

## Lesson 2.3C

# The North West Company: Getting Out There

### The North West Company

#### Origins of The North West Company

At one time the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) enjoyed a virtual **monopoly** on the fur trade. Other companies existed but they were small, independent, and disorganized, offering little competition to the HBC.

In 1789 several of these small companies joined together to form the **North West Company (NWC)**. The NWC became a major competitor in the fur trade.

#### Who's Who in the NWC

The NWC consisted of three main groups: the **Wintering Partners**, the **Montreal Partners**, and the **voyageurs**.

The Wintering Partners lived in the west. They traded with First Nations people for furs, then delivered those furs to Fort William.

The Montreal Partners bought the furs and provided the Wintering Partners with more goods and supplies for the next season.

The voyageurs were the go-betweens in the NWC fur trade. They travelled from Montreal with the goods and supplies for the Wintering Partners and returned with the furs.

Refer to this illustration as you read about the voyageurs and their canoes.

### Voyageur Canoe

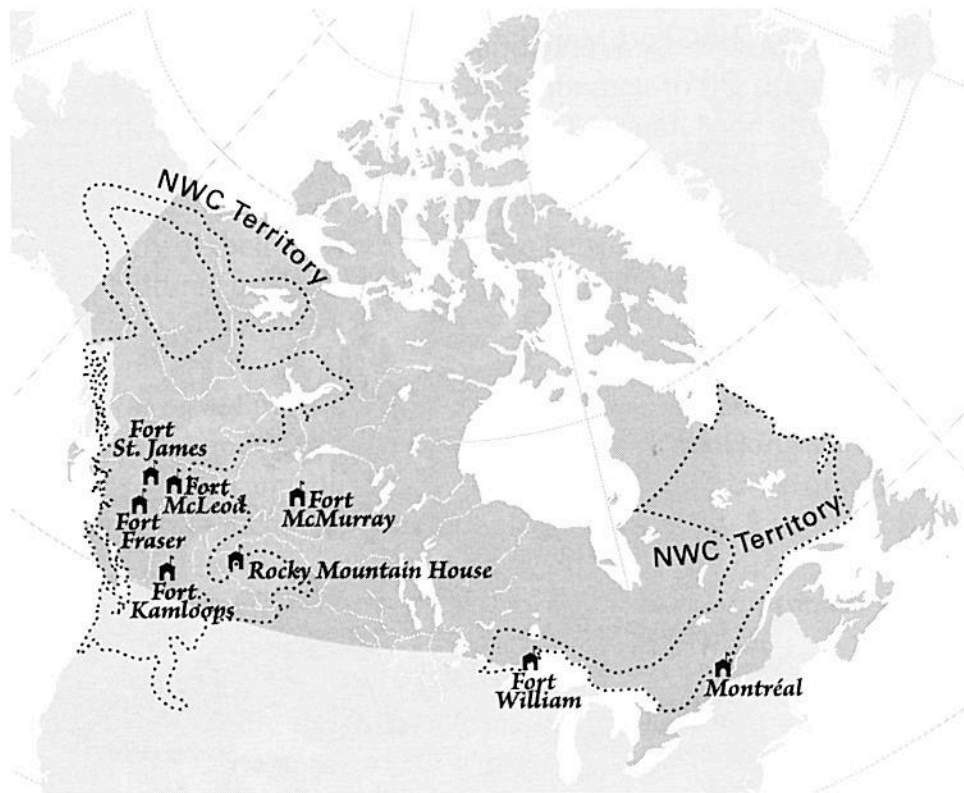


- The **avant** sat in the bow (front) of the canoe and set the strokes. He was the captain of the canoe.
- The **milieux** were the middle paddlers.
- The **chanteur** led the men in song as they paddled. He was paid extra wages for his ability to sing.
- The **gouvernail** sat at the stern (rear) of the canoe and steered it. This was an important job, as he was responsible for the safety of the men and the canoe.
- The **bourgeois** (middle of the boat, black clothes, mutton chops) was the NWC agent on the canoe. He did not paddle.

- This canoe is called a **canot de maître**. It was about 10–11 metres long, about 1.5 metres wide, used 12 paddlers, and could carry 4000 kilograms.
- Violent rapids made river travel dangerous. Where the danger was too great, the voyageurs would set ashore and carry the canoe and supplies on land to the next safe spot on the river. This was called a **portage**.

### Major NWC Posts c.1820

NWC Fort Map



Most of the Hudson's Bay Company's posts were on or near Hudson Bay. The NWC built their posts throughout the interior instead. This was good for business because these posts were closer to the areas inhabited by First Nations people.

**Rocky Mountain House** was a North West Company trading post on the North Saskatchewan River. Rocky Mountain House wasn't always a resounding success. It moved locations several times and was occasionally closed due to lack of supplies.



**Fort William**, situated on the north shore of Lake Superior, was a major post. From this location, trade goods from Montreal could be transported by canoe to outlying posts. Pelts brought from these posts were taken back to Fort William and shipped to Montreal.

### Rivalry with the HBC

Eventually the Hudson's Bay Company set up its own inland posts to compete with the North West Company. By the early 1800s, both companies had established rival fur-trading posts throughout the interior of the country.

#### HBC Fort Map



In 1821 the two rivals put aside their differences and united under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company. The new company took over all the trading posts in the west.