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Original Article

## **THE FUR TRADE INDUSTRY AND THE BIRTH OF A NATION: FROM THE COLONY OF NEW FRANCE TO PRESENT CANADA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the historical significance of the fur trade industry in the establishment and development of French and British colonies in Canada, comprising from early exploration to the formation of major trading companies like the Hudson's Bay Company and the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales*. Employing a comprehensive analysis of historical documents, literature, and case studies, the study underscores the pivotal role played by the fur trade industry in shaping the Canadian nation. Emphasis is placed on exploring the economic, political, and geographical contexts, elucidating the conflicts and negotiations that marked the evolution of fur trade. The article further details the exploration routes and boundaries utilized by early European explorers and Indigenous peoples, highlighting the indispensable role of waterways as primary transportation channels during the initial era of fur trading. The examination demonstrates how the fur trade industry not only contributed to the economic prosperity of the Colony of New France as well as the British Canadian colonies but also played a transformative role in influencing sociocultural dynamics between

indigenous populations and European settlers. The historical account unfolds from the early explorations of Jacques Cartier in the 16th century, revealing the fur trade as a principal means of financing and sustaining European presence in North America. The article specifically examines key figures such as Samuel de Champlain, Pierre-Esprit Radisson, and Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, whose expeditions and business ventures played vital roles in shaping the fur trade industry. This historical perspective illuminates the profound impact of the fur trade on the development of Canada as a nation, intricately influencing the geographical and economic landscape of the region.

**Keywords:** Canada, fur trade, French colonies, British colonies, European explorers, Indigenous

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a historical context marked by fervent territorial expansion, the distribution of the newly discovered world became a contentious issue among European powers. This allocation, stated by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 through papal bulls, granted exclusive rights to Spain and Portugal in the New World. The subsequent Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 further delineated territories, excluding other European nations under the threat of excommunication (Ávila-Laurel, 2021; Weckman-Muñoz, 1976). France, in particular, had to await Pope Clement VII's authorization to evade these constraints and explore uncharted North American lands (Reynolds, 2016).

The early French exploration suffered setbacks. Jacques Cartier, commissioned by Francis I of France, embarked on explorations with the expectation of discovering wealth comparable to that found by the Spanish and Portuguese. However, Cartier's findings, predominantly cod fisheries and timber, fell short of the lucrative resources identified by his European counterparts (Mimeault, 2020). Subsequent attempts to establish colonies hindered by financial constraints, and it took until 1608 for the French to initiate a permanent settlement in the Americas under King Henri IV (Bideaux, 1999).

With respect to French settlement and economic strategies, Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec in 1608, using the fur trade industry as a key economic driver. The fur trade facilitated exchange between indigenous peoples and the French, establishing a sustainable economic foundation for the colony (Lea, 2001). Great Britain, under King James I, chartered the Virginia Company in 1606, aiming to claim land, conduct trade, and generate profits in North America. (Hall et al., 2005) The Dutch, through the Dutch East India Company, explored the region in 1609, initially seeking an alternative route to Asia but discovering fertile land and abundant wildlife (Cohen, 1981).

The significance of the fur trade in Canada's development cannot be overstated. Louis XIV established the *Compagnie des Indes occidentales* in 1664, focusing on the fur trade to drive France's colonial economy (Jue, 2021). However, by 1709, the company faced financial ruin,

leading to its reorganization by John Law in 1719 into the West Indy Company, with a renewed focus on fur trade (Girard, 1908). The Hundred Associates, created in 1627, aimed to increase New France's population while monopolizing colonial trade, particularly in the fur trade. Despite initial success, financial troubles led to its dissolution in 1663 (Boyko, 2013).

After taking control of New France, the British sustained the profitable fur trade through the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which persists to the present day. The HBC is the oldest incorporated joint-stock merchandising company in the English-speaking world (Bonnet, 2018). This continuity underlines the enduring economic importance of the fur trade in shaping the development of North American colonies.

In this manner, the exploration and colonization of North America by European powers were complex endeavors influenced by geopolitical considerations, economic strategies, and resource discoveries. The fur trade emerged as a pivotal factor, shaping the economic trajectories of French and British colonies in the region that now is Canada. The nuanced history of European expansion in North America reflects the interaction of determination, resource exploitation, and geopolitical rivalries that characterized this restructuring period.

The objective of this article is to demonstrate the importance that the fur industry had on the establishment of the Colony of New France. As a way to finance the establishment of the French and later English presence in what is now Canada.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology that we used in this paper was an analysis of the literature, consulting articles, books, talking with elders and documents that deal with the topic of the fur trade. The living experience of a Métis trapper from Canada is incorporated. This article is based on a comprehensive analysis of historical and academic literature related to the fur trade (Daniel Francis 1983 and 1984) and European colonization in part of the North American region, which is now known as Canada. A variety of sources, including academic specialized articles, books, and historical documents addressing relevant issues in diverse areas such as the politics, economics, and geography of that period, as well as territorial delimitation treaties, and records of the early exploration expeditions in the region, have been consulted. The articles also analyze the evolution and patterns of the early Canadian colonies and the use of key waterways, such as the St. Lawrence River. (St Lawrence River is the most important river of Canada in terms of the economy and historical importance, and the third in terms of the length with 3,058 km), to understand how these factors contributed to the development and consolidation of the fur trade industry in the region. Throughout this methodological strategy, the aim is to elucidate the historical and economic relevance of the fur trade in the early formation of Canada as a nation. We also relied on a variety of maps to illustrate the evolution and characteristics of the region now called Canada. The living experience of a

Metis trapper from Canada is presented to see that this old activity of trapping fur-bearing animals is still very much alive.

### **3. ICE AGES AND POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH AMERICA**

The geological impacts of the Ice Age significantly shaped the demographic landscape of contemporary Canada. Beginning approximately 120,000 years ago, the most recent ice age progressed with fluctuations for the subsequent 100,000 years, culminating around 20,000 years ago (De Blij, 2007). The indigenous peoples of North America, the first inhabitants of the region, began settling around 18,000 years ago, with recent evidence suggesting some arrivals as early as 25,000 years ago (Notzkel, 1994; Scientific American, 2021).

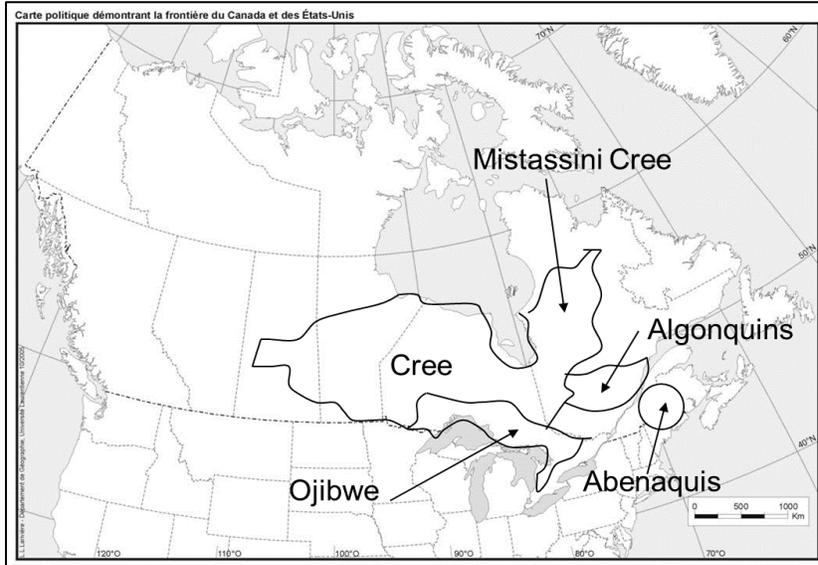
By the time of European contact, well-established indigenous populations in Canada exhibited diverse lifestyles. Sedentary groups, heavily reliant on fishing, were concentrated in the northwest coast and the Great Lakes region, while nomadic peoples, including nations such as the Siksika, Cree, Ojibwe, Assiniboine (Nakota), and Dakota, inhabited the expansive prairies (Létourneau, 1988).

Indigenous peoples in Canada can be categorized into six cultural areas: Eastern Woodlands, Boreal Forest, Arctic, Plains, Interior Plains, and Northwest Coast. These cultural areas, devoid of strict boundaries, served as general references (Létourneau, 1988). Prior to European contact, intertribal trade networks thrived, facilitated by the abundance of natural resources such as quartzite and copper (Delâge, 2016).

Trade among indigenous peoples was widespread, exemplified by the utilization of quartzite for arrowheads in the Maritime Provinces, southern Quebec, and the Hudson Bay coastline. Copper from the western Lake Superior region became another valuable trade commodity (Delâge, 2016). Noteworthy trade hubs included southern Ontario, where the Huron, Petun, Neutral peoples, and later the Iroquois, engaged in pottery production marked by technical excellence and aesthetic appeal. The Eastern Subarctic, extending from northern Québec to Labrador, witnessed nomadic Algonquian-speaking peoples maintaining traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering practices well into the 19th and 20th centuries. In the Western Subarctic, Athapaskan-speaking peoples, such as the Dene Nation, engaged in trade characterized by the embellishment of personal items with porcupine quills, moose hair embroidery, and beads (Vastokas, 2013).

Considering the mentioned above, the indigenous peoples of Canada, with distinct cultural areas and lifestyles, engaged in robust trade networks that significantly influenced their daily lives. Intertribal trade, facilitated by the rich resources of North America, not only sustained indigenous communities but also paved the way for subsequent interactions with European explorers and settlers. Understanding the historical context of indigenous trade networks provides valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural exchange and economic relations in North America.

**Figure 1.**  
Map showing the territorial divisions of the indigenous people



Source: Léo Larivière. Département de Géographie. Laurentian University 2018

### 3.1 The codfish (*Gadus morhua*)

Before Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas, the French, Portuguese, and Basques had explored the abundant codfish banks off Newfoundland, fostered by the mixing of the Labrador Current and the Gulf Stream. This region became one of the world's richest fishing grounds, vital for early European-settler economies in eastern Canada and New England. Jacques Cartier, during his first voyage, reported an abundance of cod, stating that the cod could be caught with one's hand (Prowse, 1895).

### 3.2 The race of discovery of North America

The papal bull of Clement VII, *Intra Arcana* (1529), granted Charles V patronage rights over newly discovered lands, enabling conquest and colonization. With the Treaty of Tordesilla no longer a hindrance, the French, Dutch, and British seized the opportunity to colonize North America. The Dutch East India Company, in 1602, sent Henry Hudson, whose explorations mapped the Hudson River and revealed fertile land and abundant wildlife. Dutch settlement began in 1613 with New Amsterdam, later exchanged for Suriname and renamed New York City by the British. The Dutch West India Company (1621) focused on Brazil, while the Swedish South Company (1626) aimed at establishing colonies for trade purposes, particularly along the Delaware River. In 1627, Cardinal Richelieu created the *Compagnie de*

la Nouvelle France and granted a fur trade monopoly in exchange for sending colonists to Canada until 1643 (Eccles, 1998).

### **3.3 The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)**

Chartered in 1670, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) received an exclusive trading monopoly over the Hudson Bay drainage basin. It played a pivotal role in the fur trade, intertwining with the colonization of British North America and Canada (Ray, 2019). The fur trade's significance led to the formation of other companies, including the Northern Bay Company (1682), the Mississippi Company (1684-1721), and the North West Company (1779), the latter becoming a major rival to the HBC in the fur trade until 1821, when the North West Company merged with the Hudson's Bay Company. (Brown, 2007).

### **3.4 The French Colony of North America (1534-1645)**

Between 1534 and 1645, the French focused on exploring and establishing the colony of New France. Samuel de Champlain founded Québec in 1608, whereas Sieur de Lavolette established Trois-Rivières in 1634, and Maisonneuve founded Ville-Marie, later known as Montréal, in 1646. Initially led by fur trading companies, state control was established in 1663 with the royal government (Lacoursière, 2013). Exploration efforts from 1615 to 1750 by individuals like Brûlé, Nicollet, Radisson, Lasalle, Duluth, Jolliet, Father Albanel, and Father Marquette covered vast territories, including the Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi River, Appalachian Mountains, and Hudson Bay, covering 8 million square kilometers (Havard, 2003).

**Figure 2.**

Map showing the territory of New France around the year 1700



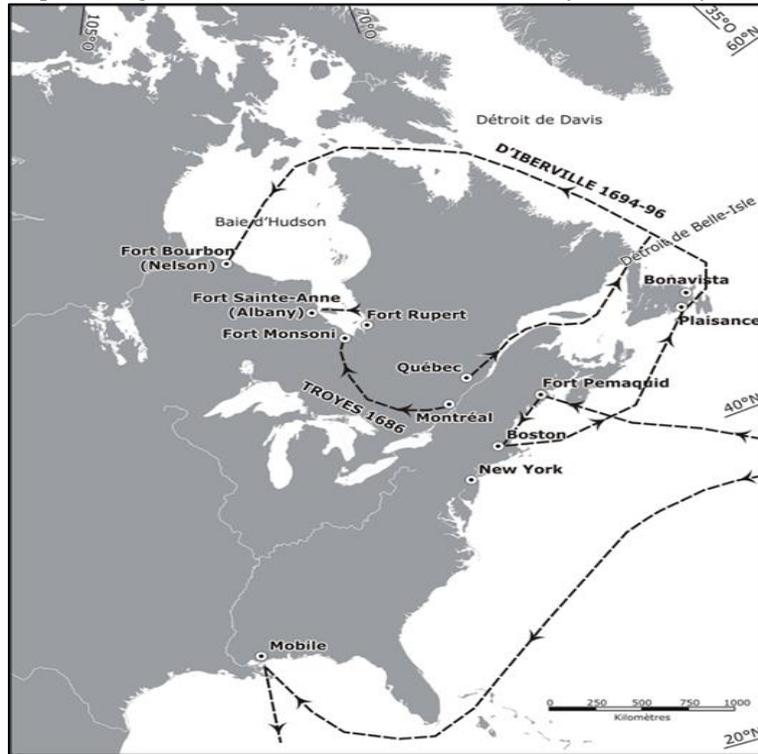
Source: Léo Larivière Dep of Geography Laurentian University 2019

### 3.5 The battle of Hudson's Bay

By the 17th century, intense competition emerged between the French and British in North America. York Factory, an HBC fur trading post, was established in 1684. The rivalry over Hudson Bay intensified around 1697, an area explored by Henry Hudson for the Dutch East India Company, with James Bay explored by Thomas James in 1630 and 1631 (Daniel, 1983). The Hudson Bay and James Bay, part of the Hudson Bay Watershed basin renamed Rupert's Land in 1670, became a commercial monopoly for the Hudson's Bay Company (1670-1870). The Battle of York Factory, on September 5, 1697, during the War of the Grand Alliance, resulted in a French victory led by Captain Pierre Le Moine d'Iberville over an English squadron commanded by Captain John Fletcher. The French temporarily held York Factory until 1713 when it was returned to the British in the Peace of Utrecht (Newman, 2000).

**Figure 3.**

Map showing the French incursion in the Hudson Bay and the Bay James



Source: Leo Larivière Department of Geography 2019

### 3.6 The watersheds of Canada

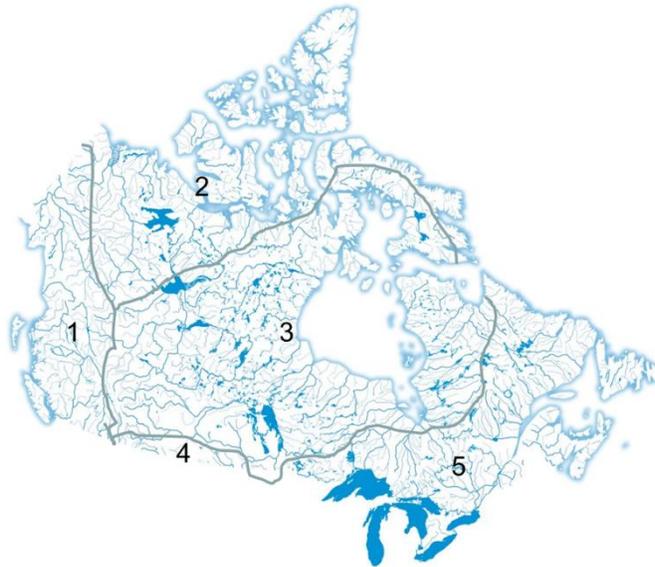
Possessing one-fifth of the world's freshwater, Canada has thousands of interconnected rivers and lakes forming 25 major watersheds. These watersheds, namely Hudson Bay, Atlantic Ocean, Arctic Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico, play vital roles in Canadian history, culture, ecology, and economy (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2017). The Hudson Bay watershed, covering approximately 3.9 million km<sup>2</sup> and spanning five provinces and two territories, constitutes nearly 33% of Canada's territory. Major rivers within this basin include Thelon-Dubawnt-Kazan, North Saskatchewan-Red Deer-South Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan, Assiniboine, Red, Nelson, Severn, Attawapiskat, Albany, Nottaway, Rupert, Eastmain, La Grande, Great Whale, and Koksoak-Canapiscau (Atlas of Canada, 2016). Formerly Rupert's Land, the Hudson Bay drainage basin was pivotal for the early fur trade in North America, claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company in the 17th century (Davis, 1988; McIntosh and Smith, 2006).

The Atlantic Ocean watershed, covering 1.6 million km<sup>2</sup> and extending over eastern Canada, constitutes 6% of Canadian territory. The Saint Lawrence River, a crucial route for indigenous peoples, facilitated the colonization of New France. Cities like Québec (1608), Trois-Rivière (1634), and Montréal (1646) were founded on their riverbanks. During the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), control of the St Lawrence River was pivotal for the British strategy to capture New France, and today it continues to play a crucial role in Canada's economy (Stagg, 2010, Bonnett, 2018).

The Great Lakes, part of the Atlantic Ocean Watershed, form the largest group of freshwater lakes globally, containing 21% of the world's surface freshwater by volume. Inhabited by indigenous peoples since approximately 10,000 BCE, the Great Lakes region has been a center for trade routes, with indigenous populations speaking Algonquian and Iroquois languages (Statistic Canada, 2017; Atlas du Canada, 2016).

**Figure 4.**

Map showing the five watersheds of Canada: Pacific 1, Arctic 2, Hudson Bay 3, Gulf of Mexico 4 and the Atlantic 5.



Source: Léo Larivière. Département of Geography. Laurentian University 2018.

During the fur trade era, ranging from the 17th to the 19th century, waterways served as the primary "highways" for First Nations trappers and European fur traders. The Saint Lawrence River played a central role in connecting Quebec City to Montreal, extending to Ottawa. Voyageurs, as defined in Appendix 1, traveled north from Ottawa along the Ottawa River, reaching North Bay. Continuing through the French River to Georgian Bay on Lake

Huron, the route progressed to Lake Superior, Thunder Bay, Pigeon River, Sagana Lake, Basswood Lake, Lake La Croix, Rainy Lake, Rainy River, Lake of the Woods, Winnipeg River, and finally Lake Winnipeg. From Lake Winnipeg, voyageurs utilized the Nelson River to reach York Factory on the Hudson Bay. Another route involved taking the Albany River from the Lake of the Woods to reach James Bay, and subsequently Moose Factory. Westward voyages followed the Saskatchewan River from Cumberland House, a significant fur trade depot, to Reindeer Lake, Lake Athabaska, and finally Fort Chipewyan, established by the North West Company in 1788, making it one of the oldest European settlements in Alberta (Voyageurs National Park, 2001).

**Figure 5.**

Map showing the most important rivers and trading post in the Bay James and Bay Hudson



Source: Leo Larivière 1997 Department of Geography.

The fusion of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company in 1821 marked the conclusion of the intense competition and discord characterizing the Canadian fur trade for over two decades. Although the unification secured the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly from Hudson Bay to Lake Athabaska, competition persisted along the international boundary with the American Fur Company (Voyageurs National Park, 2001).

French explorer and Coureur des Bois Pierre-Esprit Radisson, along with his brother-in-law Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, played a significant role in the fur trade. Radisson, who settled in Trois-Rivières around 1651, persuaded des Groseilliers to embark on a year-long journey around Lake Superior in 1659. This expedition aimed to collect furs and capitalize on the lucrative fur trade. They explored the northern regions of Lake Huron and Lake Superior, eventually traveling to England to meet with the king and present business opportunities in the fur trade with Indigenous peoples. Radisson and des Groseilliers later became associates with Prince Rupert, leading to the establishment of the Hudson Bay Company in 1670 (Warkentin, 2012).

## **4. FUR TRADE IN CANADA**

### **4.1 The major fur trade companies in Canada**

#### **a. The Northwest Company (NWC)**

Founded in response to Samuel de Champlain's recognition of the fur trade's financial potential in the North American colony, the Coureurs des Bois (see appendix 1) established a fur trade empire in the St. Lawrence basin. The French, Dutch (since 1614), and English (from 1664 in New York and 1670 in Hudson Bay) also engaged in fur trading, establishing commercial relations with Indigenous peoples. After the British conquest of New France in 1763, French traders formed the Northwest Company, competing with the Hudson's Bay Company and contributing to environmental effects, exploration, and conflicts. Eventually, the Northwest Company merged with the Hudson's Bay Company (Brown, 2007).

#### **b. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)**

The 17th-century fur trade gained prominence in North America due to European demand for beaver fur. French traders Radisson and des Groseilliers proposed a trading company to reach the continent's interior via the Hudson Bay. Failing to secure French support, they approached King Charles II and Prince Rupert. Chartered in 1670, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) became the oldest incorporated joint-stock merchandising company. Rupert's Land, comprising the Hudson Bay Watershed, was the HBC's exclusive domain from 1670 to 1870. Trading posts like Rupert House (1668), Fort Albany (1670), Moose Fort (1673), York Factory (1684), and Fort Severn (1689) played crucial role in the fur trade (McIntosh & Smith, 2006; Voorhis, 1930).

#### **c. *Hudson's Bay Company and Trading Posts***

In 1668, Rupert House, currently known as Waskaganish on the east shore of James Bay in Québec, became the inaugural trading post. Zachariah Gilliam undertook the initial trading journey aboard the *Nonsuch*, returning to England in October 1669 with a significant load of beaver pelts obtained from the Cree people. This marked the beginning of a substantial and vital market. Fort Albany, established in 1670 on the south shore of James Bay by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), endured a series of events including capture by the French in 1686, subsequent renaming to Fort Sainte Anne, and eventual recapture by the English in 1693 (Voorhis, 1930).

In 1673, Charles Bayly, Governor of the HBC, founded a fur-trading post initially known as Moose Fort on the south shore of James Bay. York Factory, constructed in 1684 on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay (Manitoba), emerged as one of the pioneering fur-trading posts, playing a central role in the industry for over 270 years. In 1689, the HBC established Fort Severn at the River mouth of the Severn River on Hudson Bay, originally named Fort James, representing one of the earliest English fur trading posts in the New World (Voorhis, 1930). In sum, the HBC trading posts were as follows:

- Rupert House (1668). First trading post established at Waskaganish on the east shore of James Bay.
- Fort Albany (1670). Established on the south shore of James Bay, taken by the French in 1686, recaptured by the English in 1693.
- Moose Fort (1673). Founded on the south shore of James Bay by Charles Bayly, Governor of HBC.
- York Factory (1684). One of the first fur-trading posts, operating for over 270 years, located on the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay.
- Fort Severn (1689): Originally named Fort James, situated at the river mouth of the Severn River on Hudson Bay (Voorhis, 1930).

#### **4.2 Phases of the fur trade**

The fur trade, which lasted from the early 16th century to the 19th century, was characterized by four main phases:

First. Chance Encounters (1500-1550). Indigenous hunters and European fishermen had spontaneous interactions in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Notably, Indigenous people had already engaged in trade, focusing on items like shells, copper, and lithic materials.

Second. Trading Posts Near Rivers (1550-1670). Trading posts emerged, facilitating fur exchanges between inland producers and traders. This phase marked the establishment of posts near rivers, enabling efficient transportation and trade.

Third. Expansion and Territorial Coverage (1670-1820). With the colony's expansion, trading posts proliferated across the continent. During this period, the Métis, *coureurs de bois*, and *Voyageurs* gradually supplanted Indigenous control in the fur trade.

Fourth. Confederation Formation and Economic Diversification (1830-1867). The final phase coincided with the confederation process (1830-1867), emphasizing activities such as agricultural colonization, logging, and later, mineral and hydraulic resource exploitation.

### **4.3 Indigenous peoples and the fur trade**

During the second phase, fur exchange occurred regularly near seaports. Indigenous roles were divided into three concentric circles: supplying Europeans with game and resources, acting as intermediaries coordinating trade, and focusing exclusively on trapping furry animals. Partners of the French comprised the Inus, Micmacs, Algonquins, Hurons, Ottawa (Odawa), Wyandots, Ojibwe, Pétuns, Poutéouatamis, and Népissingues, all of them were key partners. With regard to the Dutch and English, Montreal competed with Fort Orange (Albany), established by the Dutch in 1624. The Dutch, that were allied with the Mahingans and Mohawks, were later replaced by the English in 1662. The Hudson's Bay Company's arrival in 1670 triggered rivalries, particularly with the Cree, Assiniboine, and Chipewyan nations.

During the third phase (1670-1820), there was a transition and loss of Indigenous trading role. European trading posts expanded across the continent, leading to the decline of Indigenous control as traders. Métis, *coureurs de bois*, and *Voyageurs* played increasingly influential roles.

In the fourth phase, post-1820, the fur trade declined, and Canada's economy advanced towards agricultural colonization, logging, and the exploitation of mineral and hydraulic resources.

### **4.4 Beaver Wars (1609-1701)**

The Beaver Wars, or Iroquois Wars, were intermittent conflicts in 17th-century North America, centered on the Saint Lawrence River valley and the Great Lakes. The Iroquois engaged the Hurons, northern Algonquians, and their French allies (Salvucci, 2003). After the wars, travel into Canada's interior became more accessible, leading to the bankruptcy of fur trade monopolies (*Cent Associés* and *Communautés des Habitants*). The *Compagnie des Indes occidentales* replaced them, fostering a more open trade environment. A price drop in beaver pelts in 1664 prompted increased travel to the upper country (around the Great Lakes), fostering the rise of *coureurs des bois* (Dechêne, 1992). From the late 18th to the 19th century, Métis communities assumed a central role in the fur trade due to their immunity to European diseases (Allaire, 1980).

#### **4.5 Wildlife and the fur trade industry**

The real fur trade era began in 1670 when Prince Rupert received a royal charter for the Hudson's Bay Company. Beaver pelts were highly sought after, alongside mink, muskrat, fox, and sable marten (Gavasa, 2020).

##### **a. Beaver Felt Hats and the Fur Trade Industry**

In the absence of abundant riches, the French colony of New France turned to the lucrative fur trade. Beaver fur was used to create water-repellent hats, particularly fashionable in rainy climates like England before umbrellas. King Charles I of England, displeased with the French monopoly and facing beaver scarcity in Europe, supported explorations in Hudson Bay for an alternative supply (Podruchny, 2006).

In 1685, Louis XIV's Edict of Fontainebleau declared Protestantism illegal, forcing French Huguenots, involved in hat making, to migrate to England. This led to the collapse of the French hat industry. The beaver felt hat's popularity declined in the mid-19th century with the advent of less expensive silk, promoted by Prince Albert, consort to Queen Victoria (Backhouse, 2015).

##### **b. The living experience of a Métis trapper from Canada**

In the contemporary context of October 2023, Sebastien Nault, a descendant of the renowned Métis family McPherson / Nault (Bourchard et al. 2019, p.126), continues the practice of trapping, preserving the adventurous spirit deep-rooted in the family heritage. He recognizes that his life work is outdoors and this creates an awareness of the relations with nature. Specializing in beaver and coyote trapping for management purposes, the acquired fur serves either for personal garment production or is commercially traded through auctions. Additional fur-bearing animals, including muskrats, otters, mink, and bobcats, are captured and sold, with beaver meat being the primary consumable. The approach is guided by a profound respect for each creature involved in the trapping process, aligning with teachings from Indigenous elders and mentors. Gratitude is expressed for the exchange of lives in accordance with this perspective on the interconnectedness of creation. The trapper acknowledges the influence of Indigenous knowledge keepers who have served as mentors throughout the years. Looking toward the future, he aspires for the continuation of this profound understanding of nature in the practices of their own children.

#### **4.6 North Bay fur trade**

The contemporary trapping industry in Ontario, Canada, is subject to stringent regulations imposed by the provincial government to ensure ethical practices in managing wild fur-

bearing animals. Trapping primarily serves as a wildlife management tool, with the market offering an avenue for utilizing the resources generated by these animals.

North Bay, located in Northeastern Ontario, stands as the sole host of fur auctions in North America, particularly the Fur Harvest Auction (FHA). Despite over 500 years of beaver exploitation, North Bay remains a key player in the fur trade. The FHA, renowned as the source of premium wild fur for the global fur fashion industry, consistently satisfies fur brokers, wholesalers, and manufacturers. The beaver, a traditional cornerstone of the fur industry, remains integral to North Bay's offerings. Canada's Northwest Territories, a significant fur-producing region, contributes the world's finest Canadian Sable, Lynx, Timber Wolf, and Wolverine.

Fur Harvesters Auction Inc., serving as the exclusive auction house for Nunavut's high-quality fur products under the Nunavut Fine Furs brand, features Ringed Seal, Polar Bear, Arctic Wolf, and Arctic Fox. The auction house professionally manages fur auctions, connecting trappers and fur dealers with international fur manufacturers in countries such as China, Korea, Russia, Italy, Greece, and others. Fur Harvest Auction Inc. plays a pivotal role in facilitating the global trade of fur products in 2023.

#### **4.7 Fur-bearing animals in Canada: A focus on the beaver (*Castor canadensis*)**

This section provides an overview of the key animals relevant to fur-bearing activities in Canada, with a comprehensive list available in Appendix 5 for both trapping and hunting purposes.

**The Beaver (*Castor canadensis*): The King of Fur Animals.** Historically, the beaver has held significant cultural and practical value. Indigenous communities utilized various parts of the beaver, such as its teeth for crafting fish hooks, and considered its kidney to be a versatile remedy (Rousseau, 2018). The exploration of beaver fur as a trade commodity began with Jacques Cartier in 1534, marking its early economic significance (Murphy, 2013). The beaver, having played a crucial role in the development and history of Canada, rightfully stands as one of the country's national emblems.

The Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) holds the distinction of being the largest rodent in Canada and the second largest globally, surpassed only by the capybara. As an herbivorous mammal, the beaver exhibits a unique ability among mammals, alongside humans, to shape its environment. Noteworthy contributions of beavers to ecosystems include: the creation of wet habitats for various species; enhancement of biodiversity; improvement of water quality; water storage during droughts; and mitigation of flooding risks (Parcs Canada, 2023).

The European arrival in Canada marked a transforming period for the beaver, as it evolved into a vital income source for Indigenous populations through the lucrative trade of beaver skins with European settlers (Mills, 1960). Beyond its historical significance, the beaver's ecological impact and economic relevance continue to shape the Canadian landscape.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this article, we have conducted a historical analysis that underscores the crucial role of the fur trade industry in shaping the early development of Canada as a nation. From the initial explorations and colonization efforts by European superpowers, such as France and England, to the severe competition for control over strategic waterways, the fur trade emerged as a crucial economic and political determinant factor in the region that now is known as Canada. The article has highlighted the relevance of waterways, including the St. Lawrence River and the Hudson Bay watershed, in facilitating trade networks and shaping the patterns of early settlement and exploration.

Furthermore, the comparison of historical fur trading practices with contemporary approaches, as exemplified through the case study of a Métis trapper, reveals the enduring impact of the fur trade industry on indigenous communities and their cultures. The outcomes of this research underline the need for a more detailed comprehension of the complexities and legacies of the fur trade, including its influence on the socio-economic dynamics of early and contemporary Canadian society. Overall, this research emphasizes the complex interplay between politics, economics, geography, trade routes, and indigenous cultures, highlighting the prevailing legacy of the fur trade industry in Canada's past memoir. By recognizing the multifaceted dimensions of the fur trade, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the major foundations that have shaped Canada's diverse cultural landscape.

Moreover, it is crucial to promote a more inclusive and respectful dialogue between indigenous communities and society at large. This analysis suggests that understanding Canada's colonial past involves recognizing not only the dynamics of power but also the resilience of indigenous communities in the face of historical and contemporary challenges. It is also important to recognize the relevant need to conduct research supporting an inclusive historical narrative that recognizes Canada's rich cultural diversity.

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## APPENDIXES

### Appendix 1

Terms used to describe the different people in the fur trade industry.

#### **Les Coureurs de Bois (The runners of the wood)**

In 1663, the fur trade was the most lucrative economic activity in New France. After the destruction of Huronia in 1650, the French had no choice but to seek furs directly from the Great Lakes region. This marked the emergence of the 'runner of the woods', who played a significant role in the fur trade in New France (Allaire, 1980). Given that the inhabitants of New France were free to choose their profession and the fur trade was more profitable than farming, many abandoned their farms to engage in the fur trade. This led to the birth of the 'coureurs de bois', men whose occupation was fur trading and goods transportation (Allaire, 1987). It's worth noting that the 'coureurs de bois' had to travel long distances from the San Lorenzo River, through the Great Lakes, to Hudson Bay in the north and the Mississippi River in the south. Initially, they were French, but later included Canadians. The term 'coureur des bois' is most strongly associated with those who engaged in the fur trade in ways that were considered unconventional.

#### **Les Voyageurs**

Voyageurs were highly valued employees of trading companies such as the North West Company (NWC) and the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The voyageurs were 18th and 19th-century French Canadians who transported furs by canoe at the peak of the North American fur trade. The voyageurs' strength and endurance were regarded as legendary. Voyageurs were part of a licensed, organized effort, a distinction that set them apart from the coureurs des bois. Many journals record the hardships of traveling through the rugged country of the Canadian Shield- bland diets, exposure to biting insects, arduous portages, and dangerous rapids. Voyageurs paddled 50 strokes a minute, for 50 minutes of every hour, for up to 18 hours each day. Portages were even more strenuous, hernias, sprains and breaks were common, and a careless slip could be fatal. Many Voyageurs died along the route. (Podruchny, 2006)

#### **Le Metis**

Over time a new Indigenous, people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these individuals. This “ethnogenesis” of distinct Métis communities along the waterways and around the Great Lakes region of present-day Ontario occurred, as these new people were no longer seen as extensions of their maternal (First Nations) or paternal (European) relations, and began to identify as a separate group (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2023; Bouchard, Michel. 2019). The Metis appeared early on the pages of Canada's history, were a major determinant in the westward expansion of the nation, and are still a significant segment

of modern Canadian society. (Sealey et. Al .1975). The Métis, who are sometimes considered “the children of the fur trade”, have also developed great know-how in this area, as well as in hunting. They began to make a living from trapping at the end of the 18th century by selling pelts to companies operating in the fur trade: the Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company, and the American Fur Company. Métis women would play a central role in the fur trade. Indeed, high-ranking traders married them because of their ties to indigenous and Métis communities. Some of them, with Métis or English parents, married high-ranking officials and thus joined the “Red River aristocracy”. French-speaking Métis women, for their part, most often marry workers from commercial companies; Canadian (French) travelers, for example. The role of these women proved crucial as they supplied vegetables, berries, fish, and game to the trading posts. They also made and sold handmade items like quilts and arrow sashes. (Canadian Geographic, 2023).

### **Les Truchements.**

Among the first Europeans to journey to North America, many served as interpreters between the Native American nations and the French. These young men, who acted as intermediaries, may have laid the groundwork for what would become the 'wooden race' in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, they should not be confused with the 'coureurs des bois'. This is primarily because the fur trade was conducted almost exclusively at stationary posts, and for these individuals, fur trading was a secondary activity, not an organized profession. 'Les truchements' were explorers and occasional fur traders, like Jean Nicolet, who significantly contributed to the expansion of New France's territory (Francis, 1984).

### **The Animal Trappers**

Someone who catches animals in traps (Sudbury Area Trapper Council)

### **Appendix 2**

Terms frequently used in the fur industry the fur trade

### **The Fur Trade Canoe**

Voyageurs' canoes were typically constructed from the bark of large paper birch trees, which was stretched over a frame made of white cedar. The Maître canoe, also known as the master's canoe, was utilized on the Great Lakes and the Ottawa River. It measured approximately 11 m in length and 1.8 m in width, weighed around 270 kg, and could carry three tons of cargo or standard packs called 'pièces', each weighing 40-50 kg. The crew size ranged from 6 to 12, with an average of 8 to 10 members. Voyageurs also used a smaller version of the master's canoe, known as the Northern canoe. This canoe was about 7 m long and 1 m wide, weighed roughly 150 kg, and could carry one and a half tons of cargo or standard packs called 'pièces'. On the other hand, Indigenous canoes were generally smaller but had the advantage of being able to navigate smaller streams (Morse, 1968).

### **Trading Posts**

Trading posts served as the commercial centers of the frontier, built on or near waterways to expedite both the shipment of furs and pelts downriver and the return of supplies and trade items upriver.

### **Appendix 3**

#### *Is Trapping Legal in Canada?*

Trapping animals is legal in every Canadian province and territory, both recreationally and commercially. (Animal Justice Canada Legislative Fund)

#### *Who could be a trapper?*

Firstly, to be eligible for an adult trapping license, you must meet the following prerequisites: hold a valid hunting/fishing Outdoors Card (Class H1), be a resident of Ontario, be at least 16 years old, and attend a trapping course at an organization of your choice. Once these requirements are fulfilled, you can proceed to apply for one of the licenses mentioned below. (Ontario Trapping Licenses)

### **Appendix 4**

#### **The Fur Trade Companies**

- Fur trade monopoly between 1604 and 1674
    - French merchant company: 1604-1608
    - Dutch East India Company: (1604-1799)
    - Company of Canada: 1614-1620
    - Company of Caen: 1620-1627
    - Company of Hundred Associates: 1627-1663
    - Company of Residents: 1645-1663
    - Government of la Nouvelle France: 1663-1674
- (Girard, 1908; Education Québec, 2022)

### **Appendix 5**

#### **The Animals That Were Used for Fur and Other Uses**

- North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*),
- Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*),
- Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*),
- Groundhog (*Marmota monax*),
- Northern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*),

Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*),  
Black Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*),  
Ungava Collared Lemming (*Dicrostonyx hudsonius*)  
Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*),  
Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*),  
Arctic Hare (*Lepus arcticus*)  
Timber Wolf (*Canis lupus*),  
Coyote (*Canis latrans*),  
Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*),  
Grey Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*),  
Arctic Fox (*Vulpes lagopus*).  
North American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)  
Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*).  
Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*),  
American Marten (*Martes americana*),  
Fisher (*Martes pennanti*),  
Weasel (*Mustela erminea*),  
Least Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*),  
Long-tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*),  
Mink (*Neovison vison*),  
Otter (*Lontra canadensis*),  
Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*).  
Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*).  
Mountain Lion (*Puma concolor*),  
Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*),  
Lynx (*Lynx rufus*).  
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*),  
Élan (*Alces americanus*),  
Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*)  
Muskox (*Ovibus moschatus*),  
Buffalo (*Bison bison bison*),  
Buffalo (*Bison bison athabasca*)  
Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*),  
Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*),  
Harp Seal (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*),  
Hooded Seal (*Cystophora cristata*),  
Ringed Seal (*Pusa hispida*),  
Bearded Seal (*Erignathus barnatus*).  
(Prescott, 2013).

## **Appendix 6**

“Every creek, pond, lake and river in North America had beavers that were managed by the people living nearby. Fur trade brought this to near extinction, and cause a change in life style, culture and environment. Ponds, rivers, animal behavior and animal types also change because of the disappearance of the beaver. Now it is coming back to another era of beavers and their culture of changing environment. I am very happy to see that beaver is coming back to Sudbury, Ontario. Canada”, Sébastien Nault (2023).

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