

Thinking Historically

- HS** Establishing **historical significance**
- E** Using **primary-source evidence**
- C&C** Identifying **continuity and change**
- C-C** Analyzing **cause and consequence**
- HP** Taking a **historical perspective**
- ED** Considering the **ethical dimensions** of history

THE RISE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

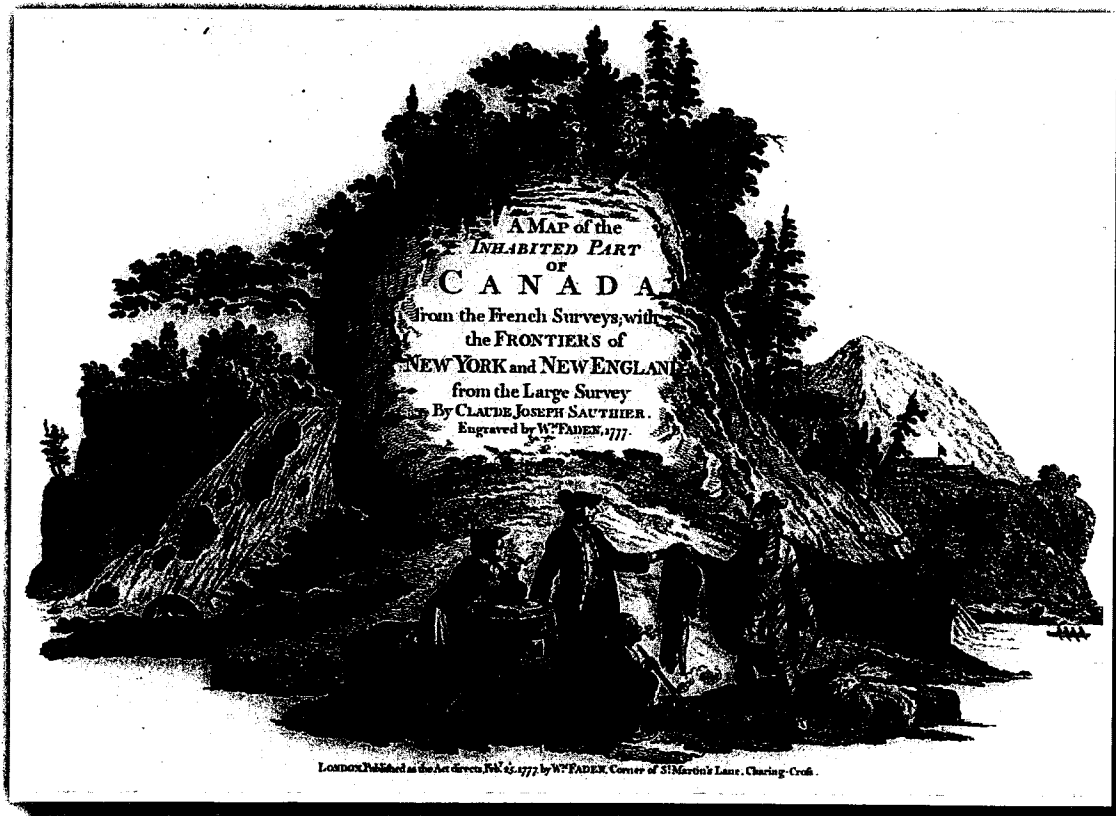
THE MIGHTY BEAVER

As you learned in Chapter 2, in the early seventeenth century, the French had established a colony—Nouvelle-France—along the shores of the St. Lawrence River. At the same time, the British had started colonizing Atlantic Canada. The Northwest—the vast area to the north and west of Lake Superior—was largely unknown to Europeans. But after 1670, the French began to travel west more frequently. The fur trade had begun to exhaust the supply of furs around the eastern Great Lakes. To supply and profit from the continued demand for furs, the French began building more fur-trade forts farther west along the St. Lawrence River and around the Great Lakes.

It was not long before the British saw how much money was being made in the fur trade. Both British and French were soon sending shiploads of beaver pelts back to Europe. The competition between Britain and France—already active in Europe and the colonies—became fierce. Both countries wanted to control North America and its resources.

Figure 3-3 This illustration is part of a 1777 map of Canada. Examine the details of the illustration closely. How is the fur trade portrayed? How does the title of the map show that it was drawn from a European point of view?

C&C The French were the first to push inland and actively seek relationships with First Nations in the Northwest. Based on what you read in Chapter 2 about the early history of the fur trade, what consequences do you think French expansion into the Northwest had on First Nations?



THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY'S BEGINNINGS

In 1654, Médard Chouart Des Groseilliers and his brother-in-law Pierre Esprit-Radisson made a trip from Québec to the interior. The two *coureurs de bois* built a trading post on Chequamegon Bay on Lake Superior. It was the first European post at the site. First Nations people in the area told them of the vast fur-trading regions to the north and west, around Hudson Bay, or Hudson's Bay, as it was sometimes called at the time.

In 1659, Radisson and Groseilliers returned to Montréal. Along with thousands of furs, they had a plan to set up a trading post on Hudson Bay, which would reduce the cost of transporting furs from the Northwest to Europe. They hoped the French king would sponsor their scheme. However, Radisson and Groseilliers did not receive the warm welcome they expected. Because they had been trading without licences, their furs were confiscated, Groseilliers was put in jail, and they were both fined for breaking the law.

RADISSON AND GROSEILLIERS LOOK TO ENGLAND FOR HELP

Having received no support from the powers of Nouvelle-France, Radisson and Groseilliers decided to try their idea with British authorities. In 1665, the *coureurs de bois* presented their plan to the court of King Charles II.

King Charles II agreed to support their quest for furs. The king's cousin, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, helped organize finances for the journey. After three years of preparation in England, Radisson and Groseilliers were ready. The British had acquired two ships, the *Nonsuch* and the *Eaglet*, for the journey. Both ships set sail from England in June 1668. The *Eaglet*, carrying Radisson, was forced to turn back off the coast of Ireland. The *Nonsuch* continued on its way, reaching the southern shore of James Bay. There Groseilliers and his men named the Rupert River after their main sponsor, Prince Rupert. After a successful trading expedition over the winter of 1668–1669, the *Nonsuch* returned to England.

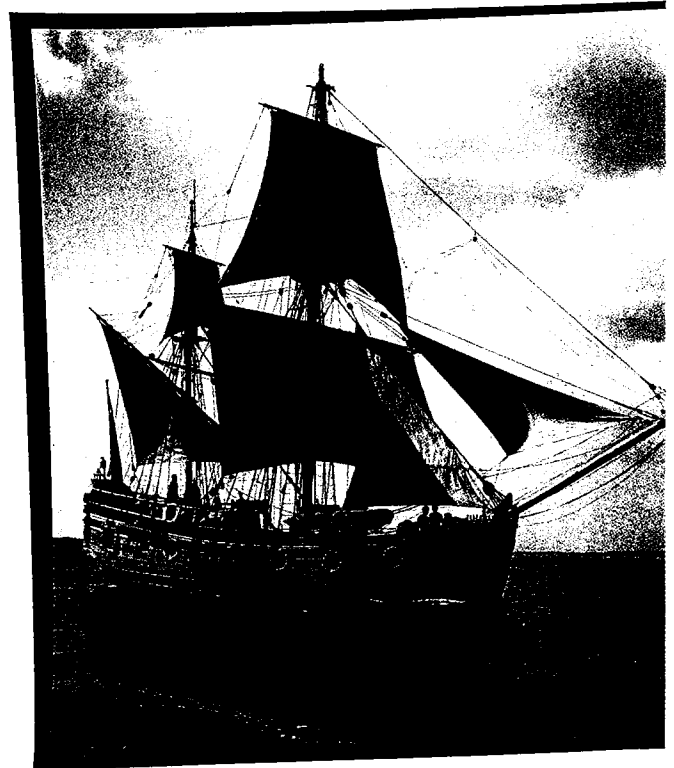
Pleased with the expedition's success, the king granted a charter to Prince Rupert and his partners on May 2, 1670. In the charter, the "Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay," better known as the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), were given a monopoly over the fur trade in all the land whose rivers drained into Hudson Bay. The monopoly also gave the company wide legal and trading powers over the area, as well as complete administrative and judicial control.

HP Imagine you are a member of the French Royal Court at the time of the founding of the Hudson's Bay Company and that you have the task of writing a letter to the King of France describing the founding of the HBC. How might you characterize the role played by Radisson and Groseilliers?

...SHAPING CANADA TODAY...

To celebrate its 300th anniversary in 1970, the Hudson's Bay Company commissioned the construction of a replica of the *Nonsuch* to commemorate the voyage that led to the founding of the HBC and the opening of the West to commerce. The ship was the company's gift to the Province of Manitoba for its 100th anniversary.

Figure 3-4 This replica of the *Nonsuch* was created by Jim Flynn in 1970. Today the replica can be found in the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg.



WEB CONNECTIONS

Research more about the history of the Hudson's Bay Company by visiting the *Shaping Canada* web site and following the links.




Let's Discuss

What problems do you think might arise from the way the Hudson's Bay Company was to be governed? Would these kinds of problems exist today?

RUPERT'S LAND

In its charter, the HBC was granted a monopoly over lands in the Hudson Bay drainage area. In modern geographical terms, Rupert's Land included northern Québec and Ontario, all of Manitoba, most of Saskatchewan and southern Alberta, a portion of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and parts of Minnesota and North Dakota in the United States.

 What problems can you foresee as consequences of this land grant?

THE COMPANY OF ADVENTURERS GETS STARTED

In the seventeenth century, British businesses were in the process of expanding around the world. The British East India Company had been chartered in 1600 to gather the riches of India. Prince Rupert and his Company of Adventurers saw North America as another potential source of wealth.

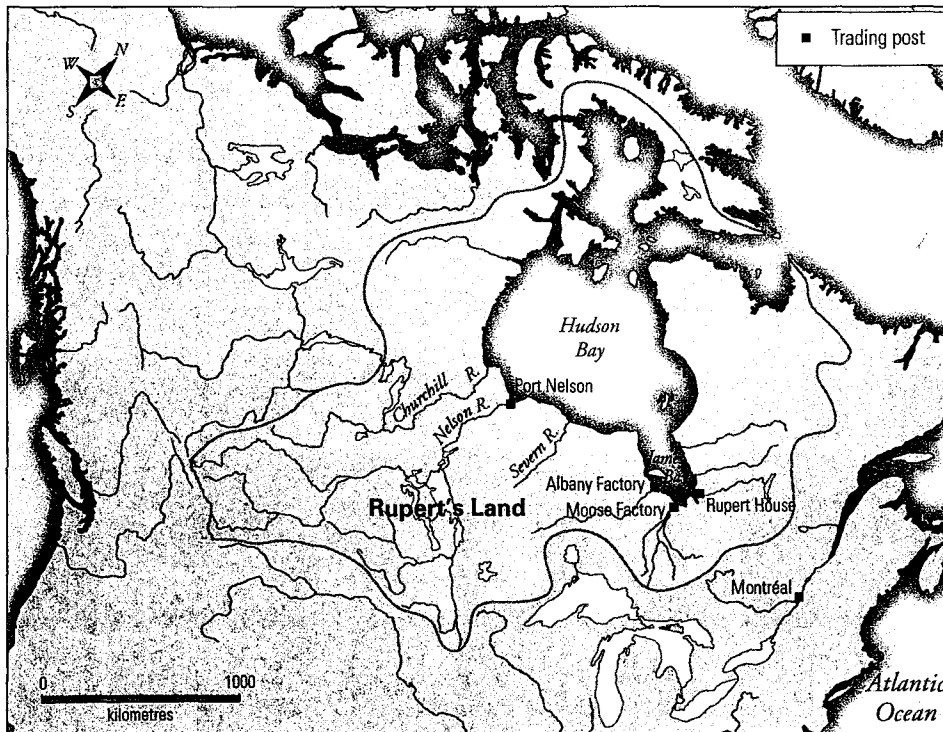
The HBC appointed a governor and committee to organize fur auctions, order trade goods, hire men, and make shipping arrangements. By 1685, trading forts were operating at Rupert River, Moose Factory, Albany Factory, and Port Nelson. Each fort or post was commanded by a chief factor (head trader) and his council of officers. However, the London-based governor and committee set the basic policies for Rupert's Land. They based their decisions on annual reports, post journals, and account books supplied by the officers stationed on Hudson Bay.

Although the HBC was headquartered in London, the real *adventurers*

of the company were its employees, the **Baymen**. Most of the early HBC employees were indentured servants. Indentured servants were labourers who agreed to work for the company for a period of time, usually seven to nine years. In exchange, they received food, drink, clothing, lodging, and their transportation to the fur-rich area of Hudson Bay. Many Baymen were from the Orkney Islands off the coast of Scotland. The HBC considered men from Orkney to be well suited for life on Hudson Bay. Orkney Islanders were familiar with a harsh climate, had excellent boat-handling skills, and were hard workers.

Figure 3-5 Rupert's Land, 1685

The territory granted to the HBC was 3.9 million square kilometres, the equivalent of about 40 percent of modern-day Canada. The area became known as Rupert's Land.



The Boy Kelsey

Henry Kelsey, often called the Boy Kelsey, was born in England around 1667. Historians know little about his youth, except that he was an orphan who spent his childhood on the streets of London. In his early teens, he was apprenticed to the Hudson's Bay Company as a cabin boy on ships that carried supplies to Hudson Bay. He then spent the next forty years working for the HBC.

In 1684, Kelsey stopped his Atlantic crossings and remained at York Factory. There he worked alongside experienced Baymen such as Groseilliers and Radisson. He liked and respected First Nations ways of life and learned to speak Ininew (Cree). Some reports say he learned Nakota (Assiniboine) as well.

HBC officials noticed Kelsey's adventurous spirit and First Nations connections. In 1688, the HBC sent Kelsey and a First Nations guide to explore and make trading contacts with Dene communities north of the Churchill River. In 1690, the HBC decided to send Kelsey south to expand contacts with the Ininew. The HBC also hoped Kelsey could convince the A'aninin (Gros Ventres) and southern Nakota communities to travel north to the HBC forts.

Although Kelsey's exact route is unknown, he left York Factory in June 1690 and, with the help of his First Nations guides, travelled down the Hayes and Saskatchewan Rivers. Records suggest that he wintered near what is now The Pas, Manitoba. He then followed the Red Deer River south and finally struck out on foot across the prairies. He may have gone as far as the Touchwood Hills in southern Saskatchewan. He lived among various First Nations of the region for two years before returning to York Factory in 1692.

To his death in 1724, Kelsey claimed that he had never been given due credit for his explorations. This claim was likely true because there was no concrete record of his journeys until a 1749 parliamentary report in England. It was not until 1926 that his journal was discovered in Ireland. *The Kelsey Papers*, a single,



Figure 3-6 *Kelsey Sees the Buffalo*, by C. W. Jefferys, 1927. Henry Kelsey is believed to be the first European to have met First Nations people of the Great Plains in 1690.

paperbound volume dated 1693, is still surrounded by mystery. Some historians do not believe it was really written by Kelsey. The journal, which opens with some curious, rhyming free verse, tells of his various travels, including some of the first recorded European sightings of musk-ox, grizzly bear, and the great herds of North American bison.

EXPLORATIONS

1. Take a historical perspective to consider why Kelsey might have joined the HBC. What would the company have offered him? **HP**
2. Historical records suggest that Kelsey helped other HBC employees learn First Nations languages. A copy of his unpublished Ininew language dictionary is in the British **E**

Library. What does this evidence tell us about Kelsey's view of First Nations and their role in the fur trade?

3. Locate a copy of the *The Kelsey Papers* to research Kelsey's descriptions of First Nations and their ways of life. What conclusions can you draw about Kelsey from these descriptions? **E**

ON THE SHORES OF HUDSON BAY

As detailed in the HBC charter, the purposes of the company were to be “for the Discovery of a new Passage into the South Sea, and for the finding some Trade for Furs, Minerals, and other considerable Commodities.” In exchange for these duties, the charter granted the Adventurers

the sole Trade and Commerce of all those Seas, Streights, Bays, Rivers, Lakes, Creeks, and Sounds . . . that lie within the entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudson’s Streights, together with all the Lands, Countries and Territories, upon the Coasts and Confines of the Seas, Streights, Bays, Lakes, Rivers, Creeks and Sounds . . . which are not now actually possessed by any of our Subjects, or by the Subjects of any other Christian Prince or State.

The territory of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s monopoly was enormous, at least in theory. In reality, the HBC controlled only a small area near Hudson Bay. The British fur-trade system depended on First Nations people bringing furs to the forts along the Bay. As long as the fur supply was steady, the company saw little need to expand inland. In contrast, French fur traders were more willing to travel to their First Nations trading partners, bringing the furs back to French posts themselves.

For many years, the HBC confined its trading to the posts along the Bay. The Company’s mission to seek the Northwest Passage, if not forgotten along the way, was definitely secondary to the highly profitable fur trade.

Before long, a protocol developed with the HBC’s First Nations trading partners, especially the Ininimowin (Swampy Cree), whose territory was near many HBC posts. Annual trading sessions began with the passing of a ceremonial pipe, which the Ininimowin left at the fort to indicate they would return the following year. A ritual exchange of gifts took place, and then the traders began their negotiations. The Ininimowin were astute traders: guns were forged to their specifications, wares were made lighter for transport, and tobacco was prepared and packaged as instructed.

First Nations peoples across the continent had long had their own network of trading relationships. The new relationship with the Europeans initially fit into traditional trading patterns. Both Europeans and First Nations people profited during the early years of the trade. First Nations people received new trade goods, such as metal tools, and Europeans received furs and knowledge and technology to help them live and travel in North America’s unfamiliar environment.

Figure 3-7 *Trading Ceremony at York Factory, 1780s*, by Adam Sherriff Scott, c. 1954. What impression of the trading ceremony does this painting give you? How does this painting compare to the description of the ceremony in the second last paragraph on this page?



RECALL . . . REFLECT . . . RESPOND

1. Take the historical perspective of an HBC employee. Why would you take part in First Nations’ styles of trading ceremonies?

HP

2. What elements of the HBC’s charter do you predict had a significant role in shaping the years that followed? Why?

HS