

natural resource something in nature, such as a plant, animal, mineral, water, air, and wind

The Start of the Fur Trade and Beyond

As more and more Europeans explored Canada, they became interested in the **natural resources** of the land. One of the resources was fur-bearing animals. The thick, rich fur of the beaver was especially popular in Europe for making clothing and hats. First Nations peoples traded fur for European goods, such as metal tools. By 1600, a fur trade had begun in eastern Canada. European tools changed the daily life of First Nations peoples and Inuit. Over time, as the fur trade expanded into western Canada, more and more First Nations peoples came into contact with Europeans. You will learn in later chapters the need to develop agreements between First Nations and newcomers.

Voices of Canada

Working Together


It is said, that when God made this world he made many different things, that is why the newcomers and First Nations people must help each other and work together.

Louis Dhitheda, Black Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan

Thinking It Through

Key Ideas

1. Review the table on page 17 that compares the traditional Inuit and Haida ways of life. What were the similarities and differences between the two ways of life? Explain.
2. Choose a group of First Nations people or Inuit that you have read about on pages 13 to 18. Represent through a song, poem,

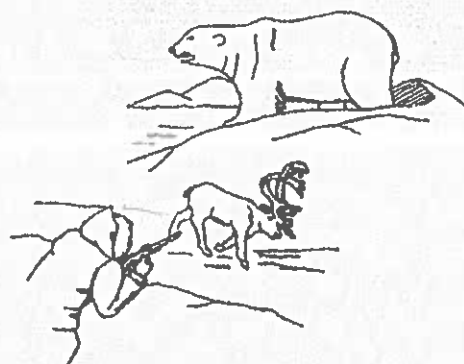
or dance two important aspects of their culture and traditional way of life. 

Thinking Critically

3. What was the most significant change to First Nations peoples or Inuit with the arrival of the Europeans?

The Fur Industry

The Canadian fur industry includes the sale and processing of animal pelts. The pelts are the furry outer skins of the animals. About 60% of the total Canadian sales in this industry are the result of trapping animals, while the other 40% comes from farm-bred animals. Approximately 80,000 to 100,000 Canadians are involved in trapping in Canada; these people are mostly males. Many of them are native peoples, many hold full or part-time jobs and are involved in trapping in off-duty hours. Commercial trapping is largely a seasonal activity because of the prime winter conditions of the animal's fur. Canadian wild furs are noted for their high quality. Fur is one of the oldest known forms of clothing. It is North America's oldest and most historically significant industry.



Approximately three to five million animals are trapped annually for their furs. The most commonly trapped species are beaver, coyote, fox, marten, muskrat and squirrel. Because of the concern for the suffering of these wild animals, there is a lot of opposition to this industry. Trappers and others in the industry claim that it is economically important to Canadians and that it supports the traditional native way of life.

The Fur Trade

Before Europeans came to North America, trapping animals for food and clothing was a way of life for the native peoples. It was also a system of bartering in which furs were traded for other articles. The development of the fur trade greatly altered the native economy and furs became the main currency.

The fur trade was essentially a system of exchange of furs for articles which the natives could not obtain by any other means. With the coming of the Europeans, it became a means by which the natives could obtain European goods. An example of how the beaver pelt was used as currency can be seen below:

14 pelts	=	1 gun
1 pelt	=	1 hatchet
1 pelt	=	1 ice chisel
1 pelt	=	1 meter of cloth
1 pelt	=	4 knives
1.5 pelts	=	1 kettle
1.25 pelts	=	1 roll of string
1 pelt	=	2.2 kg gunpowder

The fishermen from Europe also exchanged fresh meat for the furs.

These furs were then sold in Europe for very high profits. During the sixteenth century the demand for wide-brimmed felt hats resulted in the soaring of the demand for beaver pelts. Early in the seventeenth century, French traders built trading posts in Acadia and along the St. Lawrence River and formed the **Northwest Company**. When the Dutch built trading posts along the Hudson River, a rivalry began between the two routes which continued until the English gained control over the whole area.

The cooperation of the native peoples was a key factor in the fur trade. They trapped the furs and carried them by canoe to the trading posts. The profits made by the French allowed them to send hundreds of settlers to New France to farm the land. Many of these settlers disappeared into the woods instead and remained for years to trade with the natives. Many of them took native wives and gained valuable skills to enable them to adapt to wilderness life. They became known as the **coureurs de bois**.

A company known as the **Hudson's Bay Company** was formed in 1670, to collect pelts in the area of North America called **Rupert's Land**. It began to build trading posts around the shores of Hudson's Bay. This company was in direct rivalry with the French trappers. The French merchants hired hundreds of **voyageurs** who were paid to travel to the natives, gather the pelts and bring them back to Montreal.

Between 1715 and 1763, the fur trade expanded greatly. Several fur traders were granted the right to trade in the Northwest and in return they explored the area and maintained good relations with the natives. The Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company continued and resulted in the opening of the Canadian West to settlers, farmers and fur traders. It led to violence in 1816, when settlers clashed with each other over allegiance to the two companies. In 1821, the two companies came together under the Hudson's Bay Company and in 1870, the control over the area was sold to the Dominion of Canada.

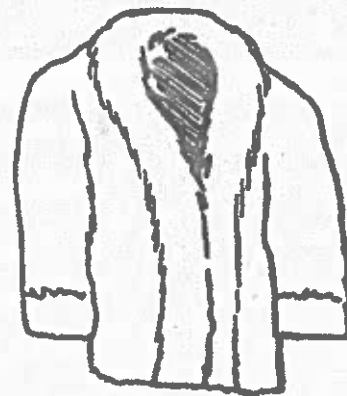
The fur trade played a very important role in the creation of Canada. It led to the exploration of much of the continent and built a strong connection between the west and the east through the system of waterways. It encouraged good relations between the Europeans and natives and resulted in intermarriage between the two groups. This further helped to blend the native and European cultures.

The fur industry in Canada today is vastly different from what it was in the days of the early settlers. Trappers in Canada must pass a mandatory course in which they learn new humane ways of trapping wild animals. Meat not used for food is returned to the wild to help other animals survive the long winter months. The fur industry expands beyond Canadian borders and is a commodity which is traded on the global market. The industry is involved in a variety of business activities which generate economic benefits to all sectors of the economy. Specialized equipment is needed as well as tracking and transportation industries. Insurance and accounting firms also benefit from the fur industry.

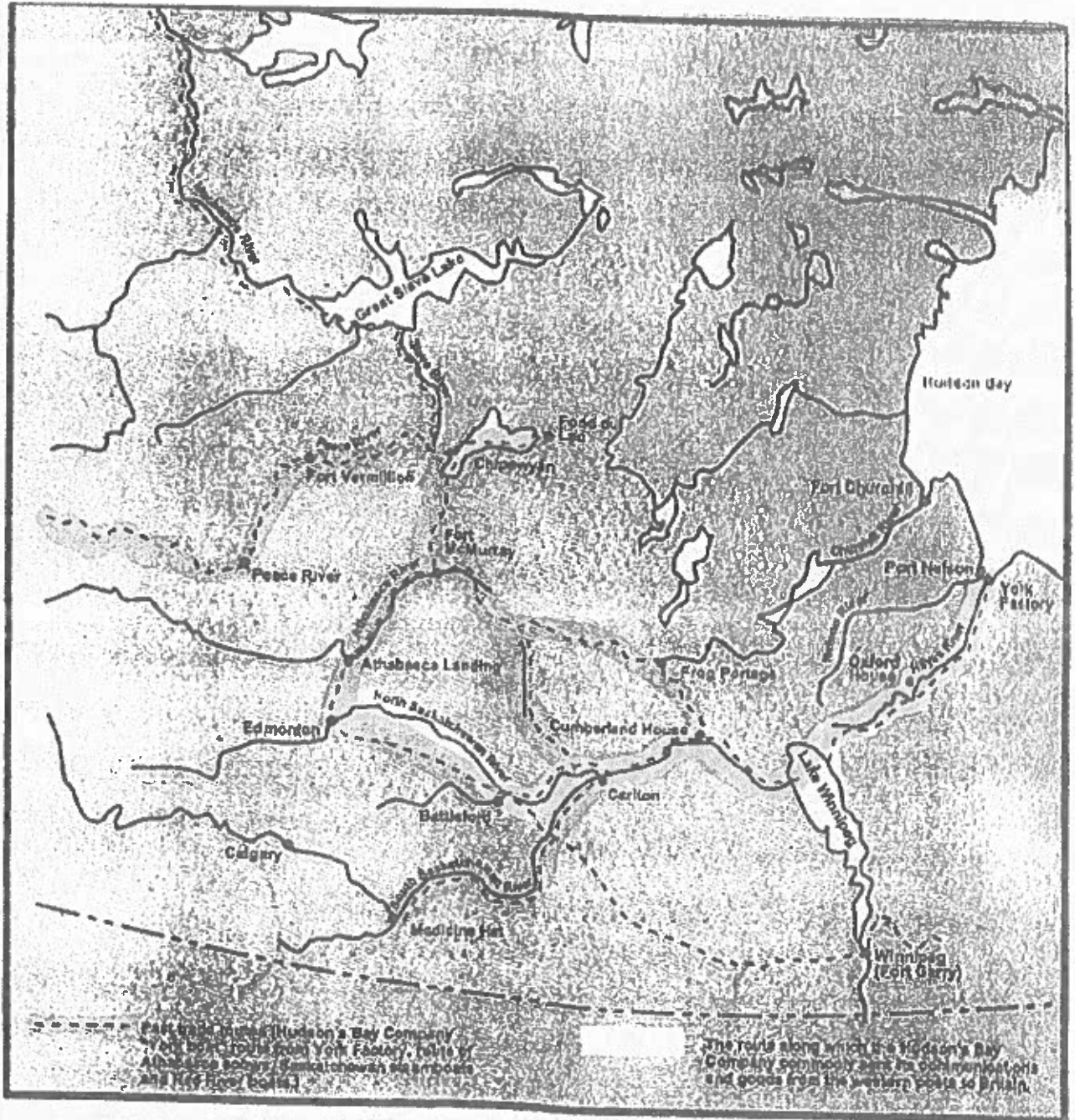
How Fur is Used to Make Clothing

Before an article of clothing made from fur reaches the department or specialty store shelves, it goes through numerous stages. Pelts are processed (**tanned**) at plants before being sent to designers to craft them into garments. Fur garments are the result of meticulous craftsmanship. They are not made by machinery in automated plants. The fur trade is still characterized as a family-run business. Hours of skilled work by hand are required.

Once a design has been created the pelt must be cut. Then it is wetted, stretched and tacked on a special table called a **blocking table**. This enables the **furrier** (a person who works with fur) to shape and soften the pelts. Finally, the pelts are sewn together. In all it takes about one year from the time the furs are harvested until the finished garment is ready for market.

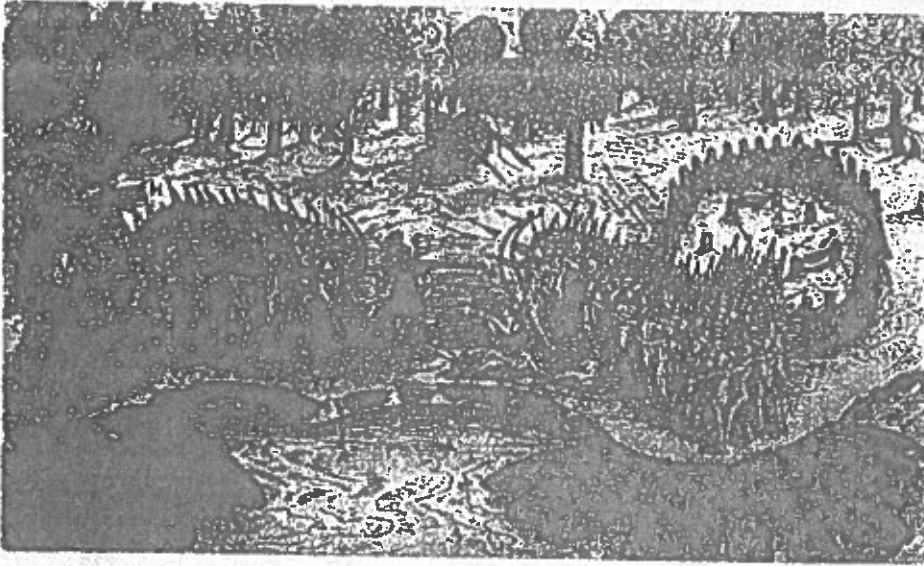


Historical Trade Routes



Allies to Support the Fur Trade

Samuel de Champlain, who had been sent by the king of France to set up trading posts in the region, recognized that good relationships with the First Nations could be to his advantage. He spent much of



▲ *Defaite des Yroquois au Lac de Champlain, 1609* is a coloured version of Champlain's own drawing of the battle with the Haudenosaunee. Why might Champlain choose to illustrate this moment?

the summer of 1604 in Tadoussac, where he formed alliances with the Algonquin, Montagnais, and Maliseet Nations.

Champlain and his First Nations allies made a deal: the First Nations would trade only with the French,

and in return the French would support them against their traditional enemies, the Haudenosaunee. In 1609, Champlain and his soldiers joined the Algonquin in a raid against the Haudenosaunee.

The Beaver Wars

Although Champlain's alliances had secured sources of fur for the French, conflict increased in the region. The Dutch and British had also entered the fur trade and were establishing colonies in what is now New York State. The Haudenosaunee and other First Nations competed with each other to secure hunting grounds and trade contacts. Beaver were being overhunted, and they became scarce. More fighting began over territories where beaver could still be found. Decades of fighting followed, and many people died. Some First Nations were forced out of their traditional territories. Others were almost completely destroyed.