

Lesson 2.3B

The Hudson's Bay Company

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Origins of the Hudson's Bay Company

While working for the British in 1669, Pierre Radisson and Médart de Groseilliers discovered a valuable fur-trading region near Hudson Bay. King Charles II immediately claimed the region for England and called it Rupert's Land, then formed the Hudson's Bay Company to establish a fur trade in region.

Setting Up Shop

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) built a series of forts and factories along the main rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. The map on *page 259* of your textbook shows the major HBC trading posts that had been established by 1820. Note how far west Rupert's Land and the trading posts extended.

York Factory, on the shore of Hudson Bay, was the Hudson's Bay Company's oldest and most important trading post. It was from there that furs were shipped to England. Notice that other trading posts are also located along the shore of Hudson Bay or on rivers that flow into the bay.

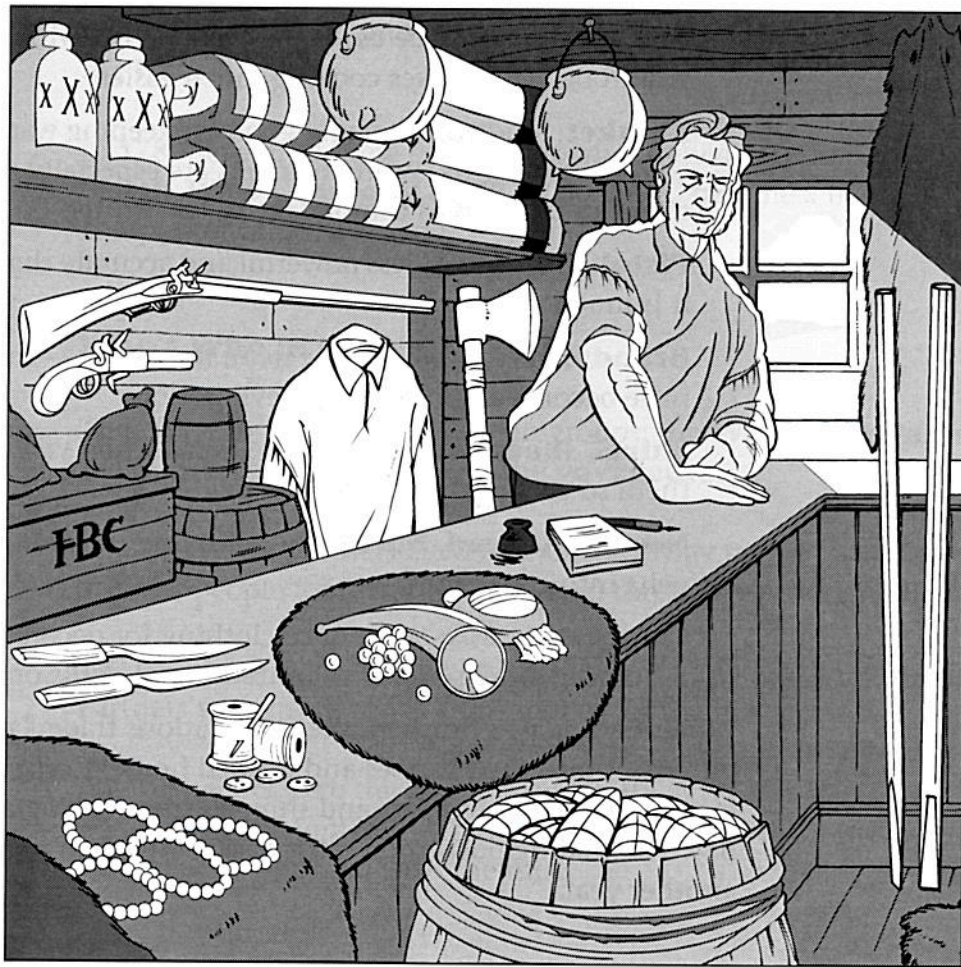
Getting Down to Business

Every summer the First Nations people would arrive at the HBC posts to trade their furs. Trading began with great ceremony. A peace pipe was smoked, speeches were made, and gifts were exchanged. The chief factor and his senior Hudson's Bay Company officers received fur pelts and First Nations leaders received European clothing. The First Nations people were then escorted back to their teepees in an elaborate parade, complete with flags and beating drums. An evening of song, dance, and festivities followed. You can see a detailed painting of the Fur trading

parade on *page 263* of your textbook. Trading began the next day and often lasted a week or two. In exchange for furs, First Nations traders could choose items such as tobacco, food, liquor, guns, axes, and blankets. Each item cost a set number of furs, depending on its value.

Because beaver was the most valuable of the furs, it formed a base for trading. A "Made Beaver" was the highest quality of an adult beaver fur. The table in *Crossroads: A Meeting of Nations - page 261* shows the price of other furs in "Made Beavers."

Trading Post



These are some goods that could be found in a trading post storeroom:

Rifle: Much more effective for hunting than a bow and arrow. Also useful for defending one's territory from rivals.

Hatchet: Used in the winter to open frozen beaver lodges. Also useful for cutting firewood.

Ice chisel: Used in the winter to open frozen beaver lodges and to cut holes for ice fishing.

Knives: Used to make various items, such as canoes and snowshoes. Could also be used to cut materials to be made into clothing.

Fishing net: A simple way to catch a lot of fish quickly.

Gunpowder, shot, powder horn: The rifle is not much use without these.

Tobacco: Brazilian tobacco is very popular and in abundant supply.

Brass kettle: Can be used over an open fire without burning your food. This makes cooking much easier.

Blanket: Made of wool and good for keeping warm on bitter cold winter nights. White blankets are especially popular as they can be worn as camouflage in the winter.

Pistol: The pistol is less powerful and accurate than a rifle but it is much cheaper.

Brandy: Very popular trade item, but beware—many others have become addicted to this evil potion.

Shirts, shoes: Why make these items when you can buy them so cheaply?

Needles, thread, buttons: Useful for fashioning hides or pelts into clothing.

Coloured beads: Sewn onto clothing for decoration. Becoming more popular than traditional quills or shells.

When trading was finished, the First Nations traders packed their purchases into their canoes and headed home. Company employees loaded the furs onto boats and shipped them to England via Hudson Bay. The trading posts then settled back into their regular routine for another year.