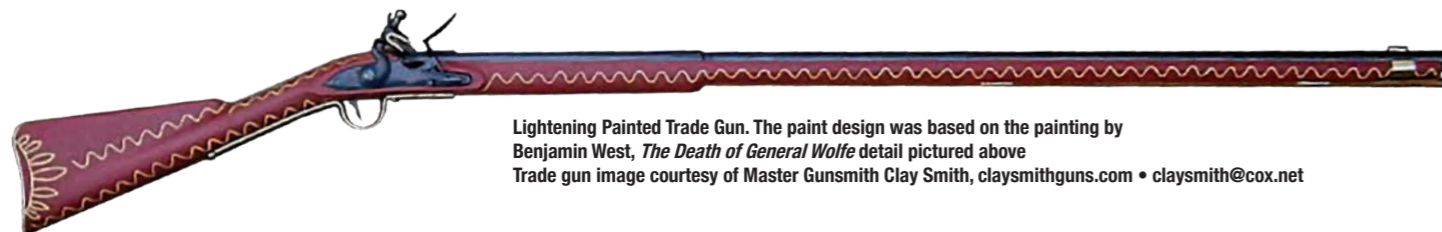
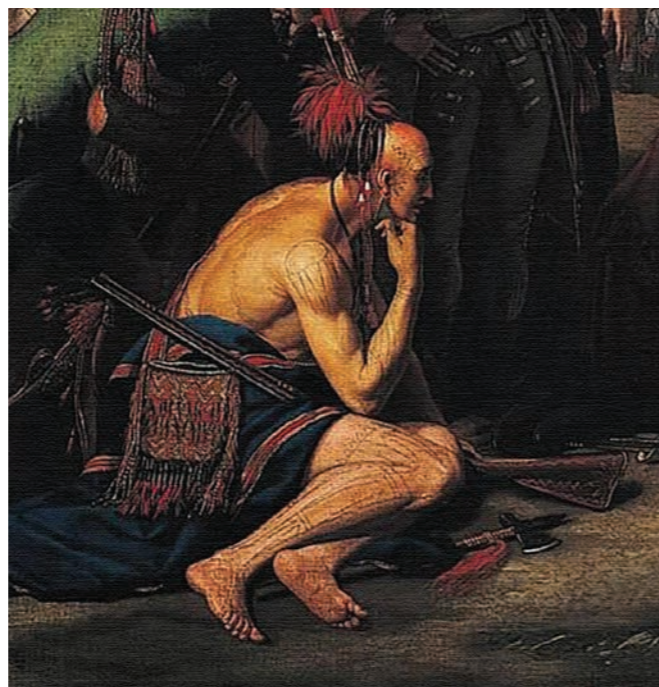
For TRADE WAR

By Joe Salamida and Ken Osen

Almost as soon as the various European powers established outposts in the new world, the control of the fur trade became one of their main economic objectives. European fashions of the time drove the demand and price up for not only the fur to trim garments, but for the beaver pelts to manufacture lush felt hats. The era from roughly 1660 through 1763 saw a fierce rivalry grow between France and Great Britain as these European super powers struggled to expand their fur-trading territories. As the native people were the principal source for the valuable pelts, their allegiance was a crucial component for control of the materials bound for the old world markets. European manufactured goods such as knives, hatchets, kettles, beads, blankets and highly desirable muskets were traded for valuable furs. The natives of North America became increasingly dependent on these trade items, not only for day-to-day use, but also for hunting and warfare. These recipients were sophisticated, intelligent customers and immediately saw the advantages of firearms over the traditional spear or bow and arrow – the muskets required much less practice to use than traditional weapons and had a superior range. By 1620 firearms were flowing to the native peoples despite strong governmental efforts to prevent

such trade. By the late 17th century guns became a universal part of Dutch and English trader's offerings (to the Iroquois in particular), increasing casualties in warfare. This greater bloodshed, previously unknown, increased the practice of raiding neighboring groups to take captives. These captives were ritually adopted to replace those lost in battle, increasing the cycle of violence and warfare with their neighbors. Now the allegiance of various native groups was not only for economic reasons but also as allies in colonial expansion. A pair of resourceful French traders, Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, discovered a wealth of fur in the interior of the continent, accessible through the greater inland sea of Hudson Bay. After gaining the interest of Prince Rupert, cousin to Charles II of England, the first ships set sail from England in 1668. On May 2, 1670, the

Royal Charter granted exclusive trading rights of the Hudson Bay watershed to "the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay." The new Hudson Bay Company was under British control, and soon established a chain of forts and posts around the shores of James and Hudson bays allowing the native people and scattered European inhabitants access to their goods. Their



Lightening Painted Trade Gun. The paint design was based on the painting by Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe* detail pictured above. Trade gun image courtesy of Master Gunsmith Clay Smith, claysmithguns.com • claysmith@cox.net



positioning and selection of goods dominated the trade between Europeans and the tribes for many years.

From their beginning, the Hudson Bay Company traded guns to the natives on a large scale. By 1742, beaver pelts were valued at: one pelt for one pound of shot or three flints; four pelts for one pound of powder; ten pelts for a pistol; twenty pelts for a trade gun.

Coincidentally, as Great Britain and France struggled for control of North America, England, through her Board of Trade, developed the Indian Department of North America in 1755. At the helm of the organization was William Johnson, who, due to his strong relations with the Iroquois Confederacy, was originally appointed by the colony of New York as "Indian Commissioner" and then later in 1755 was reappointed by Major General Edward Braddock as "Superintendent of North American Indian Affairs." On the verge of conflict with France, it is without any doubt that England viewed the department, as a source of not only regulation but as a platform to entice the Native American inhabitants to assist Great Britain's army in strengthening its defenses in the North American colonies. Presented on their trade blanket were the cold steel armaments of flintlocks and edged weapons. Once viewed as sundries of trade, this would now serve as instruments of war.

Sighted by the keen eye of a Native Warrior, these muskets were a deadly tool designed with ease of use in mind. Ranging in size from nearly 50 to 70 inches in length and weighing roughly eight pounds, they were light and well balanced as opposed to the 10 pounds, of the standard for military arm. The trade gun's light weight and smaller caliber ball, lent itself to being carried farther in country for the long hunts or war parties of the time.

Production of English trade guns was concentrated in Birmingham and London, England with some models being produced

in the Dutch city of Liege. Influenced by Dutch designs brought to England during the reign of William III, the English gun makers in the early 18th century began placing a fancy brass side plate shaped like a sea serpent or snake opposite the lock on guns intended for the Indian trade. By 1750, a standard pattern of gun had emerged, and many natives refused to trade for guns without the serpent side plates. The guns that found their way into the circulation of North American trade represented three qualities of craftsmanship: the "trade" gun, the "fine" gun and, added in the 1790s, a "chief's" grade pattern. This third type being distributed to high-ranking Sachem (Chief) in order to secure a relationship between a tribe and Great Britain.

Of interesting note is the variety of colors that the stocks were finished. Aside from a natural wood finish of cherry, walnut, maple or oak, the stocks were also offered in colors of blue, green, red, yellow, black and white. A 1780 Indian Department account specifies that guns

UPPER LEFT
Detail of the Lock on a trade musket. These are slightly smaller commercial versions of the mechanism on military muskets of the period. The hammer holding the flint is down and the frizzen is forward, opening the pan. Above the musket are three English Brandon flints; French flints were normally an amber color. These had to be replaced from time to time as they wore down. Two lead solid shot are below the trigger guard and an iron turnkey on a leather thong is to the lower right. These were important tools for replacing flints and tightening side plate screws.

UPPER RIGHT
A typical steel trade knife that has been embellished with dyed and braided porcupine quills. The brain tanned leather neck sheath is also decorated with quillwork and tin cones with dyed deer hair.

LOWER RIGHT
Detail of trade musket with the pan closed and hammer at half cock. The leather pouch would typically contain balls or shot and other items needed to maintain the musket. Above the musket is a decorated powder horn suspended by a native woven strap.

Note the red wool European trade blanket decorated with silk ribbon in all three images.

