

The Cass Manuscripts

Translated by Col. Charles Whittlesey

No. 1

ABSTRACT OF THE LIFE AND CUSTOMS OF THE SAVAGES OF
CANADA—1723

(Author's name not given)

When a woman is about to be delivered, she retires into the woods, makes a bark lodge, and a new fire to warm herself; she delivers herself without assistance or cries of pain. Immediately she goes to wash the infant in a stream, however cold it may be, unless it be actual winter; after which she continues her ordinary labors. If she is traveling, she embarks at once in her canoe. For thirty days she keeps a separate fire, if the child is a male; and for forty days, if it is a girl. During this time she eats alone of victuals that are brought to her—no man eats with her during this time, or goes to her fire; saying if they should do so, they would have a flux. They cannot imagine why the French do not observe the same customs. They do not see their women when they are sick, neither do they live with them when they are pregnant, which is the reason they give for having many wives. They have a superstition requiring women to have a separate fire during their monthly turns, which no one approaches. Their girls are free to follow their inclinations towards young men, without losing their reputation, or impairing their chance of marriage. But, if a woman's husband