

clinging ivy, and above all, the charm of legend and tradition, in order to afford as good a subject for the pen of the poet or novelist, as it already does for the pencil of the artist. Or if it were (as might well besseem its stately height) the monument of a hero, or even a light-house, to guide benighted mariners to their haven, nothing would be easier than to surround it with romantic associations. But it is almost impossible to connect the sentiment of romance with a Shot Tower.

When we consider the small size of the article, to the manufacture of which this lofty structure is devoted, the means appear greatly out of proportion with the result. Formerly, in casting shot, the apparatus was merely a plate of copper, in the bottom of which were punched a number of small holes. This was placed a few feet above a kettle of water into which the melted lead descended, after passing through the holes in the plate. But in falling so short a distance, and being so suddenly cooled and hardened, the shot did not acquire a perfectly globular form, — a desideratum which is now attained by means of Shot Towers. In that of Mr. Youle, the largest size of shot falls from the summit of the edifice to the bottom of a well, twenty-five feet below the surface of the earth, making the whole descent about one hundred and seventy-five feet. The size of the shot is determined by the size of the holes through which it passes. The furnaces, for melting the lead, are situated near the summit of the tower. Three tons of shot is the quantity usually manufactured per day. . . . The shot is of different sizes, from No. 1, or Swan Shot, to No. 12, which is called Dust Shot. When first manufactured, they are of a dull white colour, without lustre, and are polished by being shaken together in an iron barrel which is made to revolve by machinery. This process gives them their black lustre, and they are then ready for sale."

## The Trader's Cassette

By CHARLES HANSON, JR.

An American emigrant to Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1816 later observed that "The traders and their clerks were then the aristocracy of the country . . . living in as much luxury as the resources of the country would admit. . . ." That luxury included better food and quarters than the common workers, a liquor allowance and many small privileges like having one's personal trunk follow him about the wilderness.

The French-Canadian voyageur called special boxes like the trunks "cassettes" as distinguished from the packages of trade goods which were generally called "pieces." Space and weight were always at a premium in the woods country where everything moved in canoes along the streams and on men's backs across the portages. Since the trading canoes were fairly well standardized in dimensions the trunks also had to be a standard size for easy stowage.

One of the best surviving descriptions of a Hudson's Bay Company officer's cassette is this note by Malcolm McLeod, who was born in 1821 at Green Lake, Rupert's Land, the son of a Hudson's Bay factor.<sup>2</sup>

"'Cassettes,' Trunks made of best and well seasoned pine, and made as strong and light as dovetailing, grooving, iron binding and good workmanship can make them. The stuff throughout, is three quarters of an inch thick. The dimensions are two feet four inches in length, and one foot four inches in width and depth, and beveled on top to the extent of nearly an inch, leaving the sides about fifteen inches and a quarter deep, of this depth, the



A very fine example of 25-lb. linen shot bag from Youle's Tower. All printing in green. (Museum of the Fur Trade collections.)

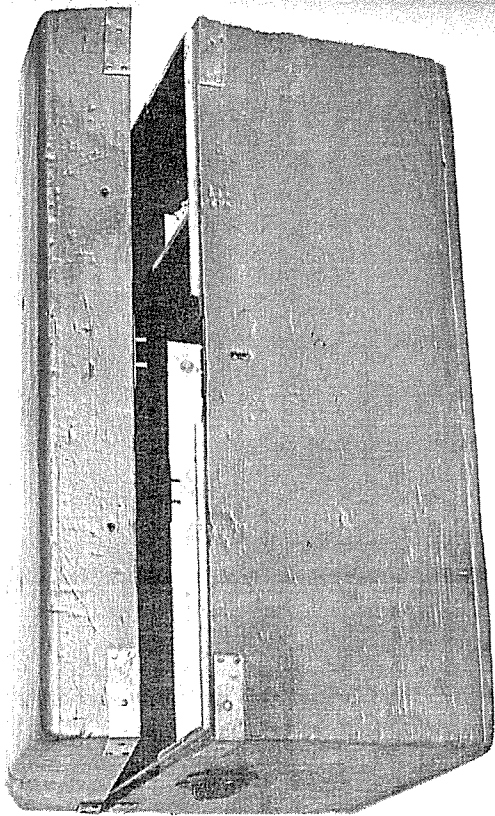


Fig. 1. Nineteenth century Hudson's Bay Company cassette. Front view. Small interior tray may have been added at later date.

cover (made to fit closely to a lap in the body of the box) takes from four to three and a quarter inches. Of the 'Cassettes' used in the country, this is the largest size, and the smallest does not vary more than an inch, in any way. They are well painted, and are proof against any accident but fire."

The cassette shown in the accompanying photographs was used by David Armit, a Hudson's Bay Company commissioned officer, during the last half of the nineteenth century and is of the exact dimensions quoted by McLeod.<sup>3</sup> The various views show the lap joint that the cover makes with the body of the box and the curved construction of the cover. The top corners of the body and the bottom corners of the cover are reinforced with inch-wide strips made of copper on the front two corners and of brass on the rear corners. The wood corner joints are all neatly dovetailed.

The hardware on this cassette is typical in every way. Mid-nineteenth century Hudson's Bay Company indents from the various posts often mention "Japanned lifting cassette handles" and "Dovetail cassette hinges 4½ in. when open." The cassette locks were the ordinary chest locks of the period, inlet on the inner side of the box and provided with two locking lugs.

The traditional color for painting cassettes was "Spanish brown" made with a natural brownish-red earth oxide pigment that was an important Spanish export in Colonial times. It was also a popular paint pigment at northern trading posts for making oil cloth covers for canoes. Moose Factory alone in 1831 ordered 224 pounds of Spanish brown pigment. Paint made by mixing this pigment with linseed oil and turpentine is called "New England Red" by antique collectors and it was a popular finish for Colonial pine furniture. At the present time Spanish brown is little-used and very scarce. It imparted a rich, deep finish quite distinctive from most modern red-brown oxide paints like "Venetian red" and "Indian red."

At least two contemporary paintings show Hudson's Bay cassettes in color: "Bivouac

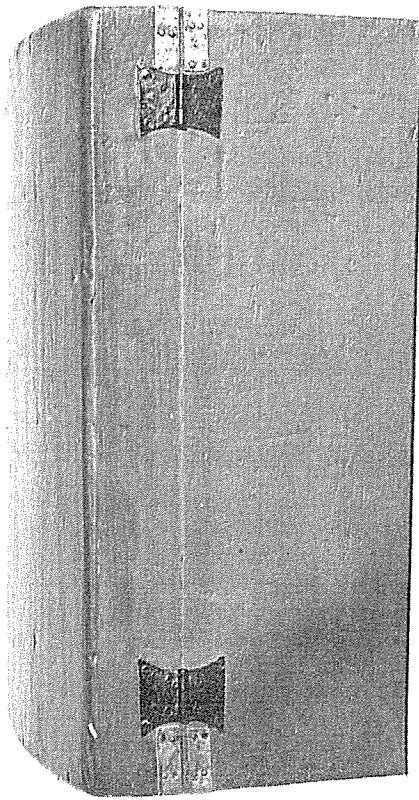


Fig. 2. Nineteenth century Hudson's Bay Company cassette. Back view, showing typical hinges.

of a Canoe Party" by Frances Ann Hopkins<sup>4</sup> and "Two of the Companies Officers Traveling in a Canoe made of Birchbark Manned by Canadians" by Peter Rindisbacher.<sup>5</sup> The Hopkins painting is remarkable for the wealth of detail and the faithful colors of the various pieces of voyageur equipment scattered about an early morning campfire. Rindisbacher shows two officers riding amidships in a small canoe with a red cassette set transversely just behind them.

Cassettes were made in the shops of the various trading posts and factories. In 1831 Nicol Finlayson noted that he had the carpenter and cooper at Fort Chimo making "cassettes."<sup>6</sup>

The American Fur Company also furnished cassettes for their officers but at least a substantial number of them were made by contractors in New York and shipped to the field. In the following random sampling of American Fur Company orders it will be noted that the sizes differ slightly from the standard Hudson's Bay dimensions noted above:<sup>7</sup>

New York — 22 November 1833. Order to Mr. Benjamin B. Pierson for 40 Cassettes to be painted red as usual, with strong, large size wrought iron handles and double bolt chest locks of very good quality.

30 January 1835 to Benjamin Pierson. 48 pine cassettes with strong large size wrought iron Japanned Handles and double link tumbler chest locks, "They are to have two coats of good Spanish Brown." \$3.25 each.

30 January 1835 to Joseph C. Stanley, 48 Gold Street. 12 Pine Cassettes.

- 2 feet 6 inches long )
- 1 feet 4 inches wide ) - outside measure
- 1 feet 3½ inches deep )

"They are to be made of clear stuff not quite one inch thick except the top which is to be a little thinner — they are to have strong large size wrought iron Japanned handles and double Tumbler Chest Locks, say double links. The upper corners of the body and the corners of the Cover to be fastened with thin Sheet Iron 3 inches wide — They are to be well painted with two good coats of Spanish Brown.

25 April 1836 to J.S. Anderson, 165 Chapel Street, N.Y.  
 10 regular cassettes  
 10 to be 24 inches long  
 14 inches wide  
 14 inches high in the center  
 (outside dimensions)

3 February 1838 to J.S. Anderson. 36 pine cassettes 29 inches long, 16 inches wide, 15 inches high, outside measurements, double bolt locks.

2 April 1838 to J.S. Anderson. 15 Cassettes 29 inches long, 16 inches wide, 15 inches high.  
 15 cassettes 24 x 14 x 14.

26 March 1842 to John S. Anderson. "4 of the Smaller Size Pine Cassettes" 24" x 14" x 14" at the highest part 4 inch-double link tumbler locks and Japanned handles same size as those on the larger cassettes.

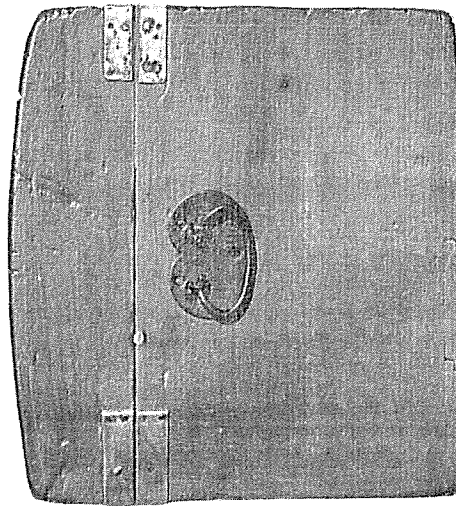


Fig. 3. Nineteenth century Hudson's Bay Company cassette<sup>119</sup>. End view showing typical lifting handles.

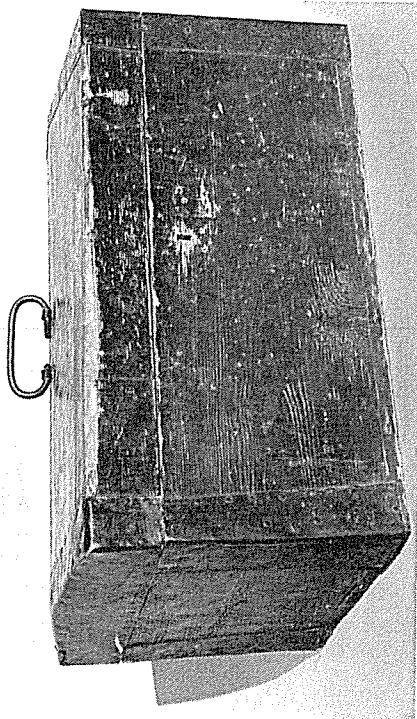


Fig. 4. "Ration box" or "traveling case" of painted pine. (Museum of the Fur Trade collections.)

29 March 1844 to John S. Anderson, Williamsburgh, Long Island. 10 cassettes of the "second size" 24 x 14 x 14. Handles "to be Japanned, stout, and large size so as to admit the whole hand without pinching." Painted with two coats of Spanish Brown.

25 February 1846 to John S. Anderson, 110 Henry Street, N.Y. Orders 6 pine cassettes of the largest size and 6 of the second size.

The Northwest Company of course made the same use of cassettes. The Fort William Inventory of 1816 showed eleven cassettes among the "Fort Utensils" on hand.<sup>120</sup>

It has been the writer's privilege to examine at least a half-dozen historic Canadian cassettes. Many of them have been repainted, including the one illustrated here. It had a heavy coat of gray that appeared quite recent, under the gray was a dark green paint and under that was the original Spanish Brown. A similar cassette once used by W.E. Traill, A Hudson's Bay Chief Trader in the last half of the nineteenth century, still has a very old coat of medium dark green with no evidence of any previous paint of different color.<sup>121</sup> A further old-time use of dark green paint is noted on the "ration box" also illustrated in this article and on a similar small wood box sitting beside the cassette in Frances Hopkins' painting. The possibility therefore suggests itself that green may have eventually found favor for cassettes and similar boxes in the last days of the fur trade but there is no documentation for any such change. In 1861 Moose Factory was ordering a great deal of white paint but also ordered some Spanish brown, yellow and green in lesser amounts.

A few of the surviving HBC Cassettes from the late nineteenth century vary as much as 2 or 3 inches in length and an inch or more in height from the standards given by McLeod, some being larger and a few smaller. The green cassette used by Mr. Traill is 30 1/4 inches long, 18 1/2 inches wide and 18 inches high. It is possible that the increasing use of York boats instead of canoes permitted some variations from the old standards without any inconvenience to the boatmen who handled them.



# Kit Carson's Saddle

By JAMES A. HANSON  
Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas

Fortunately for the sake of historical accuracy, curators, historians and mountain man buffs are beginning to research early nineteenth century horse equipment including items used by the legendary Rocky Mountain trappers. As might be expected, no documented examples of mountain man saddles have survived.

An interesting New Mexican saddle of the Civil War period has come to light, however, and I feel that its close dating and historical association make it a valuable link in the saddle tree (please excuse that remark).

At Cleburne, Texas there is a large and fine collection of Indian material, firearms, and general curiosities which was assembled by Mr. W.W. Layland in the early 20th century. The collection is now administered as a museum by the city. One outstanding piece is a saddle reputed to have belonged to Christopher "Kit" Carson. According to a 1936 newspaper clipping, Mr. Layland bought the saddle in 1914 in Taos, New Mexico. A photograph accompanying the article shows Mr. Layland with the saddle, a rawhide bridle and Mexican ring bit (still in the collection), and over the horn of the saddle is a pair of large pistol holsters. One of the holsters remains; it is apparently for a Colt Dragon, whether it was originally a part of Carson's equipment is questionable.

The convincing part of the saddle's association, other than the obvious non-American design and decoration, is a brass shield on the left side of the fork inscribed "Presented-BY THE-REGIMENT." A saddle would have been a most suitable gift from the New Mexican volunteers to their commanding officer, General Carson.

The tree is completely covered with leather. I have, in the accompanying sketch, reconstructed the saddle, and have reversed the natural turn of the stirrups, now detached. The decoration of the saddle is both tooled and stamped. There is only one cinch ring, forward of center, and the stirrups are attached to the bottoms of the fenders with copper rivets. The stirrups are conventional bent wood. The horn is wood and the round bosses, including the one on the horn, and the inscribed shield, are brass.

The squarish skirt goes under the tree. The upper skirt stops below the horn, which is covered separately. In back, the upper skirt simply butts against the cantle, which like the horn has its own covering. The fenders pass through an open slot in front of the cantle and are attached with screws underneath. The upper skirt is tied to the lower skirt at front and back. An extra piece passes over the fender to protect the rider's leg. The entire saddle is sewed together with cotton thread; none of it is laced.

The saddle is apparently of fine quality, and it is a transitional specimen, evidently being manufactured in New Mexico and bearing resemblances to the Santa Fe saddle and to some post-Civil War Texas stock saddles.

The Trall cassette is other wise typical in every way with dovetailed corners, inside lock, slightly curved top and iron handles with plates of modified heart shape. The cover has the customary half-lap joint with the top of the box itself.

The "ration box" illustrated here is a small pine box with a slightly curved top and one lifting handle in the center of the cover. It is 20 inches long, 14 inches wide and 11 inches high at the center of the top. The cover is 3 inches high at the center. It has its original dark green paint and is elaborately reinforced with sheet iron nailed on.

It came from the descendants of a fur trader in Manitoba and was called a "ration box." No particular research has been done on this small style of trunk but Frances Hopkins includes a green box of this general style and size in her paintings of the voyageurs' breakfast scene.

A grand-daughter of the Chief Trader Trall mentioned above has a similar box from his effects. It has a flat top with brass corner fittings but is otherwise mounted in iron and painted a medium dark green. It measures 21 3/4 inches long, 14 inches wide and 12 1/2 inches high.

It does appear that smaller boxes of this type had a definite place in traders' outfits along with the covered willow baskets used for meats, liquors and other dainties. In Governor George Simpson's famous cross-country journey to the Columbia in 1828, three officers rode in two canoes manned by eighteen men, their outfit included kegs of liquor, bags of provisions, two cassettes, one "case" and two baskets. Note was made that the voyageurs had their own "pactons" or bundles. To them, the red trunk with handles on both ends was simply one of the things one could see everyday and yet never hope to attain.

## NOTES

1. James H. Lockwood, "Early Times and Events in Wisconsin," **Wisconsin Historical Collections** (Madison 1903). II, 109-110.
2. Malcolm McLeod, editor, **Peace River. A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to Pacific by the late Sir George Simpson; in 1828** (Ottawa 1872; Reprint Rutland, Vt. 1971). 43 (Note V).
3. David Armit was born in the County of Orkney, Scotland and entered Company service at White Horse Plains Post in 1867. He later served at Fort Garry, Lower Fort Garry, Fort Frances, North West Angle Post and Riding Mountain House. He was commissioned a Junior Chief Trader in 1882 and was placed in charge of the Manitoba District in 1887. From 1899 until his retirement in 1904 he had charge of the James Bay District. Information compiled by his granddaughter, Mrs. Dorothy Dennis of Winnipeg.
4. Now on exhibit at the National Archives of Canada.
5. Illustrated in Alvin Josephy, Jr., **The Artist Was a Young Man** (Ft. Worth, Texas 1970). Plate XXIII.
6. K.G. Davies, editor, **Northern Quebec and Labrador Journals and Correspondence 1819-35** (London 1963). 161
7. American Fur Company Papers, New York Historical Society. "Orders Outward" - Calendar No. 16405.
8. Selkirk Papers, MG-19; Public Archives of Canada.
9. W.E. Trall began service with the Company as a clerk at Fort Ellice in 1864 and became a Chief Trader before he retired in 1893. His service included posts at Lac LaBiche, Fort Pitt, Lesser Slave Lake, Fort St. James and Vermilion. Information supplied through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. C.H. West of Vancouver.
10. E.E. Rich, editor, **Simpson's 1828 Journey to the Columbia** (London 1947). xvi.