of the winter's hunt. If the hunt turned out badly the Indian regarded it as an act of God for which he himself was not responsible, and from his point of view the debt was discharged. The London and Montreal merchants, naturally, did not thus easily discharge their western correspondents, who must pay the debts they had incurred or undergo financial ruin. It is significant of the hazardous character of the Indian trade to note that at Mackinac (and probably elsewhere, throughout the Indian country) the traders adopted the Indian point of view to the extent of observing, as a settled rule of procedure, the principle that the debts most recently incurred should be first discharged, leaving the earlier creditors to look for their pay to whatever balance might remain after this had been done.

In short, the fur trade was little more than a huge gamble for most of those directly engaged in it. If the trader won, his profits were oftentimes very great; but it is significant of the general situation that at such centers as Detroit, Mackinac, Fort Wayne, and Vincennes, few traders accumulated wealth and the great majority were overburdened with debts, which in many cases they never succeeded in discharging. As for Askin, beginning shortly after the close of the Revolution, the passing seasons rolled up an ever-increasing indebtedness, which for years stood around the relatively enormous figure of twenty-five thousand pounds. Try as he might he could do little to effect the discharge of this incubus. Only the fact that his principal creditors, Isaac Todd and James McGill of Montreal, had been his firm friends since the early adventurous years at Mackinac, saved him from complete ruin and a poverty-stricken old age. They had prospered at Montreal, and McGill was reputed before his death to be the wealthiest man in Canada. Their affection for Askin was such, and their belief in his integrity of character so great, that they accepted, in lieu of the cash due them, various tracts of land in and around Detroit, taken over at valuations far in excess of anything ever realized from them.

Having effected this disposition of his major indebtedness, Askin, as the century drew to its close, prepared to enter