History of the American Fur Trade

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**The Fur Trade, What is it and why is it important?**

The North American Fur Trade was a period of change economically and culture wise. During this period countries from the west (England and tribes from around Canada, Wisconsin, Michigan), and the surrounding areas traveled to each other to trade furs such as beaver, otter, beaver, and a small variety of other animals. The fur trade was important because it created both good and bad things in history that everyone learned from and it created what we now call North America. In the early starting of the trading period, the French had men coming over to America to report on the Native Americans and how trading would help their economy. Including France, many countries and their kings, explorers, incorporations, and craft smiths influenced the fur trade with greed and connections that caused territorial problems especially within Northern Wisconsin.

**French Explorers Venture to Explore and Research the North Shore**

Even in the early 1600’s the French became interested in the Northern Shore. Around 1618 the famous explorer Samuel de Champlain had Étienne Brûlé report to him about what laid in the Northern Shore. Étienne Brûlé was also a famous explorer known to be the first person from Europe to explore into what we now know as Canada, but in this instance he went to where we now call Lake Huron.

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1 The king of France at the time was King Louis XIV

2 Many explorers including Nicolas Perrot, Toussaint Boudry, Radission, Groseilliers, and many other came to the northern shore on French request.

3 Samuel de Champlain was a French explorer that made from 21 to 29 trips across the Atlantic.
In 1634 Champlain sent another explorer out: Jean Nicolet. Nicolet set out to find a route to the Orient tribe through the Great Lakes. A year later, in 1635, Nicolet returned to Canada with a fleet of Indian ships.

By 1655 the Indian flotilla had been disbanded, but the French still had travelers exploring the “new land”. Two unidentified traders traveled to the West and reported that there was a large amount of “savage” countries in the west. Scientists say that shortly after this in 1656 and 1657 Radission most likely journeyed to what is now Sault Ste. Marie. At the same time Radission and Groseilliers took a trip to the Upper Lakes. In 1660 a group of travelers made it back to France. With them they brought what is nowadays worth over $60,000 worth of furs. Yet another group of explorers set out and returned in 1663 and did not bring back enough to pay for the expedition. This caused a decrease in the expeditions in the years to come.

By 1667 Nicolas Perrot and Toussaint Boudry went out with the flotilla (the Flotilla of 1667) they visited several tribes in Wisconsin, and broke the Ottawa’s monopoly as middlemen. Then in 1668 Potawatomi members sent ships to Montreal to have the men buy and sell goods or act as middlemen for the neighboring tribes.

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5 Jean Nicolet was a French explorer known for finding and exploring Lake Michigan, Green Bay, and many others.
6 Savage was what they called the countries the tribes lived in for they were not “civilized” in their eyes.
7 Pierre-Esprit Radission was a French explorer that went on to create the Hudson Bay Company.
8 Médard Chouart des Groseilliers was a French explorer that went on to create the Hudson Bay Company.
9 Nicolas Perrot was a French explorer known for traveling to the Upper Mississippi Valley.
10 Toussaint Boudry was not really famous for anything.
11 Middleman are people who buy and sell goods.
12 Montreal is a large city in Canada.
The Ceremonies of Peace

Perrot returned from the lake region with reports of friendliness of the tribes in 1670. Jean Talon 13 dispatched Perrot and François Daumont de St. Lusson 14 to carry out the ceremony to celebrate the peace. In October of that year the envoys along with Perrot and François Daumont de St. Lusson made their way west to spend the winter in Green Bay.

The ceremonies evolved around the French making new expansions creating the fur trade era. After the ceremony they would finally proclaim ownership of the country. During the ceremonies there were marches. King Louis XIV and his French soldiers were at the end of the marches. St. Lusson held a sword in his hand and proclaimed “in the name of the Most High, Most Mighty and Most Redoutable Monarch Louis,... Most Christian King of French and Navarre.” 15 Afterward gifts of their new land. The French gave things like knives, clothing, blankets, mirrors, and other gifts. The Indians in return gave furs and pelts in loads to the disposal of the French.

13 Jean Taylor was the intendant of New France
14 François Daumont de St. Lusson was a young nobleman

This 30 page e-book that tells the dates, kings, traveler, tribes, and more including the Fur Trade around the Great Lakes and territorial disputes. This was created for the intent of informational learning, but you have to request to use it for educational or commercial use.
The Forts of Trade

One of the most famous forts of the fur trade is Fort Mackinac. This is also called Fort Mackinaw or Michilimackinac. Fort Mackinac is in the city of Mackinac Island, on Mackinac Island of Michigan. This fort was used as a military post for the British and American forces. It is now a museum open to the public, and is now a popular tourist spot. Fort Mackinac opened in 1782. Fort Mackinac was also used as a trading post where the Indians and traders would meet to trade.

Fort Frontenac was created by Robert Cavelier da la Salle with help of a grant from Louis XIV. This fort was a French trading post to trade with the Indians, which did become a military post too. This is a fort that was built in 1673. Fort Frontenac in now located in Canada. Originally this was in a territory called Cataraqui.

From the King's Eyes

In the early trading history with the French, a group was developed called coureurs de bois directly meaning fur traders or coureur de bois meaning runner of wood, but they were also called bush rangers. This name was given to the people that went to western forests to live with and among the foriens, and trade with their own. The French king did not like or accept these groups at all, in most instances he said that he hated them. Increasing Canada's populations was actually an objective of the king, not the population in the western forests.
Canada’s Population Plan

The King of France wanted to increase the population of people in Canada during the trade with the Indians and New France. The king’s official plan was to demand all trading in Canada be done properly, legally, and supervised in the forts and military bases. To keep the population stable and counted for in the aspect of traders in the area; they tried enforcing licences to the traders.

System of Licences

There were many systems of licences that developed over the trading years by the French. Eventually all of the systems and methods failed for their own reasons. Licences evolved during their time. They were similar to now day hunting licences. One of the problems that they came to face was that they ended up limiting. On May 21, 1696 the king of France declared an end to all fur trade licence, he restored the multiple forts including Mackinac/Michilimackinac, a post on the Joseph River, and Fort Frontenac too.

The Wars and Tragedies

Many wars occurred in result of the fur trade. Some countries almost turned on themselves too. Though the king of France was powerful, the explorers had their own ideas of what they wanted to do with these new opportunities. In the middle of the trade, right before the king of France became so called “territorial” over the Indians land, the brave traders from fort mackinaw that dared to go solo to the trading grounds were
qualified as “trespassers” on the Indian ground. Also The American Fur Company \(^\text{16}\) founded by John Jacob Astor did not like this unorderly way of handling trading on the Indian’s grounds. The men that were caught “trespassing” to the Indian’s grounds to trade faced many consequences including having their trading posts/shops burned, the company's factory workers fled out of fear or were killed, and even things like their homes being destroyed.

**What is the good to the fur trade?**

Yes, there was a lot of bad came from the American fur trade, but many territorial problems of the Indian’s land also known as parts of Canada, Michigan, and Wisconsin caused the land and territories to become what they are today. The fur trade helped the tribes and land in America become more known. The trade also caused the tribes to create peace between the French and other nations that they traded with. During to fur trade the population increased creating expansion and new economic discoveries too.

\(^\text{16}\) The American Fur Company was a fur trading company founded by John Jacob Astor. This company went along to be the most successful trading company and took over companies like the Hudson Bay Co. when they stepped down from trading.
Annotated Bibliography (Secondary Sources)

This video explains how the Europeans interactions with the Indian lands, specifically Canada. It also explains the Métis struggles with the Canadian Government.

This source tells the history on Fort Michilimackinac also known as Fort Mackinac or used to be known as Fort Mackinaw. This website also tells us how the British and French influenced the Great Lakes area. It is intended for research and information purposes.

This book includes the adventures of Sandy MacDonald and his trip to make him the "Sandy MacDonald the King of the Fur Trade". It also shows us maps and photos of their trail, the people they met, and the places they past. This book was created to tell us the history of them,

This source explains the history of the fur trade in 1820, and how Wisconsin was right in the center of all the action at the time. This was written on January 28th of 1923.

This source explains what life as a traveler and trader was like. It also explains how trading worked and what Fort Mackinac is. This article is for informing people about the fur trade and how Fort Mackinac is a great family destination.

Ross, Frank E. Fur Trade of the Great Lakes Region. Minnesota Historical Society. Digital file. This 30 page e-book that tells the dates, kings, traveler, tribes, and more including the Fur Trade around the Great Lakes and territorial disputes. This was created for the intent of informational learning, but you have to request to use it for educational or commercial use.