



The Laird of Fort William: William McGillivray and the North West Company

Irene Ternier Gordon

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High finance, wilderness adventures, violence, and questionable legal tactics all played important roles in the history of the North West Company. William McGillivray, head of the company from 1804 until 1821, was arguably the most powerful businessman in Canada in the early nineteenth century.

William McGillivray emigrated from the Scottish Highlands to work for his uncle Simon McTavish when he was twenty years old and became head of the NWC in 1804 upon McTavish's death. The period from 1805 to 1814 was a time of quick expansion and great prosperity for the company; however, its decline was even more rapid. It could be argued that the NWC did not merge with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 but rather was swallowed up by it. By the time William died in 1825, the McGillivray family had been forced into bankruptcy.

Set against the background of the history and legacy of the NWC, this engaging biography tells McGillivray's complete story, from his early years in Scotland, immigration to Canada, and fur-trading successes to his eventual downfall.

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