

**From Fur to Felt Hats: The Hudson's Bay Company and the Consumer Revolution
in Britain, 1670-1730**

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Abstract

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This dissertation seeks to explore the wide reaching effects of the 'Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period' (1680-1750) by examining the Hudson's Bay Company from the perspective of the London metropole. During this period, newly imported and manufactured goods began flooding English markets. For the first time, members of the middling and lower sorts were able to afford those items which had previously been deemed 'luxuries.' One of these luxuries was the beaver felt hat, which had previously been restricted to the wealthy aristocracy and gentry because of its great cost. However, because of the HBC's exports of beaver fur from Rupert's Land making beaver widely available and therefore, less expensive, those outside of the privileged upper sorts were finally able to enjoy this commodity. Thus, the focus here will be on the furs leaving North America, specifically Hudson's Bay, between 1670 and 1730, and consider the subsequent consumption of those furs by the British and European markets. This thesis examines English fashion, social, economic, and political history to understand the Hudson's Bay Company and the Consumer Revolution, and their effects on one another.

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INTRODUCTION

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries experienced a sharp increase in the consumption of goods which British historians have entitled ‘the Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period’ (1680-1750).¹ During the early modern period an increase in long-distance, trans-oceanic shipping brought a number of new foods, textiles, and goods to the English populace.² The expansion of trade spawned not only a consumer revolution but created whole new industries of shipbuilding, warehouse building, docks, shipping, and administration, amongst others. Manufacturing at home was quick to copy newly imported goods in order to stay financially afloat. Political action came in the form of restrictions on certain imported goods as well as increasing tariffs in order to fund the country’s constant military and naval endeavours for this was also an age of war. Eventually, the Consumer Revolution influenced all aspects of British life. From the very rich to the very poor, Britons were increasingly concerned with the consumption of these increasingly popular new goods. It was precisely into this consumerist world that the Hudson’s Bay Company [hereafter referred to as the HBC] was born. Moreover, what follows pays particular attention to these commercial and imperial processes as they played out in Britain and especially London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

As one of the main cities of Europe, London naturally played a large role in the life of contemporary fashions and trends. When new, foreign products began appearing at the London dockyards, they were often quite expensive and rare, meaning that only

¹ The discussion on the Consumer Revolution will continue in greater detail later in this chapter.

² Although The Acts of Union took place in 1707, joining England and Scotland as ‘Great Britain,’ this thesis will continue to use the term ‘England’ to describe the country prior to its union with Scotland.

the wealthiest individuals could afford them. Of course, once these products began to be imported in massive quantities, their prices dropped and they became more widely available to the general public. This was the case for products like tea, sugar, spices, and, also, the beaver felt hat. When the felt hat first appeared in England in the sixteenth century, it was far too expensive and rare for anyone but the very wealthiest of people. Moreover, the felt hat was also expensive because European beaver fur sources were in short supply across Europe due to overharvesting. In the seventeenth century, however, a new source of beaver fur had been discovered in North America. Incorporated under a Royal Charter in 1670, the HBC began annually importing tens of thousands of furs from Rupert's Land to fuel England's demand for beaver pelts. This, in turn, allowed the felt hat to continue growing in popularity across Europe, particularly with the emerging middle class. By the end of the seventeenth century, the fashion for felt hats had become widespread, trickling down from the very wealthy to all but the very poorest individuals. London, therefore, was at the centre of the HBC's fur trade monopoly.

In recent years, the role of the London metropole has been largely neglected by historians in the story of the fur trade. With minimal research specifically on this subject, then, it has been necessary to pool the existing research on the HBC and the Consumer Revolution. By integrating this disparate research, this dissertation hopes to make a modest contribution to both of these subjects. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the effects of the Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period by examining the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade from the London perspective. Due to limits on space, this thesis will focus on a short period, namely the HBC's foundational period (1670-1730). Each of the following chapters is designed to evaluate the HBC's position in the changing global economy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

centuries. By examining the HBC and the actions of its Committee Members, the full effects of the British Consumer Revolution on the fur trade may become better understood.

The Consumer Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought about drastic changes in almost all levels of British society, politics, and economics. After the first wave of foreign goods to reach England was met with excitement and enthusiasm, merchants began importing foreign commodities in exponential quantities. Domestic manufacturing industries also prospered during this period by copying foreign goods and selling domestically produced copies. England was constantly at war throughout the period, and politicians were quick to seize opportunities to raise funds by taxing all of the new goods coming into and being created in the country.³ The continuous war efforts also helped to influence the Consumer Revolution by creating a boom in the labour market, which, in turn, provided individuals with more disposable income that could be spent on these new commodities. The Consumer Revolution, then, was a major process of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as it penetrated into every aspect of British life.

Central to our understanding of those processes is Neil McKendrick's, John Brewer's, and J. H. Plumb's *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*. These scholars explore the economic, political, and social effects of the Consumer Revolution in England. Most importantly, Neil McKendrick considered the effects of the Consumer Revolution on England's economy

³ For a discussion of the relationship between commerce and war in early modern Britain see: John Brewer, *Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689-1815* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1994).

as well as its population. He argues that the consumer boom occurred suddenly and unprecedentedly. He understands the Consumer Revolution as having occurred in the eighteenth century, and, although that does not mean that it began in 1700 or that England was fully in the Industrial Revolution in 1800, he does see a sharp break with the past between Stuart and Gregorian England.⁴ He sees the Consumer Revolution as penetrating far down into the lower classes which resulted in the blurring of class divisions. When lower class individuals are able to dress like their social betters, the noticeable physical differences between individuals disappeared and the ability to recognize social divisions was lost.⁵ What followed were efforts by the upper classes to maintain these distinctions by spending more money. When this approach failed, however, they began distinguishing themselves with more sophisticated materials and the cut of their clothing.⁶ Such developments broadened the marketplace and the range of products (and producers) too.

McKendrick accepts the emulation theory, which assumes that, during this period, consumers of the lower and middling classes desired to become more like their social betters by imitating their behaviour, dress, and purchases. If, for example, a Chinese white porcelain plate became the choice of the aristocracy, the lower sorts would purchase a similar domestically produced plate in a lower grade material because it still resembled the purchase and prestige of the higher class individual. For individuals attempting to achieve upward social mobility, emulation of their social betters was a way to improve their status. Clothing and possessions were one of the most obvious

⁴ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, & J. H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 33.

⁵ McKendrick, Brewer, & Plumb, 53.

⁶ McKendrick, Brewer, & Plumb, 57.

visible manifestations of one's social status.⁷ Emulation, however, was made possible because manufacturers and traders attempting to sell goods in England helped to encourage emulation on the middling and lower classes. One prime example is Josiah Wedgwood's porcelain and pottery business. When English manufacturers finally discovered the method of producing porcelain from the Chinese, the home industry experienced a boom. Individuals like Wedgwood, a porcelain/pottery manufacturer, created a range of different products for every kind of consumer.⁸ If porcelain could only be purchased by the upper classes, then a suitable alternative (such as pottery) would be marketed for everyone else.⁹ The extent of consumerism was so great that it invaded almost every aspect of English society. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb therefore suggest that the Consumer Revolution had significant and visible effects on English society, economy, and upon politics.

Chandra Mukerji builds on the research and the thesis presented by McKendrick and his colleagues in her book, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism*, which explains rising English consumerism by examining the consumption of printed materials and cottons. Mukerji agrees with McKendrick's suggestion that manufacturers were responsible for perpetuating emulation in England by creating a variety of goods for people from different levels of society. These manufacturers did not intentionally create a new social organization of rich and poor purchasing the same things, but rather

⁷ For more information on socially-driven consumption during this period see: Maxine Berg, "New Commodities, Luxuries and their Consumers in Eighteenth Century England," in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, eds., *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 63-86.

⁸ For more information on Josiah Wedgwood see: Howard Coutts, *The Art of Ceramics: European Ceramic Design 1500-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 180-191.

⁹ McKendrick, Brewer, & Plumb, 118.

they were simply looking to expand their markets and increase their profits.¹⁰ Mukerji argues that by the turn of the eighteenth century Britons were ready to cast off the old medieval hierarchy of dress and embrace self-expression rather than social rank through clothes.¹¹ She also agrees that late seventeenth and early eighteenth century consumerism was unprecedented in the sense that consumption was no longer restricted to the social elites and penetrated to a large section of the population, including the labouring poor.¹² However, she does disagree with McKendrick's idea of a sudden and unprecedented Consumer Revolution and suggests that what happened at this time was a more gradual emergence of a consumer culture.¹³ One of the reasons that Mukerji disagrees with the notion of a 'Consumer Revolution' is because this term is most often associated with the 'modern' consuming phenomenon that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. The purpose of her book, she writes, is to understand the materialism/capitalism of the twentieth century by examining forms of materialism which emerged in early modern Europe and have persisted to the present day.¹⁴ One thing that Mukerji stresses historians must do when examining this period of increased consumption is study the cultural changes which took place at the time so that we can understand why these events occurred and not just that they did in fact take place.¹⁵ She notes that although previous historians have made progress in understanding the Consumer Revolution from an economic and political perspective, it is necessary to study the Consumer Revolution as a cultural phenomenon in order to truly understand

¹⁰ Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 22.

¹¹ Mukerji, 257.

¹² Mukerji, 9.

¹³ Mukerji, 245.

¹⁴ Mukerji, 243.

¹⁵ Mukerji, 245.

why this change occurred. Thus, she concludes that a materialistic culture emerged in England which can be dated to the early modern period, prior to the advent of industrialization.

Another important contribution to the Consumer Revolution debate is offered by Lorna Weatherill. Her book, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain and 1660-1760*, continues the recent debate on consumerism and challenges historians to re-evaluate some of the widely accepted theories about the subject, such as emulation. Weatherill disagrees with the emulation theory because, she argues, it is too simple a theory to apply to such a complex period in history and it is inappropriate, therefore, for historians to smother the potential of this period with a blanket term like ‘emulation.’¹⁶ Furthermore, since the reasons for people wanting to own specific items varied from person to person, it is wrong for historians to label every type of consumption in this period as ‘emulative.’¹⁷ In other words, more lay behind the revolutionary processes of Augustan consumerism than merely the desire to buy goods. Moreover, she writes that there is little supporting evidence for a social hierarchy of purchasing which McKendrick has suggested, with the aristocracy and gentry being the first to own the new goods pouring into the markets, and the middling and lower classes quickly following suit. The evidence she examines, mainly probate papers (post-mortem inventories of a person’s goods), suggests that the first people to own these new goods were not the aristocracy, but were, in fact, the middling merchants and craftsmen who supplied and made these goods. Moreover, one of Weatherill’s main reasons for studying the Consumer Revolution is to challenge previous historians who have only

¹⁶ Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988), 196.

¹⁷ Weatherill, 200.

studied the Consumer Revolution as an inevitable precursor to more monumental society-changing processes to come, such as the Industrial Revolution. Instead, Weatherill suggests that the Consumer Revolution increased industrialization in England and helped precipitate the Industrial Revolution. When newly imported foreign trade goods began flooding English markets, merchants and craftsmen responded by copying these designs and materials so that they could be produced in England.¹⁸ This determination to expand domestic industries in the face of foreign competition was a reason that England was able to enter into the industrialized and mechanized era. If not for this competition and the need to produce goods faster and cheaper than the competition, England would not have entered into the Industrial era when it did.¹⁹

Carole Shammas attempts to examine the Consumer Revolution with a new, objective perspective in her book, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America*. She disagrees with previous historians' understandings of the Consumer Revolution either as negative because individuals were no longer capable of self-sustenance and became addicted to consumerism, or as positive because the new commodities and the emerging consumerism can be seen as a sign of societal advancement.²⁰ Instead, Shammas argues that the Consumer Revolution cannot simply be seen in terms of 'good' or 'bad' because consumption did not affect everyone in the same way. She also disagrees with McKendrick's thesis that the Consumer Revolution facilitated a sudden break with the past. Shammas argues that this did not happen as suddenly as McKendrick implied, but rather it built up gradually from the mid-sixteenth

¹⁸ Weatherill, 16.

¹⁹ For more information on the Industrial Revolution see: Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Emma Griffin, *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁰ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.

century when newly imported foreign goods began steadily working their way from the top of the social scale to the bottom.²¹ Shammaas does, however, support the argument that the Consumer Revolution really did penetrate all the way down the social ranks. She writes that consumption was experienced by a broad spectrum of individuals, some of whom were malnourished and underprivileged yet still wore newly imported fabrics and drank tea with sugar.²² Consumption, then, was not only for the upper and middling sorts, but for the lower sorts who, by sacrificing certain needs or comforts, were able to participate in the Consumer Revolution. In addition to this, Shammaas also argues that consumption cannot be seen in purely economic terms. Historians, she suggests, must examine individuals as they interacted with others, their family social relations, and the changing nature of English society and the English household.²³ Through this kind of work historians have come to understand why the Consumer Revolution occurred in the late seventeenth century.²⁴

Another one of the major contributions to discussions of the Consumer Revolution is John Brewer's and Roy Porter's *Consumption and the World of Goods*. This collection of essays provides contributions from eminent historians of the Consumer Revolution – such as Lorna Weatherill and Carole Shammaas. These essays cover a wide variety of consumption-related subjects including the consumption of specific items, the gendered nature of consumption, how to define consumption, the emulation theory, consumption as a cultural (and culture-changing) activity, and the

²¹ Shammaas, 5.

²² Shammaas, 299.

²³ Shammaas, 6.

²⁴ For recent work and new theories on the Industrial Revolution see: Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: an Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

economic aspect of consumption. In his essay, “Understanding Tradition and Modern Patterns of Consumption in 18th Century England: a Character-Action Approach,” contributing author Colin Campbell challenges the theory of emulation by bringing other suggestions to light. Campbell argues that too many assumptions have been made by historians by using misleading terms such as ‘consumer’ and ‘emulation’ to describe individuals in this period. Campbell gives the example of a farmer’s wife who purchased a piece of furniture she had previously seen at a local aristocrat’s house. This purchase does not necessarily imply that the farmer’s wife thereafter sees herself as the aristocrat’s social equal.²⁵ It is important to stress that items may have been purchased for their own sake, and not necessarily with the motivation of emulating the upper classes. Campbell argues that just because behaviour was imitative it does not mean that it was always emulative.²⁶ He also points out the difficulty of examining household inventories because, although they allow for an analysis of items in the house, they do not tell us who in the household purchased an item or why. We cannot, therefore, make assumptions about certain objects in a household without looking for other sources of information such as diaries, correspondence, autobiographies, and novels, which give more insight into contemporary thought about the purchase of certain items.²⁷ Labelling behaviour as ‘emulative’ is therefore extremely difficult and even misleading because it makes assumptions about individuals which may not be true. Incidentally, even if

²⁵ Colin Campbell, “Understanding Tradition and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England: a Character-Action Approach,” in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), 40.

²⁶ Campbell, 40.

²⁷ Campbell, 44.

emulation is a possibility, it does not follow that it is the only reason for making a purchase.²⁸

Other pertinent essays in *Consumption and the World of Goods* worth considering in the context of this thesis discuss a variety of topics which highlight the importing/exporting of goods to and from Britain and the increased consumption of foreign foods such as tea, sugar, and chocolate. John E. Wills, Jr. provides an account of the trading networks that developed between Europe and Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in his essay, “European Consumption and Asian Production in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.” Wills explains that the initial demand for Asian goods came from an interest in foreign goods that were considered exotic. Demand later increased, however, because people developed a genuine appreciation for those goods – especially, tea and cotton.²⁹ When European traders arrived in India, they discovered very sophisticated cloth production industries. These imports, however, eventually crippled English domestic cloth manufacturing, which led to a ban on imports of certain fabrics.³⁰ Wills also describes the increase in tea and coffee consumption in England in the seventeenth century. The first coffee house in England opened in 1652.³¹ By the 1720s, competition for trade had increased so much that it lowered prices on goods, which inadvertently made imported goods more accessible to a wider variety of consumers.³² Despite the fact that Chinese leaders were determined to keep foreigners

²⁸ Campbell, 40.

²⁹ John E. Wills, Jr., “European Consumption and Asian Production in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), 134.

³⁰ Wills, Jr., 138.

³¹ Wills, Jr., 142.

³² Wills, Jr., 143.

out of their country, European trade continued to increase and expand throughout the period.³³

Another great historian of the Consumer Revolution is Maxine Berg who, in *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain*, describes the changing nature of consumption in England and its influence on trade and manufacturing. Berg states that the changes in British industry in the eighteenth century occurred much more slowly than historians previously thought.³⁴ Consumption in England was made possible by two competing sources: the importing of foreign goods and the manufacture of goods at home. In the seventeenth century, a new system of international trade was created linking England to Asia, Africa, the Americas and the many exotic goods they produced.³⁵ In addition to Asian goods such as spices, tea, indigo, and silk, raw materials (such as unrefined sugar, timber, and unprocessed tobacco) were also imported to boost the domestic manufacturing industry which produced goods meant for re-exportation.³⁶ But the British view of the world economy in the eighteenth century was still influenced by mercantilism and the need to protect a country's resources and revenue.³⁷ Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Britain was continuously at war, yet the trading industry prospered and the profits raised from the tariffs on imported goods actually helped fund these wars.³⁸ Berg also discusses the theory of emulation as only being able to explain a portion of eighteenth century

³³ On these themes see: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and for insight into Chinese attitudes to Britain see: James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 84-110.

³⁴ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), 34.

³⁵ Berg, 116.

³⁶ Berg, 117.

³⁷ Berg, 123.

³⁸ Berg, 124.

patterns of consumption. She writes that the new foreign goods flooding the British markets were responsible for influencing the changing tastes of the middle sorts. Yet, despite this, factors shaping emulation came from within the country. Manufacturers seized opportunities to increase profits by making products which commemorated special events like royal weddings. These items were manufactured in a “variety of materials accessible to all levels of society.”³⁹ Thus, the manufacturers themselves influenced at least a portion of the lower and middling classes to emulate their social betters. One company that receives short shrift in discussions of the emerging Consumer Revolution of the late seventeenth century is the Hudson’s Bay Company. Such oversight is inexplicable since the HBC was itself a product of changing attitudes towards trade, commerce, commodities and fashion.

Much of the research on the HBC took place between the 1940s and 1950s, and then again in the 1970s. Since then, the economic history of the HBC and their fur trade has largely fallen out of vogue and is not widely examined by Canadian or British Colonial historians. That being said, much of the historiography on the HBC drawn upon for this thesis is decades old. The most notable historian on the HBC is E. E. Rich, who not only edited many of the published volumes of the HBC’s meeting minutes and letters,⁴⁰ but also published articles and texts on the Company as well.⁴¹ Through these works, Rich provides comprehensive analyses of the HBC, which convey his great

³⁹ Berg, 129.

⁴⁰ See, for example: E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson’s Bay Company 1671-1674*. April 2, 1672. (London: Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1942); E. E. Rich, ed., *Copy-book of letters outward etc.: Begins 29th May, 1680, ends 5th July, 1687* (London: Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1948); and E. E. Rich, ed., *Hudson’s Bay Copy Booke of Letters, Commissions, Instructions Outwards 1688-1696* (London: Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1957).

⁴¹ See: E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson’s Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume One 1670-1763*. London: Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1958; and E. E. Rich, “Pro Pelle Cutem,” in *The Beaver*, (Outfit 289, Spring 1958), 12-15.

respect for, and interest in, the Company. Also included in these works is Rich's extensive research on the early modern fur trade in Europe, the French fur trade in Canada and their encroachment into Rupert's Land, the resulting open Anglo-French conflict and the loss/gain of forts, as well as the kinds of goods used in the trade and the Company's relationships with the Indians of Rupert's Land.⁴²

Equally important for the subject is Murray G. Lawson's, *Fur, a Study in English Mercantilism 1700-1775*, which briefly examines the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat, the burgeoning English hatting industry, as well as the effects this highly demanded consumer good had on England's economic and social systems. Lawson explores the emergence of beaver fur as a popular luxury item, particularly in the construction of felt hats, in early modern Europe during the early seventeenth century. Once beaver was found to be plentiful in North America, the French, Dutch, and English began exploiting this valuable commodity.⁴³ Moreover, London hat fashions changed following the major political events in the country, such as the accession of the Stuarts to the throne.⁴⁴ The fur hat became symbolic of these changing political attitudes and reflective of the political turmoil of the mid seventeenth century in Britain. Lawson concludes that the felt hat was not merely a novel fashion accessory but that it had wider implications on English political and economic culture, in addition to social. Moreover, Lawson also notes that the felt hat not only became popular in England, but across the continent as well. Throughout this period, European economies became appropriate

⁴² For the purpose of this thesis, to maintain consistency with the aforementioned historians as well as reflective of the contemporary language found in the HBC archives, I will be referring to Canada's First Nations as 'Indians.'

⁴³ Murray G. Lawson, *Fur, a Study in English Mercantilism 1700-1775* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), 1.

⁴⁴ Lawson (1943), 4-5.

markets that could absorb the tens of thousands of beaver pelts annually imported by the HBC into London.⁴⁵

In his analysis of the early history of Hudson's Bay and the circumstances which led to the HBC's founding in 1670, Glyndwr Williams notes that the Company faced numerous difficulties when founding settlements and posts in the Bay. Though the English claimed to have been the first to discover Hudson's Bay through Henry Hudson's explorations of the region in 1610, the claims would not be accepted without disputes from rival European competitors, namely the French, who were eager to stake their own claims on the territory. In order to understand the situation of French encroachment into the region, however, Williams' explores the development of the French fur trade in the early seventeenth century as well as the contributions of Radisson and Groseilliers to this trade by the mid-century. These two Frenchmen explored the Great Lakes region in the 1650s, creating trade alliances with local Indians and realizing the labour, money, and time-saving idea of shipping furs directly from Hudson's Bay instead of transporting them overland. Unfortunately, this idea was dismissed by the politicians of Old and New France.⁴⁶ Therefore, in 1665, Radisson and Groseilliers arrived in England with the intention of gaining the Crown's support for fur trading operations in Hudson's Bay.⁴⁷ In 1670, the HBC was incorporated under a Royal Charter and began extensively trading for beaver furs in Rupert's Land.⁴⁸ However, one of the main struggles for the HBC's employees were the continuous French attacks against the

⁴⁵ Lawson (1943), 35.

⁴⁶ Glyndwr Williams, "Highlights in the History of the First Two Hundred Years of the Hudson's Bay Company," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 301, Autumn 1970), 5.

⁴⁷ Williams, 5-6.

⁴⁸ *Charter, Statutes, Orders in Council, Relating to the Hudson's Bay Company* (London: Hudson's Bay Company, 1960), 3-21.

Company's forts – particularly those in 1682, 1686, and 1694-1697.⁴⁹ During these periods of conflict, the Company's posts frequently changed hands between English and French ownership. While, these posts were eventually returned by the French to the Company after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which, among others, saw the French relinquish claims to Rupert's Land, the increased difficulty of open conflict in the Bay cost the Company much strife during its foundational period.

Unfortunately for the HBC, however, the French threat was not the Company's only major source of problems during these early years. As historian K. G. Davies explains, the HBC faced an increasingly difficult financial situation at the end of the seventeenth century as the Committee Members' determination to continue importing furs grew in the face of mounting debts and over-extended credits. The HBC's first dividend was paid in 1684, fourteen years after the Company's inception.⁵⁰ This meant that, for fourteen years, the Committee Members were working without earning returns on their invested shares. Subsequent dividends were paid in 1688, 1689, and 1690. While this period of successive dividends can make the HBC appear fiscally sound and profitable, however, they do not accurately reflect the Company's financial standings, particularly when it is noted that the next dividend would not be issued for another 28 years.⁵¹ Davies explains that the dividends of the late 1680s were not issued because the Company had additional revenue to grant its shareholders. Rather, they were issued because of careless optimism for the Company's future due to growing Bubble

⁴⁹ Williams, 9-13.

⁵⁰ K. G. Davies, "The Years of No Dividend: Finances of the Hudson's Bay Company 1690 to 1718," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 301, Spring 1971), 25.

⁵¹ Davies, 25.

conditions at the time.⁵² When put into perspective, the mid-to-late 1680s were difficult for the HBC because continuous French attacks resulted in a great deal of lost revenue from stolen furs as well as stolen or destroyed provisions, forts, and ships. Thus, the late 1680s ought to have been a time of conservative financial management. Following the 1690 dividend payment, Davies writes that the HBC was forced to live ‘from hand to mouth’ by shuffling money around between numerous credits, loans, and outstanding debts.⁵³ Davies concludes that the Committee’s decision to withhold dividends was meant to keep the Company afloat and was therefore an appropriate reaction to an increasingly difficult financial situation. Moreover, the Committee Members did learn their lesson after these events and withheld their next dividend until 1718 – though it is difficult to understand why they would continue running the Company or why people were willing to invest in the HBC with so little return on their investments.

Moreover, and in its broader context, the historian Elizabeth Mancke helps to reveal the HBC’s place in the history of European expansion and exploration as well as the logistics of the HBC’s long-distance, trans-oceanic trade.⁵⁴ The first Committee Members were very optimistic about potential discoveries of gold and silver in Rupert’s Land for they expected similar results to those encountered by the Spanish in South America in the sixteenth century.⁵⁵ Moreover, there was also the hope of the discovery of the fabled Northwest Passage to China.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, however, many of these dreams and plans for future colonization were abandoned until the nineteenth century

⁵² Davies, 26.

⁵³ Davies, 27.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Mancke, *A Company of Businessmen: The Hudson’s Bay Company and Long-Distance Trade, 1670-1730* (Winnipeg: Rupert’s Land Research Centre, 1988), 1.

⁵⁵ On the Spanish colonial experience and its similarities to the British Empire see: J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁵⁶ Mancke, 10.

once the harshness of the Bay's climate and territory were fully realized. Also included in this analysis of the Company is a focus on the nature of the fur markets throughout the HBC's early history. The HBC was fortunate at its inception to find a number of wealthy buyers in London, who would often purchase several thousand furs at auction for re-export to Europe.⁵⁷ However, after 1690, the London fur markets were oversaturated and the price of beaver fur began to fall.⁵⁸ To compensate for this problem, as well as that of increased financial difficulties, the Committee began exporting their furs to the cities of Europe such as Amsterdam (Netherlands), Hamburg (Germany), and Archangel (Russia).⁵⁹ Studies like these undertaken by Mancke and Williams offer insight into the HBC's participation in the global economy by examining the goods and provisions purchased by the Committee Members for trade. These items were imported from around the world to London from whence they were re-shipped to Rupert's Land. Tobacco, for instance, was initially imported from Virginia but, after receiving complaints from Indian traders about its quality, the HBC began importing Brazilian tobacco from Portugal.⁶⁰ The HBC's participation in the global economy unintentionally allowed the Indians of Rupert's Land to equally participate in that economy, even as active consumers.

More recent work on the HBC concentrates on North America and often centres on the relationship between the Company and the Indigenous people with whom it

⁵⁷ Mancke, 28.

⁵⁸ Mancke, 22.

⁵⁹ Mancke, 32.

⁶⁰ Mancke, 43. For more information on the HBC in an imperial context during the nineteenth century see: John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). Incidentally, this thesis intends to consider concepts similar to Galbraith's, however, it focuses on an earlier period, while the Company was in its infancy.

interacted.⁶¹ In *“Give us Good Measure:” an Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson’s Bay Company before 1763*, Arthur J. Ray & Donald B. Freeman describe the first century of trade relations between the Indians of Rupert’s Land and the HBC. These authors explore the English involvement in the fur trade, their initial experiences with the fur trade in Russia in the middle of the sixteenth century, and the eventual establishment of the HBC and the fur trade in Rupert’s Land. Naturally, Indian involvement in the beaver trade increased dramatically as European markets demanded greater quantities of beaver pelts due to the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat. In the hopes of increasing their trade, therefore, the HBC provided wide varieties of commodities to please their partners in trade. However, the HBC often found it difficult to influence Indian spending habits as these traders were primarily interested in satisfying immediate needs for guns and metal wares above other, and occasionally superfluous, trade goods.⁶² Moreover, the process and terms of trade between the HBC factors and their Indian clientele at the different forts are extensively examined.⁶³ Ray and Freeman conclude that the exchange rates for certain commodities varied between the forts as the circumstances demanded the relaxing of Company rules and regulations. The native traders of Rupert’s Land became crucial in facilitating beaver supplies for a growing market and, in turn, helped create a Consumer Revolution in fur in Europe.

While this thesis concentrates upon metropolitan contexts, the Indian perspective on trade with the HBC is also explored by Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz in their

⁶¹ See for example the essays in Theodore Binneman, Gerhard J. Ens, and R. C. Macleod, eds., *From Rupert’s Land to Canada: Essays in Honour of John E. Foster* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001).

⁶² Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, *“Give us Good Measure”: an Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson’s Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 225.

⁶³ Ray and Freeman, 19.

text, *Partners in Furs: a History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600-1870*.

These authors explore the period between the HBC's early interactions and trade with the Indians of James Bay and the later connections with the Inuit of the North during the nineteenth century. Of course, the HBC's employees were not the first Europeans to begin trading with the Indians of Rupert's Land. Prior to the HBC's arrival, local Indians engaged in trade with French fur traders in the region. In order to prevent future transactions with the French, however, the Company began making treaties with local Indians, hoping these would obligate them to conduct business only with the HBC.⁶⁴ The popularity of this trade was evident even prior to the Company's inception in 1669, when 300 indigenous men, women, and children came to trade with the future HBC employees.⁶⁵ Francis and Morantz also highlight the fact that these Indians were not naïve consumers who simply purchased European goods out of fascination or compulsion. The Indians with whom the HBC interacted demanded high standards of quality and refused to purchase goods if they were of inferior make or too expensive.⁶⁶ Though the Committee Members had prescribed specific 'prices' for each of the trade goods (such as ten beaver pelts for one gun), these prices were not always followed by employees in the Bay. Instead, prices were subject to change based on the varying local circumstances presented at the time – such as poverty.⁶⁷ Trade, therefore, was in a constant state of flux and was dependent on local/regional circumstances in the Bay area as well as the considerable discretion of the forts. Occasionally, to the dismay of the Committee, credits or debts were extended to Indian traders who were unable to pay for

⁶⁴ Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: a History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600-1870* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 23.

⁶⁵ Francis and Morantz, 23.

⁶⁶ Francis and Morantz, 61.

⁶⁷ Francis and Morantz, 48.

their purchases.⁶⁸ Overall, the Indians of James Bay were conscious participants in the fur trade whose tastes largely dictated the HBC's patterns of trade.

Of course, the main objective for the HBC's interactions with the Indian populations of North America was to collect copious quantities of beaver pelts which would be absorbed by the burgeoning felt hat trade in England and Europe of the period. Thus, another main point of focus for this thesis is the history of the fashion of beaver felt hats. Seventeenth century Europe witnessed the rise in popularity of the beaver hat to such levels as to necessitate the importation of large quantities of beaver pelts from across the ocean. In order to understand the reasons behind the HBC's need to import great quantities of furs from Rupert's Land, it is necessary to explore this popular fashion trend of the seventeenth century.

These themes are discussed by Hugh Grant, who examines the growth of the popularity of the beaver felt hat and its changing fashions as well as the rise and fall of the English felt hatting industry. The beaver hat was always of great interest to those desiring to rise above their station in life. For the middling, in particular, the beaver felt hat became a great social necessity.⁶⁹ During this period, hat fashions in Europe were subject to change following major political events. The ostentatious 'Cavalier' style hat, for example, became widespread in England after the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) and was credited to the large, wide-brimmed hats of the successful Swedish army. These hats, however, were subject to their own fashion changes as ornamentation came to include large ostrich feathers and brims became so wide that they needed to be pinned

⁶⁸ Francis and Morantz, 51. For the Committee's letters outlining orders and directions for their employees in the Bay see: E. E. Rich, ed., *Copy-book of Letters Outward etc.: Begins 29th May, 1680, ends 5th July, 1687* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1948); and E. E. Rich, ed., *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters, Commissions, Instructions Outwards 1688-1696* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957).

⁶⁹ Hugh Grant, "Revenge of the Paris Hat: The European Craze for Wearing Headgear Had a Profound Effect on Canadian History," in *The Beaver*, (Vol. 68, Issue 6, November 1988), 37.

up so that the wearer could see.⁷⁰ This trend remained popular until the English Civil War, when the sober mindset of Cromwell was reflected in a smaller, stiff-brimmed, and lightly ornamented hat.⁷¹ Grant also includes a description of how the main hat-making centre in Europe switched from France to England and back again. During the seventeenth century, the English hat-making industry dominated those of its neighbouring countries, particularly France. After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) made Protestantism illegal in France, numerous Huguenot Protestant hat-makers sought refuge in England, virtually crippling the French hat-making industry.⁷² Yet the felt hat's popularity would only last until the 1840s, when the Parisian silk top hat became the hat of choice in England.⁷³ Thus, the 'revenge' noted in the article's title refers to the resurrection of the French (silk) hat-making industry which virtually destroyed its English (felt) counterpart.

Moreover, David Corner examines the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat at the end of the seventeenth century and the resulting expansion of London's felt-hat-making trade. Prior to the hat's manufacture in England, felt hat-making centres were located on the continent in France, the Netherlands, and Spain. While the Tudors could not hinder the popularity of the felt hat, however, they could at least curb the importing of foreign hats by promoting their manufacture within England. Thus, hat-makers from Normandy and Flanders were encouraged to immigrate to England and produce domestic-made felt hats.⁷⁴ During this early period, however, the only people who could afford to purchase the new luxurious hats were the very wealthy aristocracy and gentry. By the 1690s, however, large imports of beaver pelts from Rupert's Land had

⁷⁰ Grant, 37.

⁷¹ Grant, 38.

⁷² Grant, 39.

⁷³ Grant, 37.

⁷⁴ David Corner, "The Tyranny of Fashion: The Case of the Felt-Hatting Trade in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Textile History* (Vol. 22, Issue 2, 1991), 153.

oversaturated the London markets and caused prices to drop sharply. This, in turn, made felt hats more affordable to even the very lowest of sorts.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Corner also notes the various stylistic changes made to the hat throughout the seventeenth century. Not only did the hat's shape and size alter throughout the period but, as increased long-distance trades brought new and cheaper materials into the country, changes were also made in the hat's manufacturing process.⁷⁶ Hat fashions particularly changed after significant political events took place within the country – such as the accession of the Stuarts.⁷⁷ By the late seventeenth century, felt hats became a particularly important social necessity to the fashion-conscious Britons, as well as the peoples of Europe.

In his book, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England*, John Styles' explores popular eighteenth century fashions and their effects on 'ordinary people' – such as the poor. This perspective of 'history from below' highlights Styles' acceptance of McKendrick's theory that the Consumer Revolution really did work its way down to the labouring poor and did not just stop at the middling ranks. By examining probate inventories, Styles obtains information about some of the possessions owned by the middling ranks. Unfortunately, however, the use of probate inventories is limited because they were not commonly produced for the lower ranks and did not always include detailed lists of items.⁷⁸ The dress of England's ordinary people is particularly interesting when compared to that of their counterparts on the continent. By the sixteenth century, foreign travellers were amazed not only that the poor in England

⁷⁵ Corner, 153.

⁷⁶ Corner, 154.

⁷⁷ Corner, 153.

⁷⁸ John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4.

were not starving, but that they were dressed in good quality clothing.⁷⁹ Styles also writes that goods considered to be ‘luxuries’ were not as expensive as historians have previously assumed. It was possible for members of the labouring sorts to be able to afford silk ribbons, silver-plated buckles and cotton handkerchiefs.⁸⁰ In particular, however, Styles reveals that the lower ranks were purchasing popular items such as watches, cotton textiles, and felt hats. Yet, there were numerous reasons for individuals to purchase specific items. The fact that new, foreign goods were entering the country did not mean that individuals were brainwashed into a frenzy of consumption.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witnessed a dramatic increase in the consumption of goods which has since become known as the ‘Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period.’ Newly imported goods such as tea, porcelain, silk/cloth and coffee were well received by the English populace and, by this time, had become staple products for many households to own and consume. In addition to these popular consumer goods, there was an increasing demand for North American beaver fur. This animal’s fur became especially important in the manufacture of felt hats, not only in England, but across Europe. The place of the fur industry in the Consumer Revolution remains to be written into our understanding of colonies, consumption, commodities and culture in the period. Focussing on the trade in furs, this thesis seeks to integrate these related issues by focussing on the trade, and place of fur, in Augustan English society.

To explore these themes, in my first chapter I examine the history of London beaver felt hat fashion and the metropolitan perspective on this popular fashion. This

⁷⁹ Styles, 2.

⁸⁰ Styles, 8.

chapter explores the reasons behind the formation of the HBC and the circumstances that brought it into existence. Due to the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat throughout the seventeenth century, the markets at the time demanded increasing quantities of beaver pelts. One key factor that aided the felt hat to grow in popularity was the cessation of the Sumptuary Laws in 1604, which legally restricted what individuals of “inferior” birth could wear – such as luxurious textiles and furs. With the Sumptuary Laws no longer in place after 1604, it was possible for the beaver felt hat to become increasingly popular to individuals of the lower sorts. Moreover, during the sixteenth century, fears of dwindling beaver supplies in Europe were relieved when two new sources of beaver opened up for exploitation: Russian Siberia and Canada. Though the English began trading into Russia during the 1550s, however, they could not ignore the great quantities of beaver pelts obtained by the French in Canada in the early seventeenth century, nor by the Dutch and English in the North American colonies. In 1668, then, under the advice of Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, the future HBC Committee Members sent two ships to Hudson’s Bay, one of which returned the following year laden with luxurious beaver furs that sold well in London. In 1670, the HBC was incorporated by Royal Charter and began sending ships annually to the Bay. This chapter’s main purpose is to explore the different hat fashions in London from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century and the English hatting industry which supported this popular fashion. Before the HBC’s incorporation, beaver hats were incredibly expensive because the main material for hatting – beaver – was increasingly scarce, meaning that fewer people wore beaver hats. Thanks to the HBC, however, the London and European markets were given a steady supply of beaver pelts and the fashion for beaver felt hats was able to thrive. It was precisely into this kind of

‘fashion’ world that the HBC was born in part and because of the HBC that the Consumer Revolution in fur thrived.

My second chapter examines the business administration of the HBC and the Committee Members’ ability to find new markets in England and in Europe during a period of market saturation and financial difficulties. When the HBC emerged as the only importer into England of beaver pelts from Rupert’s Land in 1670, demand for this commodity was widespread throughout London and Western Europe. This high demand virtually guaranteed the HBC’s early success. Thus, the main concerns of the Committee Members at this time centered on preparations for future voyages to Hudson’s Bay, the semi-annual fur sales in London, and the Company’s beneficial political connections. However, difficulties began to emerge for the Committee Members by the 1690s, when demand for beaver pelts began to drop sharply as markets became oversaturated. Unfortunately for the HBC, the Company’s imports for that decade sharply increased, totalling nearly one hundred thousand beaver pelts annually. This period of glutted markets coincided with increased financial difficulties for the HBC as well as accusations of illegal practices from the disgruntled London felting and hatters guild. Once the Committee Members began encountering these difficulties, however, they began searching for ways to expand their domestic and foreign markets. The purpose of this chapter is to consider how the HBC was able to avoid bankruptcy by tapping into new markets in London and, later, in Europe. For their markets in London, the HBC tried to increase the popularity of the beaver felt hat and beaver wool goods by gifting them to influential individuals which the lower sorts would hopefully then emulate. After these attempts failed to produce the desired results and the Committee became desperate for available capital, however, they began sending large quantities of beaver

pelts to the cities of Europe, which gradually purchased the furs. Yet, these efforts also failed to yield the kind of capital expected by the Committee. Fortunately, however, these efforts, coupled with the Committee's fiscal sensibility and political sway, kept the HBC in business throughout these difficult years. Because of the Committee's continuous efforts, the HBC was able to continue operating and annually sending ships to the Bay.

The third chapter discusses the HBC's position as part of the growing global economy of the early modern period. While the HBC was annually exporting tens of thousands of beaver pelts from Rupert's Land, they were also shipping a large number of commodities to Rupert's Land with which to purchase/exchange those beaver pelts. Every year, the HBC Committee Members were ordering and purchasing the goods, the majority of which were used for trade, while the rest were provisions for the employees. The HBC was sending goods like alcohol, tobacco, guns and metal wares, cloth, ivory, sugar and spices and, while these goods seem simple to us today, many of these goods had to travel very long distances to London itself before their exportation to, and arrival in, Hudson's Bay. While alcohol such as beer, for example, could be brewed in England or even Rupert's Land itself, alcohol such as rum was distilled from Caribbean molasses, which in turn, was purchased with African slaves and was then transported to England for distillation. In fact, many of these goods therefore made up part of a global trade market to meet the needs of the HBC trade in Rupert's Land itself. Tobacco, for example, was grown in Brazil, exported to Portugal by Portuguese merchants, re-exported to England by English merchants, and then re-exported yet again to Rupert's Land by the HBC. Similarly, guns could be purchased in Holland, ivory came from Africa, cloth and textiles from India, sugar from the Caribbean, and spices from Asia,

the Caribbean and other parts of the world. Thus, these products were only available in Europe because of a wide network of global trade, joint-stock companies, and trans-oceanic shipping. Moreover, just as the HBC was part of this trade network, so too were the Indians of Rupert's Land, who expected and enjoyed these well-travelled trade goods. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to centre the HBC in the midst of a burgeoning global economy without which the HBC could not have conducted its business in Rupert's Land furs.

The Consumer Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought about large changes to many aspects of English and European life. The themes discussed in this thesis, while having a voluminous literature which has been explored by numerous historians, have been previously discussed in isolation. It is fair to suggest that, though they were studied discretely by historians, it is the interplay of those themes that profoundly shaped the Augustan period and the development of the HBC and the Consumer Revolution in Britain itself. Therefore, this thesis seeks to fully integrate discussions of the HBC within recent findings on the Consumer Revolution of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. What this thesis reveals is that the HBC and the fur trade played a part in that revolutionary process – that Rupert's Land and Indigenous demands for commodities had a place in the Consumer Revolution and the world of goods upon which it rested. Therefore, and in light of space, certain aspects of the trans-national fur trade – such as the Indigenous American experiences – lay beyond the scope of this thesis. From the outset, it is important to emphasize that this dissertation concentrates upon the metropolitan dimensions of the history of the HBC and the London driven processes that, in part, shaped its history.

CHAPTER 1

LONDON FUR AND FASHION HISTORY

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England were a time of continuous change, variety, and novelty for individuals across the social spectrum. The decades after the Restoration have become known as the ‘Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period’ because of a sharp increase in consumer goods, produced both domestically and internationally, on the English markets, as well as an increase in the ability for members of very different social standings to purchase, if not the same, similar items.¹ The economic difference between individuals in England of this period and those of the previous century was precisely this ability to participate in the rising consumer culture instead of just being external observers of it. Thanks to the advent of increasingly reliable trans-oceanic shipping, new and exotic foreign goods from around the world began pouring into English markets, while domestic manufacturers were quick to copy the newly imported goods in order to stay afloat. Although these products were initially only enjoyed by the wealthy and royal patrons of maritime explorers, they gradually became commonplace, affordable and available to the lower sorts. Soon, this new phase of consumerism was leading people to buy new fashions, accessories, furnishings, carriages, and everything in between. Encouraged by the excitement and enthusiasm shown towards these new products, merchants began importing foreign

¹ For more information on visible manifestations of the growth of the Consumer Revolution see: Markman Ellis, *Coffeehouse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

commodities in exponentially increasing quantities.² It was precisely because of this increasingly materialistic and consumerist culture in England that a group of wealthy businessmen and politicians saw fit to seize the opportunity to make even larger fortunes through the importing of luxurious North American furs by coming together and creating the Hudson's Bay Company [hereafter referred to as the HBC].

Before this profound social, cultural and economic transformation could happen, however, a wide variety of circumstances had to take place in order to create the perfect conditions for the Consumer Revolution to occur. The first of these factors was a stable population that was free from decimation by the relentless plague, which after 1666, would never again return to London.³ A higher population, in turn, meant the availability of more workers and potential consumers. This, of course, would have spelled higher unemployment if not for the string of wars taking place across Europe from 1688 to 1815, by which England was periodically affected, in addition to the economic dislocation created by war throughout the period.⁴ The fact that the country (and Europe) was at war throughout the eighteenth century meant that all kinds of industries were booming and employment was increasingly available. Not only that, but wages also increased throughout the period, meaning that individuals of even the lower classes had more money to spend.⁵ Even the very poorest of individuals felt some relief from their difficulties in the development and improvement of social assistance programs –

² For more information on the growth of global trade networks see: Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³ Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56.

⁴ John Cannon, ed., *The Whig Ascendancy: Colloquies on Hanoverian England* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 5.

⁵ Cannon, 8. For more information on the economics of the Consumer Revolution see: Geoffrey Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society, 1680-1730* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1682).

although they were still in their infancy at this time.⁶ What is usually noted about this period is that these programs were better than anywhere on the continent and ensured that lower class Englishmen were not and would never again starve to death in numbers.⁷ As mentioned above, international trade and domestic manufacturing increased during this period as well, bringing in and turning out new, exotic and affordable goods which provided the perfect outlet for extra, disposable income. Urban development also skyrocketed at this time, particularly in London and other manufacturing districts and port towns.⁸ Overall, however, the most important factor during this period that helped foster the favourable conditions for the Consumer Revolution was political stability. Although the country had been plagued by civil wars and internal strife throughout the period, the turmoil eventually gave way to stability as the governing bodies became more accepted by the increasingly satisfied general populace.⁹ What can be seen here, then, is what Neil McKendrick describes as, “a happy combination of many circumstances,”¹⁰ which is precisely what encouraged the Consumer Revolution to take place in England at this time.¹¹

Incidentally, and hardly coincidentally, the creation of the HBC coalesced with other economic developments at this time. It is appropriate to connect the emergence of the HBC with the processes of Restoration, economic expansion, and the subsequent

⁶ For more information on social assistance programs throughout this period see: Paul Slack, *Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and R. Connors, “The Nature of Stability in the Augustan Age,” in C. Jones, ed., *British Politics in the Age of Holmes* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwells, 2009), 27-40.

⁷ Hoppit, 56.

⁸ Hoppit, 55.

⁹ J. H. Plumb, *Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), xvi.

¹⁰ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, & J. H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 13.

¹¹ For more information on the Consumer Revolution see: John Brewer & Ray Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Consumer Revolution of the Augustan period. Indeed, what the Committee Members of the newly formed HBC were looking for in North America was a new source of furs to compensate for the widespread depletion of fur bearing animals in most of Europe, a circumstance which left certain animal pelts, such as the beaver's, increasingly difficult to find and obtain.¹² This, of course, is not to say that England was completely devoid of any marketable furs. Although the country itself had numerous rabbits, foxes, squirrels, and other small fur bearing animals, these furs had become commonplace and were simply not profitable enough to be exported in significant quantities.¹³ The scarcity of some animal furs such as beaver, marten, wolverine, and even bear, naturally drove prices up and guaranteed a fortune to merchants who could acquire them. By the end of the sixteenth century, most of these furs in England came from the northern parts of Eastern Europe, particularly Russia and Siberia, where the freezing winter climate produced some of the thickest and most luxurious animal furs to be found.¹⁴ By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, the French had begun importing North American beaver pelts, in addition to other animal furs, that finally rivalled the quality of the Eastern European pelts which had come to dominate European markets.¹⁵ Naturally, what the HBC Committee Members were hoping to do in the late seventeenth century was steal the monopoly on furs from the Eastern Europeans and the French by securing an unoccupied foothold in North America from whence they could begin tapping into the territory's overabundant fur supply.

¹² Stephen R. Bown, *Merchant Kings: When Companies Ruled the World, 1600-1900* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009), 201.

¹³ Murray G. Lawson, *Fur, a Study in English Mercantilism 1700-1775* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), 32.

¹⁴ Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 43.

¹⁵ Brook, 44.

Of course, one of the main reasons why the HBC found it profitable to import furs in the first place was because of the change in approach to fashion which took place in England prior to the Company's formation. The first major roadblock to developments in consumerism in England began with a series of laws, known as the Sumptuary Laws, which were implemented to legally impose restrictions on the behaviours and possessions of individuals of varying social classes.¹⁶ Sumptuary laws affecting fashion developments in England began in the fourteenth century, when restrictions were placed on the kinds of materials individuals could wear depending on their family's annual income.¹⁷ In addition to this, there were also a series of laws which forced people to wear certain items of clothing, most of which involved woollen textiles, in order to support the country's domestic manufacturing industries.¹⁸ What the ruling bodies had not planned for, however, was the difficulty of actually enforcing some of these legislations nationwide. Thanks to the aforementioned conditions which helped to facilitate the beginnings of the Consumer Revolution, individuals far beneath the wealthy aristocracy and gentry began to be able to afford and purchase the restricted items. Consequently, the last of these laws were repealed at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ Without these laws, of course, people were free to purchase the many newly imported cloths and clothing items flooding the English markets. Furthermore, this freedom to wear whatever one could afford also meant that merchants and manufacturers could now expect a higher number of buyers, meaning that they in

¹⁶ For more information on the English Sumptuary Laws see: Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

¹⁷ Elspeth M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Publishing, 1966), 4.

¹⁸ Hilda Amphlett, *Hats: A History of Fashion in Headwear* (Great Britain: Richard Sadler Ltd., 1974), 94.

¹⁹ Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 182.

turn could increase the quantity of their imports or the outputs of their businesses. The main reason that the HBC was able to annually import tens of thousands of furs and stay in business was not only because the English populace could actually afford to purchase them, but, more importantly, because they were legally allowed to do so.

With legal restrictions lifted and a growing network of new consumers to please, fashion in England was free to expand to new heights. Before the seventeenth century, fashions were rather slow to change since materials were expensive and most people had little money to spare. However, thanks to the increase in imports of cheap, foreign materials – such as Indian textiles– and higher disposable incomes, clothing and accessories became increasingly affordable for the middle and lower sorts.²⁰ One of the most notable accessories of the seventeenth century that was subject to the changes in fashion of this period was the beaver felt hat. In order to make a beaver hat, beaver pelts had to be harvested to be used not for their fur, but as the means to creating felt, a non-woven material comprised of shaved beaver hair which was glued and pressed together.²¹ As the hat gained popularity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, hatters experimented with and became experts in creating a better quality of beaver hat, mixing various combinations of beaver hair with the hair of other animals, as well as various deadly chemicals, to ensure a long lasting and durable product.²² With skills acquired over generations, by the seventeenth century several key hat manufacturing districts had emerged, particularly in Normandy, but especially in London. By the eighteenth century, however, due to religious persecution in France precipitated by the Revocation of the

²⁰ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 277.

²¹ Kenneth Norrie, Douglas O'ram, & J. C. Herbert Emery, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2008), 32.

²² Brook, 42.

Edict of Nantes in 1685, the French hatting industry had diminished drastically thanks to the relocation of capable Huguenot hatters to London, as well as other parts of Europe – such as Holland and Switzerland.²³ From the hat’s earliest incarnations in the fourteenth century,²⁴ felt hats came in all shapes and sizes, but most noticeably changed in style in England during the civil wars of the mid-century and then more so with the Restoration in 1660 and the emergence of the “Cavalier” style in the 1660s. Though beaver felt was not necessarily an inexpensive material, the felt hat became the staple of male (and even female) hat fashions. Cherished by their owners, beaver hats became so important and valuable that they were even bequeathed at death.²⁵ Naturally, this growing demand for beaver could mean vast fortunes for any company able to obtain significant quantities of the fur. From 1670 onwards, the HBC Committee Members were ready to venture into Rupert’s Land to seize this opportunity.

Though there were many factors that contributed to the creation of the HBC in 1670, perhaps the most important determining factor for the businessmen and politicians who came together to create the Company was opportunity. In 1666, Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers approached the future Committee Members with the opportunity not only to turn vast profits by importing fur, but to conquer the North American wilderness, to discover the fabled Northwestern Passage to China, and to find the precious metals and jewels encountered by the Spanish and Portuguese in their conquests of South America.²⁶ For those Committee Members, every

²³ Lawson (1943), 7.

²⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The General Prologue,” in V. A. Kolve & Glending Olson, eds., *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), ln. 270-272.

²⁵ Bown, 201.

²⁶ Peter C. Newman, *Company of Adventurers: How the Hudson’s Bay Empire Determined the Destiny of a Continent* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005), 59-60.

step taken into Rupert's Land was the chance to find riches beyond anyone's imaginations and make themselves even wealthier. The opportunity that the Committee Members saw, then, was not only that of Hudson's Bay forts and London fur sales, but the greatness that would come through the meticulous exploration for and discovery of the hidden gems that Rupert's Land had to offer. Naturally, however, the relaxation of legal restrictions on dress, the scarcity of beaver in Europe, the growing popularity of beaver hats and the population's ability to keep up with its constantly changing fashions, not to mention the eager encouragement of their experienced French employees, all helped to facilitate the decision of the HBC Committee Members to come together and send their first ships to Hudson's Bay in 1668.²⁷ Overall, though, the HBC was created because of a need that existed for fur, particularly beaver fur, which could be exploited for profit. At the end of the day, the HBC Committee Members were not Canadian pioneers trying to do good things for the world, but, rather, they were determined businessmen concerned with profit. Thus, the HBC was welcomed wholeheartedly by the world of London skimmers, hatters, and large businessmen who would profit from their venture. The HBC was created to import North American beaver furs, which it did quite expertly, at a time when that commodity was in greatest demand by European markets, a circumstance which seemingly guaranteed high returns on invested capital.

Cessation of the Sumptuary Laws

As previously noted, one of the reasons that the HBC could begin to operate in England as an importer of popular and fashionable furs at the end of the seventeenth

²⁷ E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume One 1670-1763* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), 36.

century was because a series of laws dictating the dress, eating habits, and behaviours of the middle and lower classes, had been repealed at the beginning of that same century. The Sumptuary Laws were implemented in an attempt to keep the various social classes separate by legally restricting the most visible manifestations of wealth – such as clothing and food – from the lower sorts.²⁸ The cessation of those laws in 1604 not only signalled a change that was coming for individuals outside of the aristocracy and gentry, but also reflected the potential for developments of fashion at this time. Now, however, it became possible for eager merchants and domestic manufacturers to import or produce larger quantities of goods, particularly clothing and wearable accessories, because of an exponential increase in potential consumers who could legally purchase those goods.

Reflective of a growing determination to keep the various social classes separate, the first of the Sumptuary Laws in England was enacted in 1336.²⁹ This set of laws dictated how often certain individuals could eat particular kinds of foods, such as meats, which were considered luxuries to many at this time, as well as where they could eat it – for example, not in public.³⁰ The purpose of this, as explained by historian Elspeth M. Veale, was because, “in the Middle Ages it was thought that the [goods possessed] by an individual should bear some relation to his social standing,”³¹ meaning that the laws would ensure that only individuals of the ‘appropriate’ classes were able to enjoy the finer luxuries of life and display themselves doing so. In addition to regulations on food and diet, the Sumptuary Laws also extended to dress, particularly the kinds of materials (especially furs) that could be used for clothing and from where they could come. At this

²⁸ Beverly Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c.1600-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 110.

²⁹ Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 216.

³⁰ Shammas, 216.

³¹ Veale, 3-4.

time in England, a number of foreign fashions, though most notably from Burgundy, had begun to influence clothing styles within the country.³² The aim of these laws was to prevent foreign fashions from becoming popular in, and being imported into, England. Here the goal was to protect domestic economic development. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, individuals outside of the royal and noble houses were able to afford foreign clothing styles, which meant that the newer Sumptuary Laws had to be aimed at restricting individuals of ‘inferior birth’ or below a specified income level from wearing certain articles of clothing or specific types of materials. For example, in 1533, a Henrician Act of Parliament decreed that, “only the peerage could wear textiles with gold and silver mixed into the thread; and only the peerage and knights could don red or blue velvet, foreign woollens, and certain types of furs.”³³ In addition to this restriction, an income requirement of £200 per annum had to be met as well in order to be legally allowed to wear, “other types of furs, outward garments of silk, taffeta, satin, and damask, as well as gold, silver, and silk ornaments.”³⁴ While these laws were aimed at restricting the outward appearance of many individuals, they proved increasingly difficult to enforce, especially when a second-hand fur trade emerged during the period providing discount furs to anyone who was willing to buy them.³⁵ Ultimately, however, the Sumptuary Laws were repealed in 1604 not only because they had become difficult to enforce, but because it had become nearly impossible for politicians to come to an agreement about what was allowed or restricted and for whom.³⁶

³² Mukerji, 180.

³³ Shammas, 216-217.

³⁴ Shammas, 217.

³⁵ Veale, 13.

³⁶ Shammas, 217.

Of course, the Sumptuary Laws enacted at this time not only dictated what individuals could not wear, but also what they had to wear. Concerns for the country's domestic woollen production and manufacturing spawned several laws which mandated citizens to purchase and wear woollen textiles, clothing, or accessories. For example, in 1571, an Elizabethan statute was enacted to force all men outside of the nobility, ages six and above, to wear an English-made woollen cap on Sundays and holidays.³⁷ Although this law had been created to help increase the country's woollen trade and lessen its citizen's reliance on foreign produced cloth and clothing, it was eventually repealed in 1597.³⁸ In addition to this, a similar statute was enacted in 1678 which not only required corpses to be buried while wearing woollen textiles, but also forbade them from being buried in a variety of other fabrics – such as velvet.³⁹ However since this law was enacted after the Sumptuary Laws had been repealed, it was passed not necessarily out of a social concern for what people were wearing but more out of an economic concern to encourage the country's domestic woollen manufacturing industry. On a similar note, however, there were also other ways to keep individuals from wearing certain articles of clothing or purchasing and using specific textiles. What was really a deterrent to Englishmen trying to purchase the increasingly popular foreign clothing and accessories that were flooding the markets were the additional customs and excise duties imposed on imported trade goods. For example, in 1710 an additional excise duty was placed on silk, linen, and cotton textiles coming into the country from abroad which

³⁷ Penelope Byrde, *The Male Image: Men's Fashion in Britain, 1300-1970* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1979), 179.

³⁸ Amphlett, 94.

³⁹ Beverly Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite: The Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 24.

would remain in place for over a century.⁴⁰ Once again, however, the taxes imposed on foreign products were enacted with the hopes of stimulating the country's domestic industries, even if they did work as a deterrent to prevent those of the lower sorts from accessing and overindulging on foreign goods.

The main concern of sumptuary lawmakers throughout the early modern period was the need to maintain the social divisions existing between the middling and lower sorts.⁴¹ Since the most obvious method for determining a person's station in this society was his or her outward appearance, Sumptuary Laws were initially the best way for the nobility to identify and distinguish themselves from others. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, it became increasingly difficult to enforce these laws and maintain the social orders as more individuals outside of the nobility and gentry could afford the outlawed items. Moreover, the blurring of the boundaries between sorts became even more pronounced throughout the seventeenth century as a middling sort began to emerge out of, and distinguish itself from, the lower ranks of society.⁴² That being said, even though a number of taxes would be imposed to make articles such as felt hats more expensive, they would not drastically affect the spending habits of this new middling sort. However, since many of these laws revolved around the consumption and wearing of fur, had the Sumptuary Laws remained, they would have restricted the development of the hatting industry, fur industries, and felting industries alike. It was in part because

⁴⁰ John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 15.

⁴¹ For more information on social divisions and class structure in the early modern period see: Keith Wrightson, "The Social Order of Early Modern England: Three Approaches," in Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith, and Keith Wrightson, eds., *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986), 177-202.

⁴² For more information on the growth of the middle classes see: Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Geoffrey Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society, 1680-1730* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1982).

the Sumptuary Laws became redundant at the beginning of the seventeenth century that a market for the HBC emerged in Restoration England.

Early Fur Trade in Europe

While the fur trade in Europe grew during the course of the Middle Ages, the sources of fur on the continent, particularly in Western Europe, shrank, forcing traders and merchants to conduct business over increasingly greater distances. Although throughout this period England still had its own sources of fur bearing animals, only a few of them were of any real significance to the country's economy – for example, rabbit and polecat.⁴³ While exports of these pelts from England represent the popularity of other furs at this time, the animal that came to be prized above all others was the beaver. Unfortunately, however, beaver pelts were in short supply across England and Western Europe, as over-trapping had led to their virtual extinction by the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ Moreover, the furs from England and Western Europe were not nearly as luxurious as those of Northern Europe or Asia, particularly around the Baltic Sea and in Siberia, since the climate of that region forced animals to grow long, thick coats to survive the freezing winters.⁴⁵ Before the potential for the beaver trade in North America was fully realized, then, it was to this part of the world that the English would send their business ventures.

While beaver pelts could still be imported from the Low Countries and the surrounding territory until the end of the sixteenth century, merchants would have to

⁴³ Lawson (1943), 32.

⁴⁴ Bown, 201.

⁴⁵ Rich (1958), 1.

find more plentiful sources of beaver if they intended to make significant fortunes.⁴⁶ In the middle of the sixteenth century, merchants formed the first English joint-stock company – the Muscovy Trading Company.⁴⁷ The objective of this group was to take advantage of the vast quantities of beaver pelts and beaver wool available for trade in Russia, along with a number of other goods including hemp, tallow, and hog bristles,⁴⁸ while also trying to find the Northeastern Passage to China.⁴⁹ This company's first voyage – the Chancellor expedition – took place in 1553 and, although only one out of the three dispatched ships returned to London two years later, the voyage proved successful enough to merit a Royal Charter.⁵⁰ Instead of finding a Northeastern Passage, however, Chancellor made his way overland to Moscow, where he secured trade arrangements with the Tsar – Ivan IV.⁵¹ Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries traders continued to import Russian furs into Western Europe, at which point they were absorbed into the increasingly popular felting/hatting industries. Yet, despite the fact that Western Europeans would eventually find a new source of beaver, they were unfortunately powerless to abandon the Russians too soon, since they were the only ones who knew the secret process of combing out beaver fur to make it suitable for felting. This technique involved removing the important layer of hair known as 'beaver wool' or 'duvet' which, in the freezing winters, would become covered by longer guard

⁴⁶ R. Turner Wilcox, *The Mode in Hats and Headdress: Including Styles, Cosmetics, and Jewelry* (New York: Scribner, 1959), 113. For more information on English overseas exploration and colonization see: Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁴⁷ Sara M. Harvey, "The Seventeenth Century," in Jill Condra, ed., *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Clothing Through World History, Volume 2, 1501-1800* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2008), 100.

⁴⁸ [Hudson's Bay Company Archives], A.1/20, fo.3, November 29, 1697. Subsequent classification numbers refer to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

⁴⁹ Rich (1958), 3.

⁵⁰ Rich (1958), 3.

⁵¹ Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 68.

hairs.⁵² If a felt maker were to simply shave the beaver pelt without having first treated it, he would not be able to obtain the greatest quality of felt from the hair. What merchants were forced to do with the furs, then, was ship them to Russia for combing and then send them back to Europe for felting.⁵³ This circuitous journey was necessary until the secret was discovered and replicated by Europeans at the end of the seventeenth century.⁵⁴ Fortunately for the newly established HBC, however, their participation in the fur trade did not initially involve the preparation of beaver pelts for felting.

Incidentally, the importing of furs from Russia was only necessary for Western Europeans because another source of equally luxurious furs was yet to be realized and competently exploited. The early seventeenth century would witness massive imports of beaver pelts into Europe by the French, Spanish, Dutch, and English from new sources across the Atlantic. These countries' merchants began to import large quantities of beaver from North America, particularly the newly established colonies along the Eastern Seaboard and St. Lawrence River.⁵⁵ Champlain's discoveries in the early 1600s of the potentials of the St. Lawrence region and the surrounding territory, as well as trade with local Indians, found beaver to be in great abundance.⁵⁶ What this meant for the English throughout this century was a seemingly endless supply of beaver pelts. Historian Murray G. Lawson describes how this was possible, "in the first half of the seventeenth century [England] exploited the New England area. In the second half, just as this region was becoming exhausted, she acquired new and illimitable supplies by her

⁵² Rich (1958), 47.

⁵³ E. E. Rich, "Pro Pelle Cutem," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 289, Spring 1958), 15.

⁵⁴ Rich (1958), 394.

⁵⁵ Wilcox, 113.

⁵⁶ Brook, 31.

conquest of New Netherlands and its Hudson-Mohawk route to the...Great Lakes.”⁵⁷ While the early American seaboard was plentiful in beaver, the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam proved itself as a worthy competitor for the English since between 1624 and 1632 it is estimated that the colony exported between 4,000 and 7,000 beaver pelts, among other furs.⁵⁸ Since the value of fur continued to rise throughout the period, and it is estimated that the beaver population in Rupert’s Land could have easily reached 10 million beavers, the HBC Committee Members were wise to take advantage of the opportunity and begin sending ships to Hudson’s Bay.⁵⁹

What the future HBC Committee Members encountered in 1668 when they decided to send their first two ships to Hudson’s Bay, then, was a ‘fashion’ world that had already become infatuated with beaver fur.⁶⁰ The Committee Members were merely tapping into an already healthy and lively market. Through the eager encouragement of their new employees, Radisson and Groseilliers, the Committee Members decided to venture into what they would name and claim as Rupert’s Land – an under-exploited territory of which they would take advantage.

Felting & Hat Manufacturing

Though there is mention of a beaver hat in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, written at the end of the fourteenth century, the advent of the felt hat is typically associated with the fifteenth century, while the hatting industry is recognized as

⁵⁷ Lawson (1943), 32-33.

⁵⁸ Wilcox, 113.

⁵⁹ Bown, 201.

⁶⁰ Arthur J. Ray & Donald B. Freeman, “Give us Good Measure:” *an Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson’s Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 24.

becoming established in Europe in the sixteenth century.⁶¹ Thus, the first beaver hats to be made on the continent are dated to 1456, though it would take another half century for the hatters – and their skills – to cross the Channel and reach England, where the first hats in the country would be made in London in 1510.⁶² The hatting industry in England is largely credited to immigrants – Spanish, Dutch, and French artisans – whose skills and knowledge helped to establish London as one of the largest hat manufacturing centres in Europe.⁶³ One of the main reasons that the hatting industry flourished in London (specifically in the districts of Southwark and Bermondsey) was because of its proximity to a continuous water source, the Thames, which was a necessity for production.⁶⁴ As felt hats became increasingly popular throughout the period, the hatting industry in London expanded and became renowned throughout Europe.

There were a number of stages in the hat making process which were fine-tuned and perfected by tradesmen who handled large numbers of furs, chemicals, tools and equipment used in production. One of the first stages of making felt hats was to make the felt itself. The skill of making felt had existed for centuries prior to the advent of the felt hat in the fourteenth century and grew in popularity over the next four hundred years. However, the line between legend and history begins to blur when trying to pinpoint the exact moment when felting was discovered. For example, a hatmaker's manual from the early nineteenth century explains that, while fleeing persecution, St. Clement, an early bishop of Rome, tucked wool into his sandals to avoid getting blisters but inadvertently made felt by compressing the fibres while running and also by gluing

⁶¹ Chaucer, "The General Prologue," in. 270-272. "A Marchant was ther with a forked berd,/In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat;/Upon his heed a Flaundrish bever hat."

⁶² Rich (Spring 1958), 14.

⁶³ Lawson (1943), 6.

⁶⁴ David Corner, "The Tyranny of Fashion: The Case of the Felt-Hatting Trade in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Textile History* (Vol. 22, Issue 2, 1991), 157.

them together with his sweat.⁶⁵ The technique is also said to have been discovered by Asian nomads, was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans, and was later learned by the Crusaders, who brought the knowledge and skills back with them to Europe.⁶⁶ Either way, felt was thought to be a particularly invaluable material because it was durable and warm, easy to work with, and conformed to almost any shape, which made it perfect for use in headwear.⁶⁷ The process of felting itself was strenuous and time consuming as it involved repeatedly compressing and gluing fur to produce a sheet of non-woven fabric which could then be moulded and formed.⁶⁸ While beaver fur became the preferred choice for felting because it produced the best results, it would often need to be combined with a variety of animal fur/wool blends – usually rabbit, also known as ‘coney,’ and occasionally sheep’s wool – to produce more affordable felts, though of a lower grade and quality.⁶⁹ When hatters tried to use felt mainly composed of sheep’s wool during a beaver shortage in the sixteenth century, the resulting hats were of inferior quality because they would not bind or dye as easily as beaver, became deformed when wet, and wore out much faster.⁷⁰ Thankfully for the HBC, though, this kind of make-shift felt lacked demand, particularly after North American beaver fur began flooding European markets.

However, before beaver pelts from Rupert’s Land could be processed, there was one main factor that determined what kind of processing they required prior to being

⁶⁵ *The Hat Makers’ Manual: containing a full description of hat making...copious directions for dyeing, blocking, finishing, and water proofing...a list of hat manufacturers and trades connected therewith in the metropolis, mode of obtaining employment, useful hints to hat makers coming from the country, &c. &c.* (London: Cowie and Strange, 1829), i.

⁶⁶ Newman, 40-41.

⁶⁷ Byrde, 173.

⁶⁸ Rich (1958), 47.

⁶⁹ Corner, 154.

⁷⁰ Brook, 42.

crafted into felt hats. As previously mentioned, before the secret Russian treatment of combing out beaver pelts was discovered in Western Europe at the end of the seventeenth century, merchants were forced to send their beaver pelts to the East in order to have them treated and made ready for felting. What the Russians essentially did was comb out a layer of fur from the pelt, known as ‘beaver wool,’ which became covered by longer guard hairs in the winter. Since these guard hairs were unwanted by felt makers, after the pelts were combed, the beaver wool would be sent back to Europe for felting, while the pelts, which had increased in value after combing, would be sold for use as fur trim or coats.⁷¹ Before the European felt makers could discover the Russian’s secret, however, the Indians in Rupert’s Land found another way of removing the guard hairs. Historians Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz describe the technique, “In the cold northern climate of North America, such as the James Bay area, the people wore beaver skins as clothing. For this purpose skins were scraped and greased and the long guard hairs dropped out during prolonged wearing, leaving the duvet exposed.”⁷² This kind of beaver pelt earned the name ‘coat beaver,’ and was distinguished from the other kind of beaver pelt, known as ‘parchment beaver,’ which was simply left out in the sun to dry and would arrive in London with its guard hairs intact.⁷³ The determining factor for processing, then, was whether the beaver pelt was labelled as ‘parchment’ or ‘coat’ beaver.

The process of making felt hats was difficult, time consuming, and dangerous. There were many steps to creating a felt hat, the first of which always included obtaining

⁷¹ Rich (1958), 48.

⁷² Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in James Bay, 1600-1870* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1983), 8-9.

⁷³ Rich (Spring 1958), 15.

the fur from which the felt could be made. As already noted, beaver fur was preferred by felt makers because it produced the highest quality of felt, though it could also be mixed with other furs, such as rabbit, to create a similar felt hat of lower quality.⁷⁴ Though the trade would continue to require the expertise and knowledge of a skilled craftsman and his apprentices, the entire process had to be removed from the confines of the artisan's home when it became increasingly difficult and required larger workspaces which could be powered by water.⁷⁵ Historian David Corner briefly describes the steps involved,

At least five distinct processes or stages were involved in felt-hat production: the vibration or 'bowing' of raw materials to evenly distribute the fibres; the applying of pressure on the fibres so that they formed a conical shape or 'bat,' known as 'basoning;' the repeated pressing and rolling in steam of the bat, known as 'planking' or 'walking;' dyeing and finishing which included singeing, brushing, ironing and curing.⁷⁶

In addition to this, an early nineteenth century hat maker's manual also lists the need to waterproof the finished product.⁷⁷ Moreover, as hatters developed new techniques to increase a hat's durability and longevity, their process began to include incredibly dangerous chemical mixtures and compounds which would be touched and inhaled by the hatters themselves. This was especially true in the nineteenth century, when the term 'Mad-Hatter' became common in describing the debilitating effects on hatters from working with such corrosive substances as mercury and nitric acid.⁷⁸

With the felt hat's increased popularity throughout the seventeenth century, the massive quantities of beaver pelts being exported from Rupert's Land at the end of the

⁷⁴ Hugh Grant, "Revenge of the Paris Hat: The European Craze for Wearing Headgear Had a Profound Effect on Canadian History," in *The Beaver* (November 1988), 41.

⁷⁵ Rich (1958), 2.

⁷⁶ Corner, 158.

⁷⁷ *The Hat Makers' Manual...*, 28.

⁷⁸ Grant, 42.

century were welcomed and absorbed by London's booming hat industry.⁷⁹ The HBC Committee Members were wise to establish their company in 1670, while demand for beaver fur was high and the popularity of their staple good had yet to reach its apex.

Felt Makers and Hatters

The making of felt hats out of beaver fur was a difficult endeavour, requiring years of experience to create durable, seamless, and uniform hats out of beaver and/or other animal furs. As described above, the preparation of felt and the hat making process included many steps which were tried, re-evaluated, and refined until perfected over several centuries by artisans across Europe. The two largest and best known hat manufacturing centres in Europe of the seventeenth century could be found in England and France. While the felt and hat makers of London may have started out as small, independent craftsmen working out of their homes or nearby workshops, by the seventeenth century this trade had become so large and popular that it formed a centralized guild to insulate its shared interests. This guild helped to protect the hatters and their growing industry from local and international competition and unfair or illegal trade agreements. Though the London hat trade was growing throughout the period, until the middle of the seventeenth century, the French dominated the hatting trade, producing some of the highest quality felt hats on the continent. However, because of growing religious and political strife in France, the Protestant artisans (Huguenots) within that country were forced to relocate to nearby Protestant countries. In the years after 1685 and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes it is estimated that 50,000 Huguenots settled

⁷⁹ Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), 55.

in England.⁸⁰ Thanks to this influx of foreign hatters, by the end of the seventeenth century London had become the capital hat manufacturing district of Europe.⁸¹

By the end of the sixteenth century, tensions between the ruling Catholic majority of France and the growing sect of Calvinist Protestants, known as Huguenots, had escalated into open violence. The ultimate result of the fighting was often numerous Huguenot fatalities, such as those of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, which numbered into the thousands.⁸² In response to the continued attacks, King Henri IV brought the Edict of Nantes into effect, which, among other rights, guaranteed Huguenots the freedom of worship.⁸³ Unfortunately, however, this period of politically-sanctioned religious tolerance came to an end when King Louis XIV began to rule France in 1661.⁸⁴ While the number of Huguenots represented less than ten percent of the French population,⁸⁵ numerous restrictions continued to be imposed to limit their worship, education, participation in politics, and their exemption from paying the Catholic tithe.⁸⁶ These restrictions ultimately culminated in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes on October 22, 1685, thereby making Protestantism illegal in France.⁸⁷ Beginning with the Huguenot massacres of the sixteenth century and continuing after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, about two hundred thousand Huguenot refugees fled

⁸⁰ Robin D. Gwynn, *Huguenot Heritage: the History and Contribution of the Huguenots in England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 5.

⁸¹ Rich (1958), 273.

⁸² David J. B. Trim, ed., *The Huguenots: History and Memory in Transnational Context: Essays in Honour and Memory of Walter C. Utt* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 1.

⁸³ Bertrand Van Ruymbeke and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 3.

⁸⁴ Raymond A. Mentzer & Andrew Spicer, eds., *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559-1685* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114.

⁸⁵ Van Ruymbeke and Sparks, 3.

⁸⁶ Warren Candler Scoville, *The Persecution of Huguenots and French Economic Development, 1680-1720* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 3.

⁸⁷ Trim, 1.

France.⁸⁸ Many skilled craftsmen and labourers belonging to the Huguenot sect, including thousands of hatters from France and Normandy, were amongst those who had come to England.⁸⁹ This large influx of skilled workers served to improve the English hatting trade, with the hatters from well-known towns like Caudebec and Rouen sharing their age old secrets of hat manufacture with their London counterparts.⁹⁰ Incidentally, so many hatters had left France that, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the French were in turn forced to order beaver felt hats from England.⁹¹ Thanks to the help of the French Huguenots, the English hatting industry was able to surpass all of its European competitors.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, King James I incorporated an association of felt and hat makers into a guild under the name of ‘The Worshipful Company of the Art or Mystery of Feltmakers of London’ [hereafter referred to as ‘The Feltmakers’].⁹² The reasons for creating this company were twofold: to encourage domestic industries in England as well as to check growing imports of foreign-manufactured goods.⁹³ The Feltmakers’ objectives concerned various aspects of the London hatting industry such as regulating the number of apprentices a hat maker could have at one time,⁹⁴ encouraging the exporting of domestically manufactured felt hats,⁹⁵ and blocking imports from the hatting towns in Normandy.⁹⁶ Unfortunately for the burgeoning HBC, this group also became the chief opponent of the Company’s

⁸⁸ Gwynn, 5.

⁸⁹ Newman, 41.

⁹⁰ Lawson (1943), 8.

⁹¹ Newman, 41.

⁹² Lawson (1943), 7.

⁹³ Amphlett, 106.

⁹⁴ Corner, 162.

⁹⁵ Corner, 153.

⁹⁶ Newman, 41.

monopoly, which granted the HBC rights to import beaver furs from Rupert's Land while limiting and/or ceasing the imports of beaver fur/wool from elsewhere – such as Russia.⁹⁷ The Feltmakers found it in their best interests to ensure that the HBC Committee Members conducted their operations legitimately and they voiced their objections when the statutory regulations imposed by parliament were ignored.⁹⁸ In 1690, for example, when the HBC's Charter was confirmed by Act of Parliament, The Feltmakers' protests led to the further enactment of laws which stipulated the conditions for the Company's semi-annual fur sales.⁹⁹ The Feltmakers continued to be a thorn in the Company's side, though with limited success, as historian Murray G. Lawson explains the Company's fortunate situation, "as long as the French menace in North America existed, so long would the monopoly Charter of the Hudson's Bay Company be secure against all attacks upon it."¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, though, The Feltmakers' objections to the Company's monopoly diminished after the French threat had been neutralized in the 1760s, after the Seven Year's War.¹⁰¹ Overall, however, The Feltmakers were simply looking out for their own interests which, by the end of the seventeenth century, had been superseded by those of the growing HBC.

While the main felt/hat making guild in London was that of The Feltmakers, they welcomed the Huguenots and the renowned skills they possessed. The London hatters also appreciated the fact that the Huguenots' presence in England eliminated the threat

⁹⁷ Rich (1958), 267.

⁹⁸ E. E. Rich, ed., *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters, Commissions, Instructions Outwards 1688-1696* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957), xxxv.

⁹⁹ Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: an Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 131.

¹⁰⁰ Murray G. Lawson, "Fur Traders vs. Feltmakers," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 279, September 1948), 36.

¹⁰¹ Lawson (1948), 36.

of foreign-made hats competing on the English markets.¹⁰² In fact, thanks to the large numbers of French hatters migrating to England, the French hatting industry was so badly damaged that it would never recover.¹⁰³ While the HBC had little to do with the construction of the felt hats that were crafted from the thousands of beaver pelts which they imported into England, it was because of these pelts that the English hatting industry was able to prosper.

London Hat Fashion

While the beaver felt hat was gaining popularity in London and throughout England, not only were adjustments made to the kinds of materials, furs, or chemicals used for making of the hats, but the hats themselves underwent several distinct changes in their appearance, shape, and size. What influenced the variations in the materials and quality of furs used had to do with newly discovered techniques, cheaper foreign materials, and, at the end of the seventeenth century, the spread of the Consumer Revolution and the impetus to create affordable alternatives to popular goods.

Prior to the seventeenth century, the increasing rarity of beavers in England limited the production of beaver felt hats within the country, as well as the hat's popularity, since the lack of supply resulted in higher prices and smaller markets. While the first felt hats to be produced in England were made in 1510 in London, the hats would not be worn by significant numbers of men for another 50 years.¹⁰⁴ Another main reason why felt hats did not become popular during the early sixteenth century, however, had to do with the fact that there were already a variety of other hats which were

¹⁰² Rich (1958), 267.

¹⁰³ Lawson (1943), 7.

¹⁰⁴ Rich (Spring 1958), 14.

predominantly worn. The straw hat was a staple for the majority of the English population who did not live in or around London and were, therefore, less likely to be influenced by changing fashions. Overall, straw hats were one of the most important for individuals working outdoors or travelling as they provided protection from the sun and heat (see Figure 1.1).¹⁰⁵ Another popular hat of this period was the wool cap, better



Figure 1.1: Woman in straw hat, c.1697 © Batsford. Georgine de Courtais, *Women's Hairstyles and Headdress in England from AD 600 to the Present Day*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1973, 72.

known as the 'flat cap' because of a low, round crown and narrow brim that gave it a flat appearance.¹⁰⁶

Since wool was one of the most important domestic manufacturing industries in the country, it earned political support to ensure its survival and prosperity. In an attempt to support this trade, Queen

Elizabeth mandated that this flat, wool cap be worn on Sundays and holidays by all men beneath the aristocracy or gentry status.¹⁰⁷ By the middle of the century, however, hat makers began to use felt in the construction of their hats, though they largely resembled the flat cap in appearance, except for a slightly larger crown.¹⁰⁸ Some changes in style did occur during Elizabeth's reign, however, with crowns being raised to form steep domes in the 1580s and then flattened on top like cylinders by the next decade.¹⁰⁹ While the felt hat made its first appearance in the fourteenth century, it would be considered an

¹⁰⁵ Byrde, 173-174.

¹⁰⁶ Wilcox, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Wilcox, 76.

¹⁰⁸ Byrde, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Byrde, 179.

unobtainable luxury for a large portion of the English populace for at least three more centuries, particularly with the Sumptuary Laws still in place until 1604. Though the repeal of these laws did coincide with the rise in popularity of the hats, this too did not affect fashions directly since most hats were far too expensive for many Englishmen at this time, costing between £3 and £4 throughout the period.¹¹⁰ The next change in hat fashions, however, came following the end of the Tudors and the accession of the Stuarts.

During the seventeenth century there were four distinct changes in hat fashions which coincided with the four main changes to the English monarchy or ruling party.

The first of these was the change from Queen Elizabeth to James I and, later, his son Charles I. This period of the first two Stuart kings saw the rise in popularity not only of the felt hat among the higher classes, but also the particular style of the



unisex Cavalier hat (see Figure 1.2).¹¹¹ This hat was best known for

Figure 1.2: Cavalier style hat, c.1630 © Batsford. Georgine de Courtais, *Women's Hairstyles and Headdress in England from AD 600 to the Present Day*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1973, 68.

its very wide brim that was flipped up and pinned to the crown with a jewel or pendant and typically decorated with colourful hatbands and large ostrich plumes.¹¹² The style became very popular in England during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), after the

¹¹⁰ C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston: Plays, 1972), 67.

¹¹¹ Harvey, 145.

¹¹² Byrde, 179.

Swedish cavalry's victories in battle brought attention to themselves and their large felt hats.¹¹³ The reason that beaver felt was necessary for this hat (but not the smaller and flatter hats that preceded it) was because beaver felt was a strong material that could support such a large form and could be stiffened to maintain its shape in ways that sheep's wool could not.¹¹⁴ For men wearing the Cavalier hat, the look was not complete without the 'lovelock' hairstyle, which included long natural hair, one section of which was longer than the rest out of commitment to a beloved.¹¹⁵ The popularity of these hats was even recognized by Charles I, who mentioned the growing fad during his during his Royal Proclamation of 1638, "the wearing of beaver hats [has] of late times become much in use, especially by those of sort and quality."¹¹⁶ While the beaver felt hat had begun to gain popularity during the first half of the seventeenth century, this particular fashion was still reserved for the very wealthy English nobility and gentry.

The second stage of English hat fashions in the seventeenth century occurred after the execution of Charles I and throughout the interregnum period. This change in hat fashion was entirely politically motivated because there was such a strong desire by Oliver Cromwell and his republican Commonwealth supporters to relinquish any connections to the old Stuart kings and the rejected monarchy.¹¹⁷ The design of the hat changed from large and ostentatious to neat and efficient and is often recognized as the stereotypical 'pilgrim hat' associated with the Puritans (see Figure 1.3).¹¹⁸ This hat was typically made of black or brown felt and included a large, flat-topped crown, a narrow,

¹¹³ Newman, 42.

¹¹⁴ Grant, 37.

¹¹⁵ Amphlett, 107.

¹¹⁶ Lawson (1943), 4.

¹¹⁷ Amphlett, 102.

¹¹⁸ Wilcox, 114.

unpinned brim and a plain, black hatband with a simple buckle.¹¹⁹ The idea behind this fashion was to encourage modesty, humility and prudence by wearing plain clothing and accessories.¹²⁰ While many Puritans and Commonwealth supporters adopted this conservative mindset, however, there still remained those who rejected this new trend of simple styles. Although the King himself had been executed and the monarchy suspended, a group of Royalists continued to hope for the country's return to the stability and unity found under the monarchy. This group (known as the 'Cavaliers') distinguished themselves from their political opponents (known despairingly as the 'Roundheads') by having men and women dress in fancy, colourful clothing and accessories.¹²¹ Despite this separation and abrupt change in fashion, the beaver felt hat



Figure 1.3: Puritan style hat, c.1645 © Batsford.
Georgine de Courtais, *Women's Hairstyles and Headdress in England from AD 600 to the Present Day*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1973, 68.

continued to be prevalent throughout this period for the members of the upper sorts.

The next phase of hat fashions in England began as a direct result of the Restoration of 1660. With the return of the monarchy came the departure of the sobering Puritanical wardrobe and the return of flamboyant and decorative felt hats.¹²² Once more, there was a need to

distance oneself from the political failures of the past. Thus, hat brims expanded and became so large and floppy that they needed to be pinned up on one side and held in

¹¹⁹ Harvey, 133.

¹²⁰ Grant, 38.

¹²¹ Amphlett, 102-103.

¹²² Amphlett, 103.

place with pins or buttons.¹²³ Decorations and ornaments for these hats included large feathers, silk ribbons, and jewellery.¹²⁴ While these hats may have resembled the Cavalier hat with their broad brims and large feathers, it has been noted that this new generation of hats never quite recaptured the splendor of that former style.¹²⁵ Yet, despite the fact that hat fashions were changing during this period, the major change in fashion at this time came from the advent of the long periwig. Men of the Restoration shaved their heads in favour of long wigs which could be curled and styled to perfection and were easier to maintain than genuine hair.¹²⁶ Incidentally, hats actually became difficult to wear during this period because of the increasing height and weight of men's wigs.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, beaver felt hats maintained their importance in the eyes of the upper and, gradually, the middling sorts. The importance of felt hats is even demonstrated by the noted diarist Samuel Pepys, who, in 1662, recorded in his diary, "In the evening did get a beaver, an old one, but a very good one... but I am very well pleased with it."¹²⁸ By the second half of the seventeenth century, then, the beaver hat had become part and parcel of the upper class way of life, and had even begun to work its way down the social scale to the middling ranks.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 ushered in the final stage of hat fashions in England during the seventeenth century that would remain popular for the majority of the eighteenth century too. This felt hat, which would typically be recognized today as a pirate's hat, was known as the 'tricorne' because it had a low crown to which the brim

¹²³ Lawson (1943), 5.

¹²⁴ Cunnington and Cunnington, 162.

¹²⁵ Amphlett, 106.

¹²⁶ Wilcox, 111.

¹²⁷ Byrde, 181.

¹²⁸ Samuel Pepys, "April 19, 1662," in John Warrington, ed., *Diary of Samuel Pepys: Volume 1* (London: Dent, 1966), 246.

was pinned on three sides to form three points (see Figure 1.4).¹²⁹ At first, the need to pin brims to the crown came out of sheer necessity, since the popular wide brims would eventually lose their stiffness, become floppy and block the wearer's view.¹³⁰ As time went on, however, it simply became fashionable to affix two flaps to the crown, which later turned into three. Felt hats continued to be excessively decorated with large plumes of ostrich feathers, lace, gold and silver threaded ribbons, as well as jewelled buckles and pins.¹³¹ Wigs also increased in their popularity throughout this period which discouraged the wearing of hats lest they ruin the meticulously-arranged curls.¹³²

Nevertheless, hats continued to be an important status symbol and were widely purchased, even if they were only going to be carried by their owners instead of being worn.¹³³ This hat was particularly favoured by the upper and middle sorts because it was easily distinguishable from the hats of the lower classes, which did not have their brims fastened to the



Figure 1.4: Tricorne style hat with curled wig, c.1725-1750
© Batsford. Georgine de Courtais, *Women's Hairstyles and Headdress in England from AD 600 to the Present Day*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1973, 86.

¹²⁹ Anne Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 58.

¹³⁰ Lawson (1943), 6.

¹³¹ Amphlett, 110.

¹³² Byrde, 115.

¹³³ Harvey, 133.

crown.¹³⁴ Although women would wear the tricorne as part of their riding outfit, women's hair fashions at this time largely turned away from hats during this period while favouring caps, hoods, jewelled accessories, and increasingly larger wigs.¹³⁵ The beaver felt tricorne remained the staple hat of fashionable Englishmen throughout the middle of the eighteenth century, when it became part of the excessive fashion trend known as the "Macaroni" style.¹³⁶ This style would continue to be worn until the introduction of the top hat in 1770¹³⁷ and the bicorne (with the brim entirely turned up and pinned in the front and back) around the 1780s.¹³⁸

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, beaver fur continued to be one of the most important animal furs to be used in the felting and hatting processes. As previously noted, felt made from beaver fur was more durable, would bind easily, and could be worked and more strenuously processed than other animal furs. Hats continued to be made from beaver and other animal furs until new materials worked their way into the hatting process, usually because they were less expensive than imported animal furs.¹³⁹ In this case, beaver felt continued to be the material of choice until it was replaced by silk in the early nineteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Historian Hugh Grant describes the ultimate results from the switch to silk, "by 1840, the Parisian silk hat had all but eliminated the English felt-hat industry."¹⁴¹ While felt may have faded into disuse by the

¹³⁴ Wilcox, 145.

¹³⁵ Amphlett, 114.

¹³⁶ For more information on the Macaroni style and early modern fashion see: Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); and John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹³⁷ Harvey, 264.

¹³⁸ Buck, 58.

¹³⁹ Corner, 153.

¹⁴⁰ Lawson (1943), 4.

¹⁴¹ Grant, 37.

middle of the nineteenth century, its reign as the most popular hatting material had lasted for well over two centuries.

[Conclusion]

Throughout the seventeenth century, the rising popularity of the beaver felt hat had managed to captivate the desires of the majority of the English population, allowed political affiliations to be expressed through one's headgear, swayed politics, created laws, and, above all, influenced the changes in fashion in London and across the countryside. Though the advent of the beaver felt hat is dated to the fourteenth century, European interest in this new hat and the animal that provided its material rose gradually for several centuries before reaching its peak in the eighteenth century. Throughout most of this period, the hat largely remained reserved for the wealthier upper classes, either by legal means or because of its great cost. By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the hat's popularity had spiked, capturing the interest of many individuals, the majority of whom were simply unable to afford this fashionable item. Thanks to the Consumer Revolution at the end of the seventeenth century, however, the felt hat became much more accessible to the majority of the English population. With the rising obsession with felt in England, anyone who had the ability to import large quantities of beaver pelts into the country could count on guaranteed success and large fortunes. By the seventeenth century, faster ships, increased global trade, and new discoveries, created rising possibilities for businessmen with enough capital to work their way into new business ventures. It was precisely into this world that the HBC was born.

It was during this period of increased continental obsession with this product that the HBC Committee Members realized that it was possible for them to increase their

fortunes by getting into the business of importing beaver pelts. Of course, this entire endeavour began with a visit from noted French fur traders Radisson and Groseilliers in 1666, whose idea of sailing into the beaver-plentiful territory of Hudson's Bay had been largely ignored by politicians in France and New France.¹⁴² Prior to the Company's creation, the future Committee Members had to test the reliability of their source's information and predictions. Therefore, in 1668, the *Eaglet* and the *Nonsuch* set sail for Hudson's Bay with the hopes of returning with a ship laden with beaver pelts.¹⁴³ The following year, the only ship to have reached the Bay and successfully wintered there, the *Nonsuch*, returned to London with a cargo of beaver pelts that sold for £1,379.¹⁴⁴ Convinced that the Frenchmen's plan was viable and profitable, the Committee Members joined together to create the HBC and obtained a Royal Charter for their company in 1670, thus legitimating their claims to the region and the goods they would obtain.¹⁴⁵ The success of the Company's annual fur sales were demonstrated only a few years later in 1677 and 1679, when the Company sold its furs for £5,000 and £9,000, respectively, prompting the announcement of its first dividend for shareholders in 1684.¹⁴⁶ While not every year resulted in such high sales figures for the Company, however, the Committee Members were skilled businessmen who were able to adapt to the changing markets, prioritize their payments, make good on their commitments, and see their company thrive throughout the eighteenth century.

¹⁴² Glyndwr Williams, "Highlights in the History of the First Two Hundred Years of the Hudson's Bay Company," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 301, Autumn 1970), 5.

¹⁴³ Rich (1958), 36.

¹⁴⁴ W. A. McKay, "The Story of the Canadian Fur Trade: Part II," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 296, Summer 1965), 24.

¹⁴⁵ Rich (1958), 41.

¹⁴⁶ McKay, 26.

While obtaining large quantities of beaver fur was the main objective for the Committee Members throughout this period, there were also a number of other fur-bearing animals in Rupert's Land whose furs were quite popular and valuable on the English markets. From the Company's founding until the middle of the eighteenth century, the kinds of animal furs sent to England for the HBC to sell included marten, otter, fox, elk, ermine, cat, moose, buffalo, rabbit, muskrat, raccoon, wolf, wolverine, squirrel, and even bear. In addition to this there were also different animal parts that were collected in Hudson's Bay such as goose feathers, musk, castorum (beaver glands), and whale blubber. The value and importance of these various animals was demonstrated by the Committee Members' constant orders, encouragements, and incentives for their employees to obtain the largest quantities possible and ship them to London. In 1681, for example, in their instructions to Governor John Nixon, the Committee Members wrote, "Wee would have you likewise bee carefull to gett all sorts of small Furrs...aswell as Martins, which wee have perticularly mentioned in our last yeares Instructions."¹⁴⁷ Thanks to the Committee Members' constant encouragement and the Company employees' tireless efforts, the main fur to be exported from the Bay after beaver was marten.¹⁴⁸ Unlike beaver pelts, however, which were plucked of their hairs, these animal pelts would remain intact and be used as fur trim on the exterior parts of clothing and accessories, or as lining for the interior.¹⁴⁹ While the wearing of fur and use of it to decorate one's home had great significance as a status symbol throughout the Middle Ages, the importance of furs had largely declined by the middle of the sixteenth

¹⁴⁷ E. E. Rich, ed., "Letter to Governor Nixon," June 1681, *Copy-book of Letters Outward etc.: Begins 29th May, 1680, ends 5th July, 1687* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1948), 27.

¹⁴⁸ K. G. Davies, ed., "Letter from Thomas McCliesh, Albany Fort," July 16, 1716. *Letters from Hudson's Bay 1703-1740* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), 42.

¹⁴⁹ Rich (1958), 277.

century due to changes in fashion.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, however, these furs continued to increase in value and, therefore, remained an important staple import for the HBC throughout this period.

Though the Committee Members went through many struggles in the early period of the Company's history, the risks and difficulties encountered were outweighed by everything that had been and was to be gained. The potential profits of importing massive quantities of beaver fur, with which Rupert's Land was plentiful, were too great to ignore. In spite of all of the political challenges, the business rivalries, the lack of ready money, and the frustrations of meeting at the height of the London summer, the Committee Members were determined to continue this business venture for as long as it was profitable, and even, on occasion, when it was not. As previously mentioned, the Committee Members were not noble pioneers or colonizers trying to benefit these remote areas or their inhabitants. Rather, they were simply businessmen trying to make a profit, which they were determined to do. The reason that they were able to survive throughout this period was because of the rise in demand for beaver pelts across Europe thanks to the popularity of the felt hat. This one accessory spurred English exploration of Rupert's Land and the history that would follow. The seventeenth century truly witnessed the beaver felt hat come into its prime and take place as the most important piece of headgear for men and women alike. It was due to the enthusiasm with which Europeans welcomed this product that people like the HBC Committee Members were able to begin their companies and, ultimately, continue fuelling the fire of the growing consumerist craze.

¹⁵⁰ Veale, 141.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING MARKETS AT HOME AND ABROAD

With the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat in the seventeenth century, the markets of Western Europe became increasingly hopeful for and receptive to a large influx of beaver fur that would enable millions of individuals across the continent to partake in this popular fashion. With new sources of beaver being exploited in Russia and North America throughout the century, the future Hudson's Bay Company [hereafter referred to as the HBC] Committee Members saw in Rupert's Land an opportunity to participate in this popular market and add to their existing fortunes. With the London markets of the 1660s and 1670s desperate for fur, the HBC had only to overcome the difficulty of obtaining this item and transporting it back to England in order to see a profit. Naturally, however, as the quantity of furs imported into the country by the HBC, as well as colonial and foreign competitors, increased exponentially every year, the once receptive markets became cold and reluctant to accept the tens of thousands of beaver pelts annually flooding the country. What the Committee Members were soon to discover about their markets was that there was only so much of a product that a city, country, or continent could absorb before rejecting the item and making it worthless. The HBC Committee Members, then, could not rely on the temporary security of the markets for their company's continued prosperity. Instead, the Committee Members would have to become proactive about encouraging the sale of their product. They would have to be persistent, even when their company's financial situation was deteriorating. They would need to influence politicians to maintain their

monopoly and eliminate any competition on legal grounds enshrined in their Charter. They sought to ensure contemporary beaver fashions were accepted by people of power and wealth to influence the lower sorts into purchasing similar items. They themselves would have to enter the export trade and ship their products to Eastern Europe for sale. Throughout this period, the Committee Members would have to actively seek out and make new markets in England and across Europe to ensure the successful continuation and prosperity of their business venture.

What the Committee Members had not anticipated, however, were the fluctuating markets, continuous wars, lack of currency in the country, and the many shipwrecks that would plague their finances for the better part of the Company's first five decades in business. One of the HBC's greatest problems during this period was a lack of ready money needed to pay their outstanding debts and fund their next voyages. This, in turn, forced the Committee Members to obtain numerous loans and extensions on their credit, for which they were charged additional interest fees.¹ This difficulty became particularly evident in the 1690s, when the HBC's meeting minutes began to record steadily lengthening delays – often between one and two years – on the payment of the Company's bills.² This period, of course, was significant because it coincided with a time when beaver fur was increasingly glutting the national and international markets.³ What the Committee Members were facing was a need for additional income which led to frantic searches for ways to make more money. This would come to include

¹ [Hudson's Bay Company Archives], A.1/8, fo.40, August 5, 1685. Subsequent classification numbers refer to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

² A.1/20, fo.6, January 5, 1698.

³ E. E. Rich, ed., *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters, Commissions, Instructions Outwards 1688-1696* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957), xxxviii.

attempting to expand and diversify their trade in Rupert's Land,⁴ posting security guards on returned ships to search for smuggling,⁵ renting their ships for other assignments while they were between voyages,⁶ or importing goods from Eastern Europe to sell in England.⁷ Unfortunately for the Committee Members, however, many of these attempts to increase Company revenue failed to yield the desired results, often taking several years to become profitable and costing more money than they earned. Nevertheless, the Committee Members may be commended for their persistence, resilience and creativity in their attempts to keep the Company afloat. Essentially, though, they were biding their time in the hopes of weathering through the years of fiscal instability. Their overall efforts were fruitful, however, even if the Company's situation may have looked rather grim at the time.

Another one of the HBC's many concerns throughout this period was the impact that foreign and colonial competitors, as well as illegal smugglers, would have on the English and European markets. When the Company was granted its Royal Charter in 1670, it gained exclusive rights to harvest and export the furs of Rupert's Land including,

[The] Seas Streights Bayes Rivers Lakes Creekes and Soundes in whatsoever Latitude they shall bee that lye within the entrance of the Streights commonly called Hudsons Streights together with all the Landes Countryes and Territoryes upon the Coastes.⁸

While the HBC's monopoly over this region and its resources helped to protect it from

⁴ E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume One 1670-1763* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), 109.

⁵ A.1/7, fo.40d., October 8, 1684.

⁶ A.1/19, fo.19d., April 29, 1697.

⁷ A.1/20, fo.4, December 8, 1697.

⁸ E. E. Rich, ed., "Appendix A," *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1942), 132.

competition within Rupert's Land by other Britons, there was little that the Company could do to prevent the exploitation of beaver fur in New France as well as the American Colonies. Thanks to Champlain's discoveries in the early seventeenth century, as well as Dutch and English colonization along the North American eastern seaboard, a vast and seemingly endless supply of beaver pelts was found and exploited by others across the continent. Unfortunately for the HBC, the harvests throughout Rupert's Land and New France were simultaneously increasing to collectively produce for European markets beaver pelts numbering into the hundreds of thousands.⁹ This meant that, by the 1690s, the markets of Europe were not only saturated by the HBC, but by French productivity as well. In addition to this rival competitor, colonial exports continued to threaten the Company throughout the period, forcing the Committee Members to rush their sales in the attempts to satisfy their buyers before the arrival of the latest colonial fur shipment.¹⁰ While the Committee Members may not have been able to control the influx of North American furs in Europe imported by other parties, they were able to control the furs brought into England by their own employees. The HBC meeting minutes often stated the need to post several 'waiters' or 'servants' on ships returned from the Bay to search for smuggled furs hidden amongst the employees' personal belongings.¹¹ One of the HBC's greatest concerns was that their own employees would try to undercut the Company's sales by independently selling their furs for a lower price. Because of the Company's financial difficulties at the end of the seventeenth century, the Committee

⁹ Kenneth Norrie, Douglas Owram, & J. C. Herbert Emery, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2008), 42.

¹⁰ E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684: First Series 1679-1682*. October 28, 1681. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1945), 138.

¹¹ Rich (1958), 189.

Members recognized the need to prevent outside competition as much as was legally possible.

One of the more effective ways that the Committee Members used to ensure that their business interests were well looked after was to earn the political and legal approval of the monarchy and Parliament. As well-to-do and well-connected businessmen and politicians themselves, the Committee Members had the ability to sway political affairs for the Company's best interests.¹² From the moment the HBC was granted its Charter, it was given legal jurisdiction over Rupert's Land as well as the goods and resources found within that territory.¹³ These men coveted their legally-backed monopoly which gave them the full support and protection of the English Crown, allowed them to seize interlopers smuggling furs out of the Bay, and gave them preference to purchase illegally imported beaver furs at discounted rates. Moreover, when the Committee Members ran into problems concerning the validity of French operations within the region as well as the substantial damage caused by continuous French attacks, they were able to find support from the Crown and Parliament via legal channels. In 1686, for example, the Committee Members estimated that the damages from French attacks and encroachment into Hudson's Bay between 1682 and 1685 amounted to £60,000 in damaged ships and buildings, stolen trade goods, provisions, and furs, and lost profits.¹⁴ The Committee Members in turn petitioned the King to demand compensation from the French King for these offenses.¹⁵ In addition to the

¹² This theme will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹³ W. A. McKay, "The Story of the Canadian Fur Trade: Part II," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 296, Summer 1965), 24-25.

¹⁴ E. E. Rich, ed., "A Deduction of the Damages, Losses, & Sufferings of the HBC, February 25, 1686," *Copy-book of letters outward etc.: Begins 29th May, 1680, ends 5th July, 1687* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1948), 169-171.

¹⁵ Rich (1948), "Petition to the King," February 25, 1686, 166-169.

HBC's international difficulties, however, the Committee Members also faced internal political challenges to their monopoly and illegal business practices. The largest opposition to the Company's monopoly came from The Worshipful Company of the Art or Mystery of Feltmakers of London [hereafter referred to as 'The Feltmakers'], London's chief felt/hat making guild.¹⁶ In the interest of protecting its members, The Feltmakers continuously petitioned Parliament to ensure that the HBC was operating within its legal parameters and to penalize it when it failed to do so. Yet, while the HBC's competitors voiced their objections, the Company's illegal activities often went unnoticed and without significant reprimand. The simple reason for this lay in the Company's presence in Rupert's Land, which gave England a basis to claim ownership over the entire territory – particularly over the French.¹⁷ While the Company was not considered to be above the law, it was often given preferential treatment.

Above all, however, the Committee Members were mainly concerned with the continued expansion of their domestic and global markets. When the first ships left for Hudson's Bay in 1668, the demand for beaver fur was rising throughout Europe as individuals outside of the upper classes began to be able to afford the increasingly popular beaver felt hat.¹⁸ During the Company's first two decades in business, the Committee Members were pleased to find that the beaver pelts they imported from the Bay were readily absorbed by the London skimmers and hatters. Throughout this early period in the Company's history, then, the Committee Members were fortunate to have been spared the need to search for receptive international markets and export the furs

¹⁶ Murray G. Lawson, "Fur Traders vs. Feltmakers," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 279, September 1948), 34.

¹⁷ Lawson (1948), 36.

¹⁸ Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, "*Give us Good Measure:*" *an Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 24.

themselves. To the Committee Members' dismay, however, the supply eventually overran the demand and the price of beaver fur began to steadily drop at the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ In 1682, for example, the prices of coat and parchment beaver were £0:14:2 and £0:12:3, respectively; in 1687, coat and parchment sold for £0:11:1 and £0:10:3; in 1693, they dropped to £0:7:1 and £0:8:11; and in 1700 they were £0:4:7 and £0:6:5.²⁰ This of course is not to say that the price of beaver pelts did not occasionally increase – as it did in 1695, when coat and parchment rose to £0:8:1 and £0:10:7, respectively. This, however, was only a temporary rise in an otherwise steady decline throughout the period.²¹

In the hopes of salvaging their trade, the Committee Members began a series of attempts to increase the appeal of beaver fur in London by gifting various items made of beaver fur to prominent, wealthy and/or royal individuals.²² The idea behind this was to raise the appeal of beaver fur for 'ordinary' citizens who, in their attempts to emulate their social betters, would flock to purchase the new, fashionable items. In this approach, the HBC mimicked the English East India Company (EIC), whose attempts to market tea in London involved gifting it to King Charles II.²³ Unfortunately for the HBC, however, this marketing strategy did not produce enough demand to prevent the Committee Members from having to export their own furs to continental clients. At the beginning of the 1690s, the Company stationed several foreign correspondents in the large, port towns of Eastern Europe to find buyers for the large quantities of beaver pelts

¹⁹ Rich (1957), xxxviii.

²⁰ Elizabeth Mancke, *A Company of Businessmen: The Hudson's Bay Company and Long-Distance Trade, 1670-1730* (Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1988), 36.

²¹ Mancke, 36.

²² Rich (1958), 167.

²³ Jamie Shalleck, *Tea* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 62. For more information on the EIC see: Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: a History* (New York: Longman, 1993), 60-62.

stockpiled in the Company warehouse.²⁴ In addition to relieving the London fur markets, however, the Committee Members also hoped that their exported furs would produce ready cash which was desperately needed to fund their annual voyages. The Company's own dire financial straits were the ultimate motivating factors that convinced the Committee Members to send their furs Eastwards. While these attempts to earn some much needed revenue ultimately proved futile, the Committee Members can be condoned for their determination in creating new markets in England and across Europe for the sake of their Company.

Throughout the HBC's early years, the courses of action taken by the Committee Members, though not always useful or yielding the expected results, were steps taken to keep their company not only in business, but profitable as well. While the Company's first half century was particularly unstable and its survival was certainly questionable, the Committee Members' determination to see their business venture succeed forced them to hazard into uncharted territory, contend with foreign competitors and domestic objectors, sway politicians to keep their monopoly, and secure new markets within England and across Europe. It was precisely because of these efforts that the HBC's ultimate survival was secured.

The Fur Sales

Through all of their efforts of purchasing trade goods and provisions, hiring employees, renting or building new ships, and then loading and dispatching them to Rupert's Land, what the Committee Members were interested in was, obviously, the profits of the Company's semi-annual fur sales. Before the Company's sales could take

²⁴ Rich (1958), 321.

place, however, the Committee Members had to spend hundreds of hours each year ensuring that the detail of their operation had been finalized and completed. Every year, beginning with a general election in November, the Committee Members would begin their preparations for the next year's voyage, which would have to depart for Hudson's Bay by the last week of May if it intended to return to London within the same year.²⁵ Throughout the hot, sweaty, and smelly London summer months, the Committee Members continued to meet to pay their bills and prepare their employees and warehouses for the voyage's arrival in the Thames in early autumn. Once the ships had docked, their cargo was inventoried by customs officials and the necessary taxes paid before the furs could be organized into the Company's warehouses. This step was simpler, though, during the Company's early years, while the weight of the beaver collected by the HBC employees amounted to less than 10,000 pounds every year.²⁶ Once trade routes and Indian alliances had become well established, however, the number of pelts collected rose to a high of 90,000 lbs. in 1693.²⁷ The table below illustrates the spike in the HBC's imports between the late 1680s and early 1690s:

	Beaver	Marten	Otter	Fox
1688	20,928	362	184	26
1689	27,201	325	188	16
1690	37,520	385	278	32
1691	28,117	124	120	0
1692	24,236	516	189	0
1693	92,117	3,483	849	87
1694	62,005	4,699	288	103

²⁵ Rich (1958), 91.

²⁶ Rich (1958), 71.

²⁷ Rich (1957), xlvii.

²⁸ Rich (1957), xlvii.

While the HBC employees were assigned to sort and order the pelts prior to packing them for shipment to London,²⁹ it was still necessary to inspect and organize the furs according to size, cut, colour, and grade prior to every sale.³⁰ In addition to the beaver pelts, however, there were still thousands of marten skins and hundreds of ermine, otter, cat, bear, deer, and raccoon skins, as well as a variety of other animal products, which would also have to be organized for the upcoming sale.³¹ Once the Company's haul was tallied and accounted for, bills of sale were printed to notify prospective buyers.³² Sales were often conducted at auctions 'by the candle,' meaning that buyers were required to place bids on items before a candle flame burnt out, signifying the end of that item's sale.³³ After the sale, the process of distributing purchased lots and collecting money from buyers would begin. Though it was repetitive and seemingly unending, the Committee Members conducted their business every year in the hopes of turning a profit.

Though the proceeds of the fur sales were noted in the Company records, it is difficult to gauge the Company's success simply by looking at the fur sales figures. For one thing, sales could be high one year – such as in 1675, when the Company sales earned £4,715 – and then low the next – as in 1676, when they only earned £1,972.³⁴ Sales figures could even vary between the Company's semi-annual fur sales such as in 1682, when they earned £6,028 but were left with 36 lots of coat beaver pelts in their

²⁹ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor Nixon," June, 1681, 27.

³⁰ E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684: Second Series 1682-1684*. October 27, 1682. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1946), 37.

³¹ Rich (1945), November 4, 1681, 142.

³² Rich (1942), November 14, 1671, 8.

³³ Rich (1958), 93.

³⁴ Rich (1958), 81.

warehouse, which the Committee Members were unable to sell until 1684.³⁵ Occasionally, however, the HBC would be fortunate enough to run into a string of successful sales, such as in 1699 and 1700, when the sales totalled £14,000 and £10,000, respectively.³⁶ Moreover, there were some years when the fur sales were completely unsuccessful, such as March 1683, when the total revenue was only £249.³⁷ The sales also depended on the number of ships launched in a particular year, such as in 1678, when only one vessel, the *Shaftesbury*, sailed for the Bay and returned with a cargo that sold for £4,381.³⁸ Another variable, however, was whether or not the ships launched for the Bay arrived safely at their destination. Occasionally ships were wrecked during the voyage – such as in 1680, when the *Prudent Mary* was recorded to have been wrecked in James Bay.³⁹ Moreover, because of wars throughout this period, such as the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), the Company was occasionally unable to send ships to its Bayside posts – as in 1709 – because the conflict on the open seas posed too great a risk for merchant vessels.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the Committee Members elected not to launch ships in 1700, 1702, 1703, 1704, and 1707 because it was not financially viable.⁴¹ Although the Company records make note of the various quantities of furs for sale and their prices, the buyers and how much they purchased, noted historian K. G. Davies conceded that between the various company expenses, outstanding loans and interest payments, and the revenue from sales, the Committee Members were never able to

³⁵ Rich (1958), 99-100.

³⁶ Rich (1958), 375.

³⁷ Rich (1946), xxxvi-xxxvii.

³⁸ Rich (1945), xix.

³⁹ Rich (1945), xxx-xxi.

⁴⁰ Rich (1958), 386.

⁴¹ Rich (1958), 372-387.

calculate what their company was actually worth – a problem commonly encountered by joint-stock companies, such as the EIC, throughout this period.⁴²

Once the contents of the Company's ships had been organized into the warehouse, the Committee Members hired furriers to sort the furs according to size, colour, and grade. These men were directed to sort the beaver fur into lots of between one and two hundred pelts⁴³ – although they could be as large as two thousand.⁴⁴ The goal behind the Company auctions was to sell the beavers in lots of several hundred skins so that the Committee could quickly clear large quantities of pelts from their inventory. Incidentally, the other animal pelts, such as fox and otter, were imported in considerably smaller numbers than beaver and were often sold in their entirety as one lot.⁴⁵ Interestingly, however, whereas beaver skins were sold by the pound, these more luxurious furs would be sold by the skin.⁴⁶ The Company's chief buyers were the skimmers and furriers of London, many of whom were also large exporters. With these men purchasing furs, which they would then themselves export, the Committee Members were temporarily spared the added difficulty and cost of the re-export trade. Among the largest of the Company's buyers, present from the Company's inception was Thomas Glover, one of London's most prominent furriers.⁴⁷ In addition to purchasing the pelts publically at auction, Glover was also partial to participating in private sales. Whenever the Committee Members amassed large quantities of pelts and were desperate to purge themselves of their stockpile, they would often sell the entire consignment to

⁴² Rich (1957), xlvii.

⁴³ Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: an Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 126.

⁴⁴ Rich (1958), 260.

⁴⁵ A.1/11, fo.37, November 27, 1689.

⁴⁶ A.1/8, fo.3d., December 1, 1684.

⁴⁷ Rich (1942), xxxii.

Glover at a discounted rate. In January 1691, for example, the price of beaver at the public auction was 9s. 6d. per pound, but Glover was able to purchase nearly 11,000 skins at 8s. per pound.⁴⁸ Often, however, the Committee Members found that their public and private sales did not yield the desired and necessary revenue. Although these large buyers often took advantage of the Company by demanding discounted rates, when the HBC encountered fiscal problems in the 1690s, they were ultimately relieved to sell their beaver pelts and earn some money.

The Company's Financial Difficulties

While demand for beaver fur by English markets steadily increased throughout the seventeenth century, the HBC began to import so many beaver pelts that they flooded the markets which, in turn, caused the price of fur to drop throughout the last two decades of the seventeenth century.⁴⁹ The Committee's letters to the Bay record their growing concern for the price of beaver in 1686 when they wrote, "Remember that Beavor grows Lower and Lower in price here every Day and unless you advance our Standard of Trade in that Commodity, we shall be but losers by it."⁵⁰ This drop in the price of beaver fur brought on a period of fiscal instability for the HBC which forced the Committee Members to seek out ways to increase the diversity of their company's imports, either from Rupert's Land or elsewhere, to ensure their company's survival.

⁴⁸ Rich (1958), 277.

⁴⁹ Rich (1958), 277.

⁵⁰ Rich (1948), "Letter to John Bridgar," May 20, 1686, 180.

The following table illustrates the drop in beaver fur prices in London from the mid-1680s to the early 1700s:

	Coat Beaver	Parchment Beaver			Coat Beaver	Parchment Beaver
1682	14 : 2	12 : 3		1696	8 : 0	10 : 1
1683	9 : 3	11 : 11		1697	6 : 2	7 : 9
1684	8 : 7	13 : 7		1698	5 : 7	10 : 10
1685	8 : 4	11 : 10		1699	4 : 1	6 : 6
1686	10 : 1	12 : 1		1700	4 : 7	6 : 5
1687	12 : 1	10 : 3		1701	3 : 10	no sales
1688	11 : 1	13 : 11		1702	5 : 5	9 : 1
1689	8 : 8	13 : 3		1703	5 : 4	no sales
1690	no sales	10 : 0		1704	no sales	5 : 9
1691	6 : 4	8 : 11		1705	no sales	no sales
1692	8 : 2	11 : 5		1706	5 : 1	no sales
1693	7 : 1	8 : 11		1707	no sales	6 : 9
1694	7 : 8	10 : 1		1708	5 : 5	6 : 10
1695	8 : 1	10 : 7		1709	no sales	5 : 11

At the time of the HBC's inception, the Committee Members had little intention of solely exporting beaver fur and imagined Rupert's Land to be a stepping stone to greater discoveries.⁵² While beaver fur remained the main export for the HBC, its employees were continuously encouraged to expand the fur trade to include the more profitable skins such as martens, otters, raccoons, ermines, and foxes. In 1681, for example, the Committee's letter to Governor Nixon state, "We would have you likewise bee carefull to get all sorts of small Furrs that you can aswell as Martins."⁵³ These smaller animal furs were more appealing as luxurious additions and trimmings in the

⁵¹ Mancke, 34.

⁵² Mancke, 11.

⁵³ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor John Nixon," June 1681, 27.

fashion industry, which also made them much more expensive.⁵⁴ In addition to this, however, the Committee Members also encouraged the gathering of specific animal parts such as goose feathers,⁵⁵ walrus tusks,⁵⁶ whale bones and blubber,⁵⁷ and castorum (beaver glands),⁵⁸ which could earn the Company additional income. The Company's letters also constantly urged and reiterated the need to seek out new sources of profit. Nearly every letter addressed to the Bay's governors or chiefs mentions the need to engage in "any other small trade that may be yet unknown,"⁵⁹ "mak[ing] discoveries about the area,"⁶⁰ or "encreas[ing] our trade."⁶¹ In 1684, the Company informed the men that they were sending small boats so that they could travel into the rivers and creeks surrounding the Bay to find new sources of trade and profit.⁶² Moreover, the Committee, naturally hoping for large bullion and mineral deposits similar to those found in South America, was eager to send crews and mining equipment to Hudson's Bay. Although the employees did not find large quantities of gold or silver, the Committee was hopeful after the discovery of isinglass, a form of the mineral mica.⁶³ Unfortunately for the Committee Members, however, this trade was very slow to progress and subsided after the 1680s.⁶⁴ Ultimately, however, it seems that the Committee Members did not have a realistic understanding or expectation of what twenty or thirty men could do in the wilderness of Hudson's Bay. The requests that they made of their employees in their

⁵⁴ Elspeth M. Veale, *The English Fur Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Publishing, 1966), 29.

⁵⁵ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor John Nixon," May 21, 1680, 13.

⁵⁶ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor John Nixon," May 15, 1682, 42.

⁵⁷ Rich (1958), 235.

⁵⁸ Rich (1957), xlvi.

⁵⁹ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor John Nixon," May 21, 1680, 13.

⁶⁰ Rich (1948), "Letter to John Bridgar," May 15, 1682, 34.

⁶¹ Rich (1948), "Letter to Samuel Missenden," May 20, 1686, 202.

⁶² Rich (1948), "Letter to Captain John Abraham," May 14, 1684, 113.

⁶³ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor John Nixon," May 21, 1680, 6.

⁶⁴ Rich (1958), 153.

letters to the Bay portray a company that was managing to survive financially, but was not flourishing and expanding in the way its shareholders had initially hoped.

While the Committee Members' sense of optimism in the potentials of their operations in Rupert's Land was evident through the enthusiastic encouragement of their employees during their first fifteen years in business, the late 1680s witnessed glutted markets and fiscal difficulties which quickly changed this positive outlook. By the 1690s, the Committee Members had begun to implement various measures designed to curb unnecessary spending. In 1691, for example, the HBC meeting minutes recorded the need to recruit cheaper labourers from the Scottish Orkney islands.⁶⁵ When increased danger due to open conflicts on the sea forced the Committee Members to occasionally forego sending ships to Hudson's Bay, the stationary ships were then rented out to export goods to and from the major ports of Europe. In 1700, for instance, the ships were rented to export furs to Hamburg (Germany),⁶⁶ while in 1709 they were used to ship coal from Northern England.⁶⁷ Moreover, by 1695, the HBC meeting minutes recorded the presence of foreign correspondents living in the large European cities of Amsterdam (Netherlands), Hamburg, Archangel and Moscow (Russia).⁶⁸ These correspondents were hired to organize the sale of large quantities of the Company's beaver pelts and then transfer the money to the HBC.⁶⁹ In addition to this, these correspondents were responsible for purchasing and exporting to London goods from Eastern Europe on which the English had come to rely but were unable to domestically produce. These

⁶⁵ A.1/13, fo.11d., March 24, 1691.

⁶⁶ Rich (1958), 373.

⁶⁷ A.1/31, fo.9, April 29, 1709.

⁶⁸ A.1/17, fo.4d., January 25, 1695.

⁶⁹ Rich (1958), 321-322.

goods included hemp, flax, tar, pitch, and hog bristles.⁷⁰ While the Committee Members were eventually able to sell quantities of their imported hemp, which was ideal for making rope, to the English Navy,⁷¹ they ultimately lost money when they found in London a city that was almost as reluctant to buy these goods as it was to buy their beaver pelts.

Unfortunately for the HBC, these cost cutting and revenue-boosting measures did little to positively affect the Company's diminishing financial situation. The HBC's precarious finances and lack of ready money even forced the Committee Members to withhold or delay payment on their bills which gave already anxious creditors further cause for concern. In 1697, for example, the Company's grocer threatened not to deliver their order until the Company had paid an outstanding balance of £122:17:11 from the previous year.⁷² Noted historian E. E. Rich summarizes the reality the Committee Members faced during this period, "The real reason for the survival of the company lay in the annual miracle by which it conjured up sufficient credit to outfit a voyage."⁷³ Overall, however, the problems the HBC encountered during its infancy were only temporary when compared to the Company's lifespan. Moreover, by the end of the 1730s the HBC had regained enough of its financial footing to be able to invest its profits in bonds for the English East India Company.⁷⁴ Such a measure also helped diversify the risks to the HBC in an age of conflict – including the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Seven Years' War (1754-1763).

⁷⁰ Mancke, 32.

⁷¹ A.1/24, fo.11, March 11, 1702.

⁷² A.1/19, fo.22d., May 14, 1697.

⁷³ Rich (1958), 186.

⁷⁴ A.1/34 fo.24, December 16, 1737.

Foreign and Colonial Competitors

At a time of increased international economic expansion and globalization, it was only natural that the HBC would run into competition from other traders, which, at this time, came from the French, whose participation in the fur trade predated the HBC's by several decades. With the discovery of the beaver-rich St. Lawrence River watershed and Great Lakes system by Champlain in 1603, the French had stumbled upon a resource that was becoming increasingly popular in Europe but more difficult to obtain.⁷⁵ When Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, approached the future Committee Members in 1667 about a potentially lucrative business venture in North America, they were already experienced in harvesting furs but were limited in their ability to do so by their own government in Paris. While individuals like Radisson and Groseilliers were enthusiastic about expanding their business in the fur trade, legislation in New France limited the growth of this trade. While the fur trade would certainly produce higher revenues for the colony, the main goal of New France's governors was the expansion of farming and colonization in the region.⁷⁶ That being said, the Intendant and politicians were simply not interested in having eligible men run off into the wilderness to make a quick fortune. In addition to this, however, fur traders like Radisson and Groseilliers had also grown increasingly dissatisfied with the level of taxation imposed on the furs once they were brought to Montreal for export.⁷⁷ Of course, just because Radisson and Groseilliers had left for England to explore new business prospects did not mean that the fur trade in New France stopped. The French imported

⁷⁵ Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 31.

⁷⁶ Rich (1958), 13.

⁷⁷ Rich (1958), 24.

five to six times the amount of furs as the HBC did during their best years.⁷⁸ The following table illustrates the large quantities of beaver imported by the French from Canada during the early eighteenth century:

	Number of Beaver Pelts
1701	50,662
1712	48,918
1717	97,596
1722	110,666
1723	79,748
1725	28,000
1726	65,386
1728	98,666
1729	85,094
1730	107,512
1732	113,334
1733	147,334
1734	100,000

While the French markets were able to absorb some of the annual product, they could only absorb about 40,000 coat beaver and 20,000 parchment beaver every year.⁸⁰ Naturally, this posed some difficulties when the French began annually importing between 50,000 and 100,000 beaver pelts in the 1670s, when the HBC was still in its infancy.⁸¹ Unfortunately for the French, their markets were just as subject to saturation as their English counterparts' – resulting in plummeting fur prices.

Actually, after 1705, it was recorded that every beaver pelt sold in France was done so at a loss.⁸² With this realization, the French began re-exporting their furs to

⁷⁸ Rich (1945), xi.

⁷⁹ Murray G. Lawson, *Fur, a Study in English Mercantilism 1700-1775* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), 136.

⁸⁰ Ray and Freeman, 31.

⁸¹ Rich (1958), 123.

⁸² Norrie, Owram, and Emery, 42.

countries such as Holland, Germany, and those in Eastern Europe which had no access to ample beaver sources.⁸³ While the French were able to establish re-export markets, the Navigation Laws in effect in England prevented French furs from legally entering the country.⁸⁴ This, of course, was beneficial to the HBC because the Company would not be subject to crippling competition from already well-established European companies. Moreover, the Committee Members were fortunate to have established their company when they did because, while the French markets were already becoming glutted, the English markets were still eagerly waiting for an influx of beaver furs. During the HBC's first two decades in business, the large London skinnners and furriers bought all of the annually imported furs that the Company had to offer. It was only in the mid-1690s that the Committee Members were forced to send large quantities of beaver pelts to cities like Amsterdam and Hamburg to relieve the glutted markets of London.⁸⁵ Moreover, between 1682 and 1697 the Company's forts in Rupert's Land fluctuated between English and French possession which, in time, significantly affected the HBC's annual returns.⁸⁶ While these losses were unwelcomed by the Committee Members, they actually proved to be a blessing in disguise for the Company as they spared it the embarrassment and difficulty of importing far too many furs than the markets could absorb. Nevertheless, though, the Committee Members were still interested in knowing the quantities of furs arriving in La Rochelle, even though their domestic markets were essentially safe from this competition.⁸⁷ Moreover, after the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which, among others, relinquished French control over

⁸³ Innis, 70.

⁸⁴ Rich (1945), xli.

⁸⁵ Rich (1957), xlii.

⁸⁶ Rich (1958), 228.

⁸⁷ A.1/23, fo.37d., October 8, 1701.

Rupert's Land and restored it to England, the Committee Members could breathe a little easier knowing that at least some of their problems had been solved.⁸⁸

Aside from the French, however, the HBC was still subject to other European competition. The Dutch, for instance, had established their colony of New Netherland along the North American eastern seaboard early in the seventeenth century. Although this territory was officially surrendered to the English after the Treaty of Breda in 1667, the lucrative fur trade held by the Dutch was simply taken up and exploited by the eager American colonists.⁸⁹ Colonies participating in the beaver and luxury fur trade included New York, Maryland, Carolina, and Virginia.⁹⁰ Though the annual return from the colonies by the end of the seventeenth century was about 8,000 pelts, it paled in comparison with the tens of thousands of pelts annually imported by the HBC.⁹¹ While the colonial fur trade may not have been as much of a threat to the HBC as the French was, however, the Committee Members were nevertheless displeased with this added competition. The HBC's true irritation became evident in 1681, when the Committee Members heard about an upcoming sale of New York beaver fur which would pre-date their sale by one day. While the Company had originally planned to sell their furs on October 10th, the warehouse attendants declared that they would be unable to prepare the beaver fur for that day and that the sale would have to be postponed until November 9th. After finding out about the upcoming colonial sale, however, the Committee immediately cancelled the postponed sale and ordered the warehouse keepers to find a

⁸⁸ Lawson (1943), ix.

⁸⁹ Rich (1958), 49.

⁹⁰ Rich (1958), 13.

⁹¹ Rich (1958), 46.

way to prepare the fur for the original sale date – which they did.⁹² For the HBC, any competition, regardless of citizenship, was bad for business and unwanted. In 1682, for example, a group of interlopers from Boston sailed to Rupert's Land with the intention of entering the fur trade.⁹³ Once the Committee Members discovered this illegal activity the following year, they immediately sent letters to the Governor of Massachusetts informing him that the group was likely to return to Boston in October of that year at which point they must be arrested for violating the terms of the Company's Charter.⁹⁴ For the HBC, even the threat of its country's own citizens competing for the London markets was too great to endure.

In addition to competition from the colonies, however, the HBC even suspected its own employees of trying to undercut their monopoly. Though the Committee Members may have initially allowed their employees to keep the furs they had collected in the Bay, in their attempt to curb competition, they gradually reduced these privileges and forced employees to sell their furs only as part of the Company auctions.⁹⁵ As an added measure, however, the ships and the crew's possessions were searched by Company officials for illegally smuggled furs which had not been declared by the HBC's employees.⁹⁶ While the Committee Members certainly did not appreciate all of this added competition, they were forced to tolerate it if they could not disrupt it through their own semi-legal channels.

⁹² Rich (1945), xxxvii.

⁹³ Glyndwr Williams, "Highlights in the History of the First Two Hundred Years of the Hudson's Bay Company: Part II," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 301, Autumn 1970), 9.

⁹⁴ Rich (1948), "Letter to Simon Bradstreet Esqr., Governor of Massachusetts," July 11, 1683, 93.

⁹⁵ Mancke, 27.

⁹⁶ A.1/7, fo.40d., October 8, 1684.

Politics

One of the most effective ways that the HBC was able to stay in business was to have legal and political support on their side. Coming from a group of politicians and businessmen, the Committee Members had ways to influence legal channels by manipulating political legislation to their own advantages. The Company's fourth Deputy-Governor, Sir James Hayes, for instance, was Prince Rupert's – cousin of King Charles II – secretary, while the first Governor was Prince Rupert himself.⁹⁷ Other members of the early HBC also included bankers, aristocrats, large land owners, tax officials, naval officials, and other men of wealth and power.⁹⁸ As previously stated, the Committee Members were not pioneers bringing civilization to the wilderness or noble men trying to do good in the world. These men were essentially absentee landlords whose interests in Rupert's Land largely included the continued and uninterrupted accumulation of their company's profits. It was only natural, then, that these men of wealth and power would try to use their connections to benefit themselves and their business venture.

While the Committee Members often found loopholes in laws governing their own actions, they instinctively used their political connections to swiftly discipline those who, they claimed, had cheated their company. More often, though, whenever something or someone sought to prevent the Company from maximizing its earning potential, the Committee Members recorded the need to petition the Crown to assist their cause. In 1684, for example, after learning about an attack on one of the HBC's forts two years earlier by the French, the Committee recorded, "Sr. James Hayes haveing

⁹⁷ Rich (1942), xix.

⁹⁸ Rich (1942), xx-xxiv, xxxiv.

Delivered into this Committee a copy of the petition upon the notice of the French Invasion of Porte Nellson as also a copy of the memoriall that was sent from his Majesty thereupon to the French King.”⁹⁹ Violations of the Company’s Charter and monopoly were not taken lightly by the Committee. Littered throughout the Company’s meeting minutes and recorded letters are lists and tallies totalling the value of damages caused by attacks on the Company’s forts and ships. When petitioning their monarch or Parliament for assistance, the Committee Members not only included the total value of goods that were damaged or stolen, but also the anticipated lost revenue because of the attack. In 1687, for instance, the Company was trying to obtain monetary compensation for the French attacks between 1682 and 1686. The total damages claimed by the Company amounted to £111,255 16s. 3d., which accounted for everything between the destroyed Port Nelson fort and its provisions to a French fort erected in the Bay and the profits it earned by illegally trading there.¹⁰⁰ With estimated total losses over £100,000, it was only logical for the HBC Committee Members to be persistent in their attempts to seek reparations. In 1696, for example, the Committee Members were still petitioning the Crown about damages sustained during the French attacks on Port Nelson in 1682.¹⁰¹ These petitions remained necessary until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when France relinquished her claims to Rupert’s Land and Anglo-French conflicts in Hudson’s Bay began to subside.

Throughout its early history, the HBC’s largest domestic English opponent was London’s chief hat-making guild, The Feltmakers. In 1690, The Feltmakers accused the

⁹⁹ Rich (1946), January 14, 1684, 190-191.

¹⁰⁰ Rich (1948), “A True State of the Case Between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the French of Canada in the West Indies,” May 22, 1687, 265-267.

¹⁰¹ Rich (1957), December 21, 1696, 297.

Company of privately selling substantial portions of its returns to large, wealthy buyers who would then resell the fur to the felt/hatmakers at unreasonable prices. This was known as ‘engrossing’ and was illegal in other aspects of the economy – such as grain. The Feltmakers went on to petition Parliament, who agreed to legally require the HBC to stop privately selling their furs and to hold at least two public auctions every year.¹⁰² While The Feltmakers may have applauded themselves for the success of their efforts, the Company’s meeting minutes record the Committee’s continued and desperate attempts to locate any buyers who would privately purchase their unsold stockpile of furs. In 1701, for example, the minutes record the need to, “meete and greate with any person or Persons that are willing to buy...the Compa Goods now Unsold.”¹⁰³ The Committee Members simply continued to conduct their private business, even purchasing the unsold beaver themselves or selling it to their own captains. In 1707, for instance, Captain Knight bought 24 lots of martin skins for £933.¹⁰⁴ Fortunately for the HBC, however, the majority of the furs sold privately were purchased by the prominent, large skimmers and furriers of London. One of the most frequent buyers of privately sold beaver fur was the notorious London furrier, Thomas Glover. While little is known about the man himself, he was present from the Company’s beginnings, when he purchased the entire consignment of 1669,¹⁰⁵ until after the turn of the century, when he offered to buy beaver at 5s. per pound in 1702.¹⁰⁶ These large buyers were essentially the reason why the HBC was spared the difficulty of having to re-export its own furs during its first quarter century in business. Unfortunately for the HBC, however, in order

¹⁰² Lawson (1948), 34.

¹⁰³ A.1/23, fo.10d., February 5, 1701.

¹⁰⁴ A.1/29, fo.6, January 29, 1707.

¹⁰⁵ Rich (1958), 69.

¹⁰⁶ A.1/24, fo.16d., May 1, 1702.

to make a profit themselves, these buyers would usually offer much lower prices for the furs than their actual market value. While the Committee Members may have jumped at the occasion to use the law to their benefit, the continuation of these private sales shows their willingness to evade regulation for sales and survival.

Even for the payment of their customs duties the Committee Members demanded special privileges. One of the benefits of re-exporting furs was the fact that the Customs office would pay a drawback on the exported goods. This meant that, since the imported goods were not going to remain or be sold in the country, the collected import tax would be returned to the exporter. Based on this practice, in 1681, the meeting minutes recorded, “this Committee...desire his Highness [Prince Rupert] would be pleased to Intercede to his Maty. to Issue out his Order to the Commissioners of the Custome House to suffer Beaver wooll to be exported by bill of store.”¹⁰⁷ What this meant was that the Company’s success during this early period in its history nearly bankrupted it by saturating the London fur markets. In order to avoid stockpiling thousands of pelts in their warehouse, the Committee Members needed the Customs office to allow furs to be exported duty-free. Unfortunately, however, it is unclear whether or not this request was approved.¹⁰⁸ By 1684, the Committee Members had also reasoned that they should have the drawback on *ad velorum* duties extended to include tobacco, since the tobacco they annually imported from Portugal would be re-exported to Rupert’s Land. Similarly, though, while an upcoming meeting with the customs commissioners is mentioned in the meeting minutes, the results are unclear.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, by the end of the 1690s, the

¹⁰⁷ Rich (1945), February 15, 1681, 183.

¹⁰⁸ Rich (1945), xxxii.

¹⁰⁹ Rich (1946), January 18, 1684, 193.

Committee Members had even devised a strategy to avoid being charged the full amount on their customs duties. Historian Elizabeth Mancke explains,

[T]o evade paying all the customs fees the company instructed the men at all the forts to pack heavy furs 40-45 to a bundle and thin furs 55-60 to a bundle. This practice would have tended to make all bundles nearly the same size. The thin light furs were then to be stowed on the ship first so that they came off last, after the customs valuation had been done.¹¹⁰

With the HBC being charged an import duty on each individual pelt, the Committee Members were pleased to be able to save money on even a few pelts in each bundle – especially when the Company, beginning in 1693, began importing nearly one hundred thousand pelts each year.¹¹¹

Throughout its early history, the success of the HBC rested largely on the connections and alliances of its administrators to the political leaders and legal minds in London. With the Crown's approval, the HBC obtained a monopoly that legally endorsed its right to exclusively trade in Rupert's Land and prosecute those (primarily other Britons) whose actions violated their Charter. Though many disagreed with this monopoly and the privileges it awarded the Company, the Committee Members helped acquire it because of their strategic connections in England's political hierarchy, and their wealth and personal fortunes.

Making Markets at Home

While the HBC was still in its infancy, the Committee Members routinely worried about the state of the London markets. Naturally, in order to absorb the massive quantities of fur imported by the HBC, these markets would have to remain healthy and

¹¹⁰ Mancke, 33.

¹¹¹ Rich (1958), 320.

stable. Though the Company's first sales encouraged the Committee Members to continue annually sending ships to Rupert's Land, in anticipation of potential over production, the Committee Members understood their need to prevent their markets from becoming oversaturated and unable to absorb their product. During the Company's early years, its administrators focused their energy and efforts on promoting felt hats and luxury furs, alternative uses to their products, diversifying their imports, and, finally, manipulating the markets to prevent ruinous over-supply.

Though the growing success and popularity of the beaver felt hat from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards was able to partly justify the HBC's endeavour into Rupert's Land, it was unwise for the Committee Members to rely solely on the success of a hat to keep their company in business. For the Committee Members, the right course of action was to become ever more proactive in their attempts at increasing the popularity and uses of beaver and luxury furs throughout London. The early attempts at making markets in London began with the good intention of gifting items made of beaver to prominent and wealthy individuals so that the lower sorts could imitate them. In 1670, for example, the HBC had nearly one hundred pounds of beaver fur made into hats which were to be presented to several influential individuals.¹¹² With similar intent, the Committee minutes also record the gifting of five martin pelts and several other luxurious pelts to the Right Honourable Lady Fauckland in 1683.¹¹³ Furthermore, in 1684 the Committee ordered the making of two beaver hats to be presented to Charles II and the Duke of York.¹¹⁴ While these two hats were ultimately presented to James II and Richard Cradock, a Committee Member, the intention of

¹¹² Rich (1942), xxxii. The names of these individuals are not recorded in the meeting minutes.

¹¹³ Rich (1946), November 19, 1683, 156.

¹¹⁴ Rich (1958), 167.

gifting these hats to the King and his successor was to ensure that the important men in the country embraced the latest fashions for others to emulate. Of course, felt hats were not the only items which could be made out of beaver pelts. In 1682, for instance, the Company minutes record the need to deliver a pair of beaver wool mittens to a Mr. Jno. Mechin.¹¹⁵ Similarly, in the attempt to popularize the use of beaver wool stockings the Committee Members presented a pair of the stockings to the Duke of York in 1684.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately for the HBC, however, this fashion trend never really became popular. While the idea of gifting items to the rich and famous had an obvious underlying agenda of quietly lobbying powerful friends and allies in Parliament and at Court, however, it was still quite important for the HBC to have these prominent individuals display current popular fashions for others to follow.

While the Committee Members waited to reap the rewards of these efforts, however, they knew that it was necessary to simultaneously implement other initiatives to increase their company's revenue and ensure its survival. From the Company's beginnings, trading and importing beaver fur was intended as a stepping stone to the undiscovered greatness of Rupert's Land. Early letters to the Bay reveal the Committee Members' eager optimism for the speedy discovery of gold, jewels, the fabled Northwest Passage, as well as other riches and/or ground-breaking findings.¹¹⁷ Year after year, however, there came the disappointing news that the men in Hudson's Bay had found no extensive mineral deposits, no diamond mines, and no other major valuable sources of income. Though the Committee Members could not ensure the discovery of these kinds of great treasures, however, they could at least see to the

¹¹⁵ Rich (1946), November 8, 1682, 42.

¹¹⁶ Rich (1958), 167.

¹¹⁷ Rich (1948), "Instructions to Captain Thomas Draper," May 21, 1680, 14.

expansion of more plausible alternatives. Following the mention of whales in Hudson's Bay, for example, the Committee Members began to evaluate the potential of becoming a major importer of whale oil, blubber and bone (baleen). Thus, in 1689, the employees at Churchill River collected more than 10 tons of whale blubber which they exported to London.¹¹⁸ Similarly, when the potential of an isinglass mineral deposit was identified,¹¹⁹ the Committee Members hired a miner and purchased a variety of mining equipment for the forts.¹²⁰ The Company's efforts, then, were to minimize their overreliance on beaver fur to sustain their company and instead invest in alternative sources of revenue. Unfortunately for the HBC, however, these alternative sources proved few and far between, resulting in largely fruitless endeavours to diversify the financial interests of the Company at this time.

The HBC's early years of success were largely bittersweet for the Committee Members, who savoured the fact that their company was growing and increasing its annual returns yet struggled with Company finances and the difficulties associated with growing stockpiles of beaver furs. In order to compensate for these unfavourable conditions, the Committee Members began to manipulate the availability of furs in London causing demand to spike from worried buyers who believed that beaver quantities were limited.¹²¹ Letters sent to the Bay instructed the fort governors to severely limit their trade in those furs that were not selling well in London at the time. The HBC employee's responses to those letters demonstrated their understanding of the Committee's orders. In 1716, for instance, Thomas McCliesh of Albany Fort wrote,

¹¹⁸ Rich (1957), xlvii.

¹¹⁹ Rich (1945), October 31, 1681, 138.

¹²⁰ Rich (1945), March 24, 1682, 197.

¹²¹ Mancke, 37-38.

“I have told all the Indians not to bring any summer beaver, neither in coat nor parchment. I likewise burnt 150 coat and parchment before their faces, telling them at the same time that it is of no value with us.”¹²² In addition to this, however, the Committee Members would also instruct their employees to temporarily avoid sending those furs to London altogether. In 1708, for instance, instead of being sent to London, coat and stage beaver skins were simply stockpiled in the Fort Albany warehouse, as per Committee orders.¹²³ In these ways, therefore, the Committee Members were able to manipulate the London markets. By preventing their supplies from overwhelming their market demand, the HBC ensured that they would not have to lower their prices or accept less than desirable bids on their goods.

The uncertainty and cautious optimism of the Committee Members during the Company’s early years was evident by the amount of energy and effort they put into ensuring their company’s survival. This, however, was achieved only by the careful year-round monitoring of the London markets. While the glutted French fur markets caused beaver prices to drop in that country, the Committee Members were determined to avoid a similar situation. Instead, they focused their efforts on making or improving markets in England for as long as they could.

Making Markets in Europe

During the Company’s early years, the Committee Members were fortunate in the sense that they were able to sell their furs to the enthusiastic buyers of London instead of having to export the furs themselves. What the Committee Members feared,

¹²² K. G. Davies, ed., “Letter from Thomas McCliesh, Albany Fort,” July 16, 1716, *Letters from Hudson’s Bay 1703-1740* (London: Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1965), 41.

¹²³ Mancke, 38.

however, was that the London markets would eventually become glutted and unable to absorb the increasing quantities of imported beaver pelts. The Committee Members would then be forced to export their own furs to the large ports and cities of Europe whose sources of beaver were limited. By exporting the furs themselves, the Committee Members not only hoped to relieve pressure from their London markets and prevent the price of beaver pelts from plummeting, but also obtain some much-needed capital to pay their rising debts.

Unfortunately for the HBC, however, the London markets began to slacken shortly after the Company's first decade in business. In 1680, for example, the Committee Members ordered that a section of the beaver pelts be prepared for export "for the Rushia Trade."¹²⁴ While the entire consignment was eventually purchased by London wholesale buyers, thus making re-export no longer necessary, this remained a growing concern for the HBC.¹²⁵ Even successful sales were bitter-sweet for the Company, such as in 1681, when the November sale earned over £15,000 but had nearly reached the limits of how much beaver the London markets could absorb.¹²⁶ While the HBC managed to thrive during the 1680s, however, it was during the 1690s that the Committee Members were no longer able to rely on buyers in London to purchase their entire annual consignments of fur which now included nearly one hundred thousand beaver pelts.¹²⁷ In order to prevent their supply from overrunning the domestic demands and causing a drop in fur prices, the Committee Members also began to export their own furs. The Committee sent several representatives – paid employees who earned a

¹²⁴ Rich (1945), January 7, 1680, 21.

¹²⁵ Rich (1958), 93.

¹²⁶ Rich (1945), xxxii.

¹²⁷ Rich (1958), 371.

respectable income of about £200 per annum plus expenses – to the large cities of Europe to find outlets for the HBC’s growing stockpiles of fur.¹²⁸ The most commonly mentioned cities include Amsterdam (Netherlands),¹²⁹ Hamburg (Germany),¹³⁰ Archangel¹³¹ and Moscow (Russia),¹³² and Narva (Estonia)¹³³ – although there was also some business conducted in Copenhagen (Denmark),¹³⁴ Lubeck¹³⁵ and Bremen (Germany),¹³⁶ and Rotterdam (Netherlands).¹³⁷ The furs sent to these foreign correspondents were sent in consignments of several thousand skins and were sold to buyers in similarly large quantities.¹³⁸ While the HBC’s representatives found buyers and negotiated sales, however, the final decision on price ultimately rested with the Committee Members in London.¹³⁹

Incidentally, the HBC Committee Members were not the first to stumble upon the idea of sending fur surpluses Eastward. By the time the HBC had been granted its Royal Charter in 1670, the French were already annually importing tens of thousands of furs from their ventures in North America. When their markets had become glutted by oversupply and beaver fur prices began to drop, they diverted their excess furs to the Russian markets.¹⁴⁰ Unlike the HBC, who used their own ships to re-export their furs to the East, however, the French were forced to rely on the Dutch to ship their furs for

¹²⁸ A.1/17, fo.13, June 21, 1695.

¹²⁹ A.1/17, fo.4d., January 25, 1695.

¹³⁰ A.1/17, fo.13, June 21, 1695.

¹³¹ A.1/18, fo.15d., May 12, 1696.

¹³² A.1/18, fo.15d., May 12, 1696.

¹³³ A.1/18, fo.11, April 17, 1696.

¹³⁴ A.1/20, fo.6, January 5, 1698.

¹³⁵ A.1/24, fo.6, January 9, 1702.

¹³⁶ A.1/18, fo.21d., June 2, 1696.

¹³⁷ A.1/25, fo.6, March 10, 1703.

¹³⁸ A.1/17, fo.4d., January 25, 1695.

¹³⁹ A.1/21, fo.7d., January 25, 1699.

¹⁴⁰ Rich (1945), xli.

them.¹⁴¹ Moreover, after the Dutch lost their own North American fur-bearing colonies in 1667, they became equally eager to absorb the excess furs of the French and English.¹⁴² Of course, the irony of sending furs to Russia and the Netherlands during this period, countries which had previously possessed two of the largest sources of beaver pelts in the world, cannot be overlooked and is striking.¹⁴³

There was a point, however, when the Committee Members began to realize that these efforts were simply not producing the results they originally expected. Several years could pass between the time the furs were packed and re-exported and the time the money from the sales had been sent back to London. While it could naturally take some time for the HBC's representatives to find buyers and negotiate prices, the main delay in these operations was the fact that these men had to wait several weeks while letters went back and forth to the Committee Members in London requesting their approval. Moreover, buyers knowing the HBC's desperation were likely to take advantage of it by offering lower-than-market prices. Noted historian E. E. Rich describes the HBC's increasing difficulties, "[B]y June of 1698 the Company had over twenty-two thousand coat [beaver] lying at Amsterdam, while Hamburg had a similar quantity of parchment."¹⁴⁴ To compensate for this circumstance, however, the Committee Members would send unsellable shipments of furs from one city to the next, hoping to find fair buyers elsewhere. In 1698, for example, the HBC sent 12,000 skins to Hamburg but later ordered them to be re-exported to Archangel.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, in 1702, the Company ordered the parchment and coat beaver skins which they could not sell in Hamburg and

¹⁴¹ Rich (1958), 45.

¹⁴² Rich (1958), 49.

¹⁴³ Raymond H. Fisher, *The Russian Fur Trade, 1550-1700* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1974), 1.

¹⁴⁴ Rich (1958), 357.

¹⁴⁵ A.1/20, fo.22d., June 10, 1698.

Narva to be re-exported to Archangel.¹⁴⁶ Incidentally, even when the sales were successful the money collected was not always sent to London as it was needed to pay for the goods that the Company was importing from the East – particularly hemp and flax.¹⁴⁷

After the turn of the century, the Committee Members began to see their efforts as largely fruitless and, consequently, began to reduce their exports. In 1707, for instance, the minutes record, “The Comittee Takeing into consideration the Little Likelyhood of advantage the Company will Reape by Sending their Shipps and goods for Rushia...Did unanimously Agree not to send the Compa Shipp for Rushia.”¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, however, these exports proved to be an unnecessarily circuitous way for the Company to try to recuperate its funds. Nevertheless, in conjunction with their exports, the HBC continued to conduct its public auctions and private sales in London.¹⁴⁹ If exports to the east had any benefit, it was that they did relieve some of the pressure on the domestic markets and allowed the Company to continue selling its furs without overly compromising their prices.

[Conclusion]

While the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat throughout the seventeenth century had created an ideal opportunity for the HBC to come into existence, the Committee Members could not rely on the success of a single commodity to ensure the continued prosperity of their company. As experienced businessmen, the Committee

¹⁴⁶ A.1/24, fo.14d., April 17, 1702.

¹⁴⁷ A.1/23, fo.38, October 22, 1701.

¹⁴⁸ A.1/29, fo.13d., May 9, 1707.

¹⁴⁹ A.1/17, fo.9, April 26, 1695.

Members were dedicated to ensuring the continued success of the business into which they had invested so much. Naturally, this required a great deal of time, attention, and effort. The Committee Members were constantly conscious of their company's financial situation, the success of their fur sales, any new and unwanted competition (native or foreign), the complaints of those objecting to their monopoly, strategies for finding political support for their operation, and finding new ways to expand their markets at home and abroad.

One of the greatest problems that the Committee Members encountered throughout this early period was a string of financial difficulties plaguing their company. Despite the fact that the HBC's early shipments from Rupert's Land and their semi-annual fur sales were successful, they are not appropriate indicators of the Company's overall financial standing. What the HBC was doing during the 1670s was providing a highly sought-after trade good to a very receptive market with minimal competition. Naturally, the HBC's success was virtually guaranteed if they could simply import beaver fast enough and in large enough quantities. However, with the Company's continued success into the 1680s and 1690s, the markets eventually became oversaturated, resulting in sluggish fur sales and a drop in prices. What the Committee was forced to do, therefore, was put into effect a series of schemes to keep their company from going bankrupt. One way the Committee Members tried to prevent this from happening was to secure legal and political allies who would pass laws benefitting the Company while overlooking any of their questionable actions. With wealthy friends in positions of power in Parliament and at Court, the HBC was able to conduct occasional dubious business practices while the objections of disgruntled guilds and merchants fell on deaf ears. Another way in which the Committee hoped to ensure its

success was by diversifying their imports. If the HBC were to only import beaver furs, then they could find themselves in a particularly difficult situation if the beaver hat went out of style. In order to avoid running this risk, therefore, the Committee Members attempted to expand their trade by importing any new and useful items from Rupert's Land. Similarly, the HBC also began to import goods from the East which were needed in England, but were not available or naturally occurring within the country. Rather than having their ships return from Eastern Europe empty, they were used to import goods like hemp and flax which could be sold in England for additional revenue. Unfortunately for the HBC, however, these efforts by the Committee Members were simply not enough to keep their company from gradually slipping into an increasingly difficult economic situation. A clear indication of the HBC's financial recovery is evident only in the mid-1730s, when the Committee Members began investing their profits in other merchant companies. In 1737, for instance, the meeting minutes mentioned the need to order bonds worth £3,000 from the English East India Company.¹⁵⁰

The most important efforts on which the Committee Members could focus, however, was in creating and sustaining their markets at home as well as abroad. The Committee's knowledge and expertise of this is found in their appropriate reactions to the changing nature of their market. Naturally, it was in the Committee's best interest to find ways to expand their markets and rid them of any unnecessary pressure. As their primary market was found in London, their initial efforts were aimed at the people of that city. The best way for them to do this was by gifting their products to wealthy and influential members who would freely advertise their product. The Committee hoped that fashion-conscious individuals would try to emulate their social betters by

¹⁵⁰ A.1/34, fo.24, December 16, 1737.

purchasing those items. When the London markets began to fail, however, the Committee redirected their efforts to the Eastern countries who steadily welcomed the HBC's furs. It was in the East that the Committee hoped to find a ready outlet to absorb the excess furs that were glutting their London markets. While these efforts of expanding to the Eastern markets did not ultimately yield the desired results, however, the Committee's attempts at ensuring the long-lasting prosperity of their company are commendable. Amongst all of their efforts to keep their company afloat, their best option was to focus their efforts on creating and sustaining their markets at home and abroad.

CHAPTER 3

THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY AND THE ATLANTIC ECONOMY

In addition to participating in the global economy by shipping furs from Hudson's Bay to London, the Hudson's Bay Company [hereafter referred to as the HBC] was also responsible for importing goods from around the world to London which were then re-exported to Hudson's Bay. Since the remoteness of the Bay is not typically associated with the diverse economy of the London metropole, it has proven difficult to imagine that one could have found items linking that vast wilderness to dozens of places around the world.¹ The reality of the situation was, however, that the HBC provided specific goods which would then be traded to obtain the luxurious furs of Rupert's Land. At first glance these goods seem quite simple: tobacco, guns, alcohol, food, and cloth, among other things, which were standard trade goods desired by the Indians in and around Hudson's Bay. When examined more closely, however, one finds that the HBC's purchase of trade goods was a routinely repeated year-long ordeal involving thousands of pounds sterling worth of goods and provisions, hundreds of meetings for the Committee Members, dozens of employees, international correspondents, businesses and independent tradesmen, two semi-annual fur sales, and one annual expedition. In short, it was anything but simple. Nevertheless, such activity reflected the annual business cycle of the HBC in London.

¹ Scholars have not cast much recent light upon the connectedness of the HBC and a growing global economy. For more information on this subject see: John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

Although many items that the HBC purchased were also made in London, its environs, or, at least, within England, this was not necessarily a determining factor for purchasing trade goods. Even if the HBC wanted to support English – after the Union of 1707, British – industries and artisans, the HBC Committee Members were simply responding to the consumer demand created by the Indians in Rupert’s Land.² Many of these Indians had previously come into contact and traded with the French, whose merchant traders offered a variety of goods not only from France – such as brandy – but from around the world, too – such as Brazilian tobacco. The HBC, then, had little choice but to provide a similar compliment of trade goods if they wanted their business to survive and prosper. On the other hand, however, some of the items listed on invoices of trade goods were sent to test consumer interest. Some items imported by the Company – such as Holland guns – were most likely purchased because they were the cheapest they could find. The HBC Committee Members soon heard from the men in the Bay themselves that these kinds of imported goods either simply did not work or would not hold up in the cold climate. Other items, such as Asian spices, African ivory, or Indian cloth, imported by the HBC were not grown/produced in England or could not be manufactured as well (or as cheaply) as they could have been elsewhere.

Moreover, it is important to understand that not all of the goods that were sent to the Bay were meant for trade. The Company also sent certain items – such as provisions and building supplies – which were not intended for trade but, rather, for their employees’ use and consumption while residing in the Bay. Thus, to some extent, the HBC took responsibility for feeding its employees. In addition to trade goods, manifests

² For more information about the HBC in Rupert’s Land see: R. Connors, “In the Mind’s Eye: Law and British Colonial Expansion in Rupert’s Land in the Age of Empire,” in R. Connors and J. Law, eds., *Forging Alberta’s Constitutional Framework* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 1-23.

also contained items such as beer and pickled meats intended for the passage across the ocean, dried fruits and fruit juices to help the men stave off scurvy, and flour and oatmeal to supplement their accustomed diets. While food and provisions amounted to the second largest cargo to be sent to the Bay, they were usually minimal as the Committee wanted to reduce costs by having the men hunt their own food,³ tend gardens,⁴ and even care for livestock.⁵ Nevertheless, many items were imported to London from around the world, from whence they were sent to Hudson's Bay. The Company meeting minutes often reference some items based on their place of origin, for example 'Barbados sugar,'⁶ 'Carolina rice,'⁷ or 'Smyrna raisins.'⁸ Although these items were not necessarily for sale, they are significant because they reveal the breadth of Company interests in an increasingly global trade economy.

The HBC's early years of operation were filled with risk and uncertainty and it was appropriate and expedient for the Committee Members to be cautious about the kinds of goods they sent to the Bay. In their first few voyages in the 1670s the Committee sent staple goods for trade like guns and gun accessories, kettles and metal wares, alcohol, tobacco, and some luxury items (such as looking glasses and beads).⁹ From the outset of their business the HBC was understandably unwilling to take unnecessary additional risks in sending superfluous goods that were not guaranteed to

³ Henry Kelsey, "Journal, York Fort, September 18, 1696-September 3, 1697." October 22, 1696. *The Kelsey Papers* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1994), 33.

⁴ E. E. Rich, ed., "Letter to Henry Sergeant Esqr., April 27, 1683." *Copy-book of Letters Outward etc.: Begins 29th May, 1680, ends 5th July, 1687* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1948), 77.

⁵ Rich (1948), "Letter to Maximilion Keech," July 24, 1682, 65.

⁶ [Hudson's Bay Company Archives], A.1/33, fo.14d., May 6, 1712. Subsequent classification numbers refer to the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

⁷ A.1/33, fo.56, June 5, 1713.

⁸ K. G. Davies, ed., "Letter from Richard Staunton, Albany Fort," August 24, 1725. *Letters from Hudson's Bay 1703-1740* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), 105.

⁹ Elizabeth Mancke, *A Company of Businessmen: The Hudson's Bay Company and Long-Distance Trade, 1670-1730* (Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1988), 43.

sell in the Bay. What is interesting, however, is that for the next 50-60 years little changed with respect to the kinds of goods that were sent to Rupert's Land. In the 1730s, for example, the Committee was still sending the same staple items, only in much greater numbers. This cautiousness to deviate from the staples that sold well in the Bay demonstrates continuity during this period which the Committee Members maintained in order to keep their business endeavour prosperous. The solution to Company success was not expansion in diversity of their trade goods, but rather consistency, quality and quantity.

During the Company's early years the Committee Members also believed that they would be able to plant a colony in Hudson's Bay and its surrounding territory. The Committee even made references to these efforts of permanent settlement in their letters to the Bay.¹⁰ However, any actions they may have claimed to have taken towards colonization could have simply been necessary for maintaining and expanding their trade. Perhaps the most obvious indication that the HBC was never really serious about creating a colony was the fact that they did not send English women/families to the Bay and discouraged sexual relations with Indian women.¹¹ However, while Anglo-Indigenous unions were initially forbidden, they would eventually be realized as beneficial for the purposes of expanding trading networks.¹² Interesting also is the fact that, in the early eighteenth century, the HBC did not send things that were slowly becoming quintessential to the English 'civilized' world such as tea and porcelain. For example, tea did not appear in the Company's meeting minutes as a provision for the

¹⁰ Rich (1948), "Letter to Henry Sergeant Esqr.," April 27, 1683, 76.

¹¹ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor Nixon," May 15, 1682, 40.

¹² For more information on interpersonal and familiar Anglo-Indigenous relationships see: Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in the Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (British Columbia: UBC Press, 1996); and Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Pub., 1980).

Bay until 1715, forty five years after the Company's creation, and even then it was only included in a package for one of the Company's captains and not any of the ships' crew or employees living in Hudson's Bay.¹³ Permanent settlement may have been part of the Company's original design but as the years went on it proved too expensive and unrealistic for a Company facing increasing financial difficulties.¹⁴ Consequently, the rhetoric of colonization faded from the Company's records in the early to mid-eighteenth century.

Before exploring the different kinds of goods sent to the Bay it is important to appreciate that the HBC's monopoly in Hudson's Bay was not without its challengers and that there were occasional periods of war and hostilities in the Bay which disrupted the Company's trade. Until 1713, the Company had a rather tenuous hold on the Bay and its surrounding territory because of intermittent French aggression. In 1682, the HBC fort Port Nelson (later renamed York Factory) was attacked by two French ships led by Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers (who had previously been in the Company's employment) as well as a group of New England interlopers.¹⁵ The HBC then relocated to Fort Albany in James Bay, used Charlton Island as a storage depot, and later recovered Port Nelson.¹⁶ The French attacked again in June/July of 1686 and captured Moose Factory, Fort Rupert, Fort Albany, and Charlton Island.¹⁷ By 1688 the Company held two posts, York Factory and New Severn in Hudson's Bay.¹⁸

¹³ A.1/33, fo.149, May 24, 1715.

¹⁴ K. G. Davies, "The Years of No Dividend: Finances of the Hudson's Bay Company 1690 to 1718," in *The Beaver* (Outfit 301, Spring 1971), 26-27.

¹⁵ E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume One 1670-1763* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), 135.

¹⁶ Rich (1958), 145.

¹⁷ Rich (1958), 213-218.

¹⁸ E. E. Rich, ed., *Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters, Commissions, Instructions Outwards 1688-1696* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957), xiv-xviii.

Unfortunately, the newly established post at Churchill River accidentally burnt down in 1689.¹⁹ Although the Company recaptured Fort Albany in 1693, it lost York Fort in 1697, making Albany, aside from a handful of minor outposts, the only fort in the HBC's possession until York was restored in 1714, one year after England signed the Treaty of Utrecht with France which ceased the hostilities.²⁰ Because of these attacks the HBC lost tens of thousands of pounds in revenue, thousands of furs and trade goods, several ships, and even the lives of some of its employees. Yet, in hindsight, these attacks and the resulting loss of their forts were a mixed blessing for the HBC. With the fur market in London already oversaturated, the resulting situation would likely have proven costly to the Company had all of their forts been annually sending thousands of pelts from the Bay.²¹ Incidentally, at this time the HBC was also in an increasingly precarious financial position in England, so the confiscation of their forts also relieved the burden of sending ships laden with trade goods to several forts instead of just two, and then only one, Fort Albany.

Nevertheless, the skill and fiscal acumen of the HBC or the Committee Members should not be underestimated merely because of their misfortunes during the Anglo-French conflicts of the late seventeenth century. Overseas trade in the early eighteenth century was still fraught with risks, but profits could be great if the voyage was successful, and the Committee Members were certainly determined to have their business succeed. When ships returned from the Bay carrying a number of defective or broken trade items, the Committee would have these items examined to determine their flaws and how to avoid similar problems. They spent their winters ordering new

¹⁹ Rich (1958), 289.

²⁰ Davies (1965), xxxviii.

²¹ Rich (1958), 330.

products and provisions for the Bay with the expectation that these goods would be delivered before the ships were scheduled to launch in May.²² The Committee Members were strict in their orders about not giving out free/discounted food to local Indians despite the fact that they claimed to have been starving.²³ When one supplier failed to deliver a product, the Committee Members would send letters to their suppliers across Europe hoping someone would be able to obtain it.²⁴ However, if their attempts failed, and the Committee Members were unable to obtain certain trade items or continued sending defective merchandise, then the Indians in Rupert's Land would not return to the forts the following year, thereby weakening Company business. If their Indian clients preferred specific imported goods, then it was imperative for the Company to obtain those goods instead of supporting local or English businesses.

The HBC is often romanticised as a pioneering Canadian business, yet, realistically, it was simply a group of wealthy British men trying to make more money. Moreover, most of these members were more substantial shareholders. In 1671, for example, the Earl of Craven was noted to have £150 worth of shares,²⁵ while in 1672 a Mr. Fenn's shares were listed at £300.²⁶ In an enterprise as shaky and uncertain as importing/exporting it is not surprising that the Committee Members had to be ruthless businessmen in order to keep their business afloat and protect their vast sums of invested capital.

²² E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684: Second Series 1682-1684*. January 20, 1683. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1946), 68.

²³ Rich (1957), "Letter to Governor Geyer and Council at York Fort," June 17, 1693, 185.

²⁴ A.1/30, fo.10d., March 24, 1708.

²⁵ E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674*. April 2, 1672. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1942), 29.

²⁶ Rich (1942), November 30, 1671, 13.

The items sent to Hudson's Bay in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries carry considerable historical significance as they show how advanced the global trade economy was by the late seventeenth century. Not only were items from around Europe appearing at the London dockyards, but so too were goods from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. British trading networks originating in London were already quite extensive by the time the HBC was established so its Committee Members were not necessarily forging new networks but merely tapping into existing ones. Although the Company meeting minutes do not always specify the precise origin of their purchases such as businesses, addresses, or owners, the country or city name is often listed thereby giving a general indication of the foreign nature of the goods. By examining these goods it is possible to see not only the extensive nature of global trade networks at this time, but their significance in London as well as in Rupert's Land. Moreover, the commodities reveal the connectedness of Rupert's Land to London and the rest of the early eighteenth century trading world and, of course, the HBC's role in those burgeoning processes.²⁷

Alcohol

Alcohol was one of the most important trade goods to the HBC because it was incredibly profitable, addictive, and in great demand by Indians as well as HBC employees – which meant that it was guaranteed to sell. Throughout this period several different kinds of alcohol were sent to the Bay, each for different purposes. Incidentally,

²⁷ For more information on existing global trade networks see: Perry Gauci, *Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London, 1660-1800* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007); and Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

not all of the alcohol sent to the Bay was intended for trade. Each year, the HBC would purchase several dozen tons of beer which were then distributed as part of each man's daily rations for the voyages to and from Hudson's Bay.²⁸ Since the water stored on ships would turn rancid after a few weeks, it was necessary to bring an alcoholic beverage that was cheap, would not spoil in transit, and had a low enough alcohol content to keep the men hydrated without making them drunk.²⁹ The Company even sent large quantities of malt which were used by the HBC employees to brew their own beer once they were in the Bay.³⁰ Beer, however, was brewed in and around London and did not need to be imported to meet the needs of Company orders.³¹

By the early eighteenth century, brandy had become the most important alcoholic beverage sent to the Bay. Local Indians had first been introduced to brandy by the French, who had brought their own native brandy for trade.³² This meant that by the time the HBC began trading in the Bay the Committee Members should have imported French brandy since the Indians had already grown accustomed to, and even preferred, it. Although the Committee did try to obtain French brandy for their trade, not all of the references to brandy in the Company's meeting minutes signify French brandy as the Committee attempted to send English substitutes in the hopes of replacing the foreign product. One of the earliest references to brandy in the Company minutes is found on May 17, 1672, "the brandy...is promised to be delivered by Mr. Dulivier & to be

²⁸ Glyndwr Williams, ed., "Albany Fort Journal, 1705-06." *Hudson's Bay Miscellany, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1975), 70.

²⁹ Elizabeth Abbott, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada, 2008), 71.

³⁰ E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684: First Series 1679-1682*. May 17, 1680. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1945), 67.

³¹ Peter Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), xxii.

³² Rich (1958), 545.

received of him if it comes in time.”³³ A footnote to this section records that on June 10, 1672, the Dulivier brothers were paid £109. 6s. 0d. for 834 gallons of brandy.³⁴ The meeting minutes here, for example, do not list whether or not this was French brandy, though the suppliers had a French surname.

For much of this period England was at war with France and, although this did not mean that trade between the countries was at a standstill, the HBC faced considerable difficulties and rising prices while trying to import goods during periods of war.³⁵ In 1693, during the Nine Years’ War, the Committee wrote to Governor Geyer at York Fort informing him that they had no French brandy to send that year, “as for French brandy there is none to be had in England nor suffered to be brought in...[and] theres such Scarcity of it in France that they will neither suffer that or Wine to be Exported thence.”³⁶ Nevertheless, there are numerous references in the Company’s minutes which state that the HBC was sending genuine French brandy to the Bay. In 1713, for example, the meeting minutes note that, “Mr. Loro Mansfield & Mr. Sheppard Distillers were Ordered to provide...for the Factory at AR...12 Gallons of French Brandy.”³⁷ By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the minutes begin to specify that the Committee was ordering greater quantities of “English Brandy” from their local distillers.³⁸ In addition to this, the HBC also began sending a tincture to the Bay so that their governors could colour their English spirits to give them the appearance of French brandy.³⁹ Although the HBC did not want to jeopardize its trading relations with the

³³ Rich (1942), May 17, 1672, 40.

³⁴ Rich (1942), May 17, 1672, 40.

³⁵ Rich (1958), 311.

³⁶ Rich (1957), June 17, 1693, 190.

³⁷ A.1/33, fo.56d., June 5, 1713.

³⁸ A.1/21, fo.21d., May 12, 1699.

³⁹ Rich (1958), 545.

Indians in and around Hudson's Bay, buying French brandy was financially prohibitive and, at times, dangerous to import due to open Anglo-French conflicts on the seas. Such circumstances explain why the Committee eventually opted to purchase English distilled substitutes made from local or colonial ingredients.

In addition to sending brandy, the HBC also sent large quantities of specially imported spirits and wines as gifts and rewards to the ships' captains and governors in the Bay. These liquors, which were not intended for trade, were imported from Europe to encourage the men who were left in charge of the Company's trade to increase its profitability. Alcohol was also largely purchased by the men working in Hudson's Bay and paid for out of their future earnings.⁴⁰ Spanish and Portuguese variations of fortified wines such as port,⁴¹ sack,⁴² and sherry⁴³ were growing in popularity in England and amongst the HBC captains and governors.⁴⁴ Distilled liquors such as Scottish whiskey⁴⁵ (referred to as 'usquebaugh') and Caribbean rum⁴⁶ also make an appearance in the meeting minutes, though not until the early eighteenth century. The Committee also sent hundreds of gallons of Caribbean molasses to the Bay which, similar to the malt, could be distilled into spirits by the HBC employees for their personal consumption.⁴⁷

In order to help their trade prosper, the HBC had to reach far and wide into the available global trade networks to bring these foreign goods to Hudson's Bay.

⁴⁰ Davies (1965), "Letter from Joseph Myatt, Albany Fort," August 2, 1729, 148.

⁴¹ A.1/32, fo.24, May 31, 1710.

⁴² Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor Nixon," June 1681, 28.

⁴³ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor Nixon," May 29, 1682, 54.

⁴⁴ C. Anne Wilson, *Food and Drink in Britain from the Stone Age to Recent Times* (London: Constable, 1973), 391. For more information on contemporary alcohols and their consumption see: John Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures: A Social History of Drinks in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁴⁵ A.1/24, fo.25d., June 16, 1702.

⁴⁶ A.1/33, fo.149, May 24, 1715.

⁴⁷ E. E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684: First Series 1679-1682*. May 11, 1682. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1945), 215.

Committee Members were in constant contact with their correspondents in Portugal, Spain, France, Jamaica, and Barbados with the goal of securing items which were essential to their trade. Even with this relatively small amount of alcohol – which was nevertheless very difficult to obtain – that was sent to the Bay, the HBC was able to bring Western Europe and the Caribbean that much closer to this remote region of the ‘New World.’

Tobacco

Another one of the most important trading goods that the HBC sent to the Bay was tobacco. The plant’s discovery by Europeans at the end of the fifteenth century and its integration into European society and cultivation in the Americas throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries meant that, by the time the HBC began trading in the Bay, tobacco had already gained significant global importance.⁴⁸ Once again, the Indians of Hudson’s Bay had grown accustomed to tobacco because of their pre-existing trading relations with the French. In this case, however, the HBC did not begin importing foreign goods and work their way back to English and colonial goods, but rather the opposite.

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the various imperial governments of Europe not only began cultivating tobacco within their own countries, but also in their overseas colonies. With Sir Walter Raleigh’s discovery of Virginia for the English in 1584, tobacco was found to grow well in the colony’s fertile soil and

⁴⁸ E. R. Billings, *Tobacco: Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacture and Commerce: with an Account of its Various Modes of use, from its First Discovery until Now* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1973), 32-42.

hospitable climate.⁴⁹ From about 1620, the colony's tobacco was favoured in England, even above that of its Caribbean counterparts.⁵⁰ Tobacco farming in the West Indies, however, was in decline throughout the mid-seventeenth century as farmers transformed their fields to grow the much more profitable cotton and sugar cane.⁵¹ In addition to this, however, tobacco was also being cultivated in England, though on a much smaller scale and lower quality than that of Virginia.⁵² This meant that, when the HBC began trading in Rupert's Land, the most popular and least expensive variety of tobacco available was Virginian. What the Company eventually discovered, however, was that the Indians in Hudson's Bay had acquired via the French a taste for Brazilian tobacco and actually preferred it to Virginian tobacco. In a letter to Henry Sergeant in the Bay, dated May 22, 1685, the Committee wrote, "we have made search, what Tobacco the French vends to the Indians...and have this yeare bought the like...Brazeele Tobacco... be carefull to sell them, not halfe the Quantety of this, for it costs us treble the price."⁵³ From 1685 onwards, the HBC began shipping Brazilian tobacco to Hudson's Bay, which had been imported to London from Portugal by way of business correspondents in Lisbon and Oporto.⁵⁴ The willingness of the HBC to create such intricate trade routes reveals the importance of a commodity like tobacco to their fur trade.

It was at this point that the HBC Committee truly realized how pivotal this kind of tobacco was for their trade and would do anything within their power not only to obtain it, but ensure its arrival in the Bay. This determination was demonstrated in May

⁴⁹ Billings, 80.

⁵⁰ Billings, 90-91.

⁵¹ Carl and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line: the English in the Caribbean, 1624-1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 276.

⁵² Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 131.

⁵³ Rich (1948), "Letter to Mr. Henry Sergeant," May 22, 1685, 142.

⁵⁴ Mancke, 43.

of 1691, when the ship bringing Brazil tobacco from Portugal arrived in England after the Company's ships had already departed for the Bay.⁵⁵ K.G. Davis describes the frenzy which followed the ship's arrival, "the Deputy Governor and some of the Committee rushed the tobacco ashore, into Customs, out of Customs and down-river, all in the day, in attempt to catch the ships before they left the Thames Estuary."⁵⁶ The Committee Members' scramble to get the tobacco onto the ships destined for the Bay shows how important it was to the HBC's trading relations and its status as a commodity in the Bay. The governors at the various forts often assured the Committee that Indians would not travel such large distances to return to a fort which had run out of Brazil tobacco during the previous trading year. In 1734, for example, William Bevan at Moose Fort informed the Committee, "it is a great disappointment to the natives in our not having any Brazil tobacco come over."⁵⁷ After the incident in 1691 the Committee began ordering the following year's tobacco from its correspondents in Portugal over six months in advance.⁵⁸ This procedure hoped to ensure that the tobacco would arrive in time for the next expedition. Otherwise, at least, the correspondents would send word that there was no tobacco available thereby giving the Committee time to locate it elsewhere. This is precisely what happened in March, 1708, when the Committee was forced to write to its correspondent in Amsterdam in search of any Brazil tobacco available for purchase, "the Secr having Rec'd a Letter from Mr. Brooke and Co: of Lisbone acquainting the Compa that the Quantity of Brazeill Tobacco could not be sent upon which it is ordered that a Letter be wrott to Mr. Spilman of Amsterdam desireing

⁵⁵ A.1/13, fo.19d., May 30, 1691.

⁵⁶ Rich (1957), xxxix.

⁵⁷ Davies (1965), "Letter from Thomas White, York Fort," August 6, 1735, 199.

⁵⁸ A.1/14, fo.4, November, 23, 1691.

him to buy for the Compa about £1500 weight of Brazielle Tobacco.”⁵⁹ Fortunately for the HBC, the agent in Amsterdam was able to obtain a large quantity of Brazil tobacco, though at a highly inflated price.⁶⁰

Though during this period the Committee’s main focus was to import Brazil tobacco, it nevertheless continued to purchase and export to Rupert’s Land English Virginian tobacco as well as something the minutes refer to as ‘imitation’ Brazil tobacco.⁶¹ Once again the HBC was able to bring goods from the outside world to the remote parts of Rupert’s Land. Tobacco linked the wilderness of Hudson’s Bay to Brazil, Virginia, Portugal, the Netherlands and, of course, London.

Guns and Metal Wares

Each year, the Committee Members would purchase hundreds of guns and metal wares (i.e. kettles, knives, hatchets, etc.) which were then sent to the Bay for trade. Fortunately for the Committee, many of these items were primarily produced within England. The Company’s minutes often mention meetings with local gunsmiths and iron mongers to finalize new orders for the following year’s expedition.⁶² Unfortunately, however, many of the guns tended not to work in the extreme winters of Rupert’s Land, while the metal wares tended to shatter when temperatures dropped. Letters from the Bay frequently complained about the poor quality of the guns and metal wares, noting that local Indians would not stand for unreliable weapons and tools since it could mean the difference between life and death. In 1724, for example, Governor Thomas McCliesh

⁵⁹ A.1/30, fo.10d., March 24, 1708.

⁶⁰ Rich (1958), 391.

⁶¹ A.1/21, fo.15, March 31, 1699.

⁶² A.1/20, fo.9, March 2, 1698.

wrote, “in every cask of hatchets sent last year that we opened we found...sorry flat-eyed hatchets, and have had a great deal of trouble in getting them traded, they being noways pleasing to the Indians.”⁶³ Therefore, the HBC Committee began importing foreign guns and metal wares to see if items forged elsewhere would prove reliable in the Bay.

From its inception, the Committee Members ordered French metal wares with the goal of improving their new status as traders in the Bay since local Indians were already accustomed to French goods from their earlier trading alliances with the merchants of New France. In March, 1672, the Committee ordered large amounts of a variety of metal wares, including twelve dozen French knives.⁶⁴ In 1673 there is also mention of the need to order ‘Biscay hatchets.’ However, this is the only time when these kinds of Iberian hatchets were ordered.⁶⁵ Incidentally, after this early period in the Company’s history, to its employees’ dismay, the Committee began ordering more English-made metal wares.⁶⁶ Letters from the Bay often voiced complaints directed at the Committee for not sending French-made goods, or for sending English goods, or, most often, for sending inferior goods regardless of their point of origin. In 1706, for example, Governor Anthony Beale wrote informing the Committee that, “as for the French hatchets the Indians are so far from prizing them before ours that they do not care to trade them.”⁶⁷ What was eventually discovered by HBC employees was that weapons forged in the rough climate of the Bay were more durable and were less likely

⁶³ Davies (1965), “Letter from Thomas McCliesh, York Fort,” August 16, 1724, 99.

⁶⁴ Rich (1942), March 4, 1672, 27.

⁶⁵ Rich (1942), November 27, 1673, 58.

⁶⁶ Rich (1945), January 20, 1682, 173.

⁶⁷ Davies (1965), “Letter from Anthony Beale, Albany Fort,” July 23, 1706, 17.

to shatter when used in colder temperatures.⁶⁸ By the 1720s, then, the HBC was sending large quantities of iron directly to the Bay to be made into a wide variety of weapons and tools by blacksmiths permanently employed at the forts.⁶⁹

With respect to guns, however, the Company had one crisis during this period which apparently discouraged them from buying foreign guns for some time. In 1684, based on the direction of their French consultant and employee, Pierre-Esprit Radisson, the Committee Members began sending orders to their correspondents in Amsterdam to purchase a small quantity of Dutch-made guns which would then be sent as trade goods to the Bay.⁷⁰ Early in the following year, the meeting minutes noted that a case of guns, nicknamed ‘Holland guns,’ arrived from Amsterdam in London, “Mr. Weymans acquaintes the Committee he has advice of the arrivall of a case of 6 guns from Amsterdam.”⁷¹ After viewing the guns for themselves, the Committee realized their low quality and poor manufacture, but nevertheless decided to send them to the Bay since they had previously been informed by Radisson that the local Indians did, in fact, prefer Holland guns.⁷² The Committee’s disappointment was shared by the Company’s employees as well as local Indians, who quickly realized that the guns were defective. The following year the Company wrote to assure its employees, “We perceave the Hollands guns Doe not please the Indians therefore we will not sende any more but have chose rather though much Dearer to us, to send the best Engclish guns.”⁷³ After this incident the Committee opted to order guns from local, English suppliers. Nevertheless, in 1688, the HBC was still reassuring their Bayside governors that they would not send

⁶⁸ Mancke, 52-53.

⁶⁹ Davies (1965), “Letter from Thomas McCliesh, York Fort,” August 16, 1724, 99.

⁷⁰ A.1/8, fo.9, December 22, 1684.

⁷¹ A.1/8, fo.9d., January 7, 1685.

⁷² Rich (1948), “Letter to Mr. Thomas Phipps,” May 22, 1685, 149.

⁷³ Rich (1948), “Letter to Captain John Abraham,” May 20, 1686, 188-189.

any more of the disappointing Holland guns.⁷⁴ Restoring faith in their wares seemingly took time, even in Rupert's Land, where access to alternative supplies of guns and powder would have been virtually non-existent.

Similar to alcohol, the HBC again began by trying to import foreign guns and metal wares to the Bay but then decided to ship English-made goods instead. Unlike alcohol, however, which had become too expensive and dangerous to import, guns, weapons and tools manufactured abroad were either inferior to those of English manufacture or could be made in a higher quality when they were produced by the Company's smiths in the Bay. It seems, then, that during the Company's early years the Committee was anxious to accommodate the tastes of their Indian clients. This was why they went out of their way to order foreign goods even though they were subject to English ad valorem duties and taxes and, therefore, cost more. Once the Company began to encounter some financial difficulties, in addition to the hazards of overseas shipping during wartime, they began to prefer trade goods that were manufactured within Britain.

Cloth

Another trade good that became important to the HBC was cloth and ready-made clothing. The Company has an interesting history of importing cloths, both English and foreign, into Hudson's Bay not only for trade, but for its employees as well. In addition to taking responsibility for feeding its employees the bare minimum, the Committee also provided some clothing for its ships' crews as well as its employees remaining in the

⁷⁴ Rich (1957), June 2, 1688, 13.

Bay year round.⁷⁵ However, most of the cloth and clothing that was sent to the Bay was intended for trade.

During the Company's early years, the Committee took particular care to ensure that a wide variety of cloth and clothing items were sent to the Bay because they were not certain what would please their Indian clientele. The noted historian Elizabeth Mancke describes the Company's efforts during the 1680s and 1690s,

[T]he Company offered the Indians an array of cloth to rival that offered by any English shopkeeper: silk, serge, Scottish plaids, shalloon, canvas, duck, perpetuanas, broadcloth, duffel, baize, cotton, flannel, and blankets... [T]he forts housed a virtual clothier's shop...coats, shirts, pants, hats, caps, socks, shoes, mittens, gloves, sashes, handkerchiefs, and women's sleeves in assorted sizes and varieties were stocked.⁷⁶

Fortunately for the Committee, many of these items could be purchased and made locally in London or, at least, within the country. Between its different regions, England has a diverse history of cloth production and, particularly, woollen manufacturing.⁷⁷ Various towns across the country became well known as they lent their name to the cloth which they produced. The HBC minutes, for example, list the need to pay for 'Strood water reds,'⁷⁸ 'Oxfordshire blankets,'⁷⁹ 'Gloucestershire cloth,'⁸⁰ and cloth ordered from Leeds.⁸¹ By 1680, the Committee was also ordering large numbers of cloth in specific measurements and colours from local suppliers in and around London.⁸² In addition to this, they were even ordering ready-made clothing items from local clothiers as well as women who worked as independently-hired seamstresses. In 1708, for example, the

⁷⁵ Rich (1942), May 17, 1672, 38.

⁷⁶ Mancke, 45-46.

⁷⁷ B. A. Holderness, *Pre-Industrial England: Economy and Society from 1500 to 1750* (New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1976), 86.

⁷⁸ Rich (1945), April 14, 1680, 54.

⁷⁹ Rich (1945), March 3, 1682, 189.

⁸⁰ A.1/32, fo.10d., March 10, 1710.

⁸¹ A.1/21, fo.14d., March 29, 1699.

⁸² Rich (1945), March 17, 1680, 48.

meeting minutes note an outstanding payment, “June the 15th To Ann Spincer for makeing 5 dozen of shirts at 5s per dozen...£1:5:-.”⁸³ Incidentally, the Company’s business model of supplying every kind of cloth and a variety of clothing proved financially draining and after 1713 the Committee only sent those items to the Bay that were high in demand and, therefore, guaranteed to sell.⁸⁴

During this period there was also a large increase in the number of cloth and clothing items from abroad which were gaining in popularity in London and slowly spreading throughout England. One of the most noticeable foreign items that the Committee Members purchased and sent to the Bay was calico. Brought over from India by newly emerging trading companies –such as the English East India Company – calico began to make an impact in Europe around the second half of the seventeenth century.⁸⁵ Although this cotton fabric was slow to become popular in England, because of an increase in supply around the 1680s the price of individual pieces dropped and became affordable for members of the middling, and later the lower, sorts.⁸⁶ Calico was an ideal material because it resembled the elite fabrics of the upper classes, but it was cheap, durable, and easy to wash.⁸⁷ It was during the 1680s that the HBC began sending this newly popular cotton fabric, along with the other abovementioned fabrics, to the Bay to test its marketability with local Indians. In 1680⁸⁸ and 1682,⁸⁹ the Committee sent what they called ‘pieces of painted calico’ to the Bay. Two years later, the Committee

⁸³ A.1/30, fo.22d., June 30, 1708.

⁸⁴ Mancke, 45.

⁸⁵ Holderness, 127.

⁸⁶ K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 277.

⁸⁷ Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 192.

⁸⁸ Rich (1948), “Letter to Governor Nixon,” May 29, 1680, 22.

⁸⁹ Rich (1946), June 21, 1682, 5.

recorded the need to order “100 white Callico Shirts”⁹⁰ for the next expedition. Even though calico was becoming very popular at this time, the Company records only note its purchase during the 1680s. One of the reasons for this being that, since the increased importing of these ready-made clothes from India threatened England’s own woollen and textile industries, the government was forced to implement laws restricting the importing of calico. On September 29, 1701, a law went into effect which stated that calicoes which had been painted, dyed, stained, or printed on in Persia, China, or the East Indies could no longer be worn within the kingdom.⁹¹ The result of this restriction was the importing of unfinished cotton fabrics from India, which would then be dyed and finished in England, so that they were no longer a large threat to the textile industries.⁹² Thus, although the HBC minutes do not specify that calico was purchased after the 1680s, the meeting minutes do reveal that the Company was still sending cloth and clothing to the Bay and was even paying to have it dyed in England.⁹³ In addition to this, the English cotton manufacturing industry was not very advanced at this point and was certainly unable to supply cloth at the very low prices which traders obtained in India.⁹⁴ Therefore, Indian cotton cloth in some shape or form was still being sent to the Bay during this period.

For the HBC, cloth differed from other trade goods in the sense that it was not dominated by French-made items. Although it is true that the Committee ordered several samples of blankets from their correspondents across the channel and sent them to the Bay in the 1680s, the Indian response must not have been positive since there is no

⁹⁰ Rich (1946), March 5, 1684, 207.

⁹¹ John E. Wills, Jr., “European Consumption and Asian Production” in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), 137.

⁹² Mukerji, 206.

⁹³ A.1/33, fo.44d., April 10, 1713.

⁹⁴ Chaudhuri, 237.

mention of the blankets after 1684.⁹⁵ The Company's plan in the 1680s was to offer a world of trade goods to the Indians of Hudson's Bay, which they did during their early years of optimism and good financial standing. After this early period, however, the Committee was determined to bypass as many additional duties and taxes as they could by having their trade goods produced locally and within England. Moreover, as they gained experience in their trade with the Indians, they began to send only the items which were guaranteed to sell and make a profit for their shareholders. Nevertheless, the Committee's efforts did manage to link the Bay to the heat and mystery of the Indian subcontinent, in addition to the various textile manufacturing districts across England.

Ivory

In addition to staple trade goods such as guns, alcohol, and tobacco, which were sent to the Bay from the Company's beginnings, another trade item that appears early on in the HBC's history was ivory. This organic raw material was initially harvested by Europeans along the coasts of Africa during the early years of transoceanic exploration in the fifteenth century. However, as European interests in ivory increased in the following centuries it became more and more difficult to obtain, forcing hunters and traders to move deeper into the African continent in search of this valuable commodity.⁹⁶ In exchange for raw ivory or carved ivory statues and objects, traders brought European manufactured goods such as cloth, guns, and beads, which were not produced at this time in the ivory-heavy parts of the region.⁹⁷ Though its numbers and

⁹⁵ Mancke, 43.

⁹⁶ John Frederick Walker, *Ivory's Ghosts: The White Gold of History and the Fate of Elephants* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 64.

⁹⁷ Walker, 64.

value would never remotely rival or equal that of the slave trade, the ivory trade did expand during the seventeenth century as the trade in African slaves increased and brought more awareness of the potential of African commodities – such as bronzes – to European merchants.⁹⁸ Although ivory could be carved into a variety of shapes and had a wide range of uses during this period, the HBC meeting minutes only list ivory as being sent to the Bay in the form of combs.

The Committee Members began regularly sending ivory combs to Rupert's Land after the Company's first expedition in the hopes that their delicacy and unique colour would become popular with the local Indians. The earliest reference to ivory combs in the Company meeting minutes is on April 14, 1674, when the Committee ordered, "Mr. Radison to goe with the husbände to choose beades & flintes, & gett patternes of combes."⁹⁹ The following month, the Committee ordered four dozen ivory combs for the next expedition.¹⁰⁰ From that moment onwards, sales of ivory combs were so successful that the Committee began to order larger and larger quantities of combs for future voyages. In 1695, for example, the Committee ordered 500 combs in a variety of patterns and sizes.¹⁰¹ The Fort Albany 1705-6 Journal lists 792 ivory combs in their inventory of trade goods for the season.¹⁰² In 1718, the Committee Members ordered a total of 1,032 ivory combs, with 432 intended for York Fort and 600 for Albany River.¹⁰³ The rising popularity of ivory combs during this period is perhaps perplexing for the simple reason that these objects were purely decorative and lacked the practical applications that other trade goods possessed – such as guns. Nevertheless, ivory combs

⁹⁸ Walker, 65.

⁹⁹ Rich (1942), April 14, 1674, 100.

¹⁰⁰ Rich (1942), May 16, 1674, 108.

¹⁰¹ A.1/18, fo.3, November 27, 1695.

¹⁰² Williams, 66.

¹⁰³ A.1/33, fo.245, February 4, 1718.

became a regular staple in the HBC trade, bringing the products of cruel human and animal suffering of the African continent to the remotest regions of Rupert's Land.

Sugar

Another one of the more exotic goods to be imported into London and then re-exported onwards to Hudson's Bay was sugar. During the seventeenth century, European states attempted to increase their territorial possessions by venturing to the valuable Caribbean islands and claiming them for themselves. Between 1630 and 1660, Spain, England, France, and the Netherlands claimed lands in the region and challenged one another's rights to those lands through open conflict.¹⁰⁴ By the end of this period, the English were in possession of several key sugar-producing islands of the Caribbean including Jamaica and Barbados.¹⁰⁵ The sugar plantations on these islands quickly became immensely profitable as Britons, as well as the peoples of Europe, developed a nearly insatiable appetite for the increasingly affordable sweetener. The 10,000 tons of sugar that was imported and consumed by the English in 1700 looks modest when compared to the 150,000 tons which were imported only a century later.¹⁰⁶ Although sugar was not prominent during the Company's early years, it became a staple import for the HBC by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

When the HBC obtained its Charter in 1670, sugar was still quite expensive and not necessarily available to individuals of all social classes.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the seventeenth century, however, sugar prices began to drop as imports of the commodity

¹⁰⁴ Abbott, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, 298.

¹⁰⁶ Abbott, 56.

¹⁰⁷ Rich (1942), lxxv.

increased exponentially.¹⁰⁸ The HBC sent several different kinds of sugar to the Bay which they differentiated by colour, refinement, and even point of origin. For example, the meeting minutes list white and brown sugar,¹⁰⁹ molasses,¹¹⁰ powdered sugar,¹¹¹ double refined sugar,¹¹² Barbados white sugar,¹¹³ “Jamaco” (Jamaica) sugar,¹¹⁴ and muscovado (brown/unrefined)¹¹⁵ sugar.¹¹⁶ The first mention of sugar in the Company minutes comes only in 1697, when a box of sugar was sent to an employee in the Bay as part of a care package most likely sent by his wife or family, “Capt. Grimington is ordered to take on board the goods of James Hubbald being a box of sugar a small caske of Brandy wth Bedding + chest marked J. H.”¹¹⁷ The following year the Company placed an order with their grocer for molasses, muscovado sugar, and white sugar for both of their ships and their factory.¹¹⁸ After this point, sugar was sent to the Bay on a regular basis, generally in 14 pound (lbs.) increments, which was the measure of one stone weight (st.).¹¹⁹

What was the purpose of sending sugar to the Bay? The Fort Albany 1705-6 Journal¹²⁰ as well as 1726 Indent of Provisions¹²¹ both list sugars as provisions and not

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, 303.

¹⁰⁹ A.1/20, fo.19d.-20, May 27, 1698.

¹¹⁰ A.1/23, fo.26d., May 14, 1701.

¹¹¹ A.1/33, fo.217d., April 30, 1717.

¹¹² A.1/33, fo.217d., April 30, 1717.

¹¹³ A.1/33, fo.14d., May 6, 1712.

¹¹⁴ A.1/24, fo.21, May 22, 1702.

¹¹⁵ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 195.

¹¹⁶ A.1/33, fo.14d., May 6, 1712.

¹¹⁷ A.1/19, fo.26, May 21, 1697. The meeting minutes do not specify which family member sent the care package.

¹¹⁸ A.1/20, fo.19d.-20, May 27, 1698.

¹¹⁹ For more information on the history of sugar see: Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986); and Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹²⁰ Williams, 70.

¹²¹ Davies (1965), “Letter from Richard Staunton, Albany Fort,” August 24, 1725, 106.

as trading items. Sugar was sent to the Bay, then, not for trade, but for consumption by the HBC's employees. There is, of course, a discrepancy between the amount of sugar sent to the Bay in one particular season and the number of HBC employees living in the Bay. In 1706, Anthony Beale, governor of Fort Albany, reminded the Committee in one of his letters that there were only 27 men living at the fort.¹²² Yet, in 1702,¹²³ 1705,¹²⁴ and 1706,¹²⁵ the Committee only sent white sugar in quantities of 28lbs or 56lbs, and other sugars, such as brown or muscovado, in even smaller quantities such as $\frac{3}{4}$ st. or $1\frac{1}{2}$ st. Since it is estimated that a person during this period could use as much as 24lbs of sugar in one year,¹²⁶ the limited quantity of sugar sent to the Bay must have only been destined for a small handful of individuals. These would have been the fort's governors and administrators, people who the Committee needed to keep contented in order to ensure their willingness to follow Company orders and increase profitability.¹²⁷ In addition to this, the Company minutes also list several incidents of employees' families sending care packages which specifically included sugar to individuals spending an extended period of time in the Bay, "the Comittee agreed that Mr. Henry Cole attorney of Allixander Thoughts be permitted to send the following Goods to him viz: 5 gall of Brandy, 28£ of sugar, 2 p. of shooes, 2 p. of stockings, 2 gall of Lime Juice."¹²⁸ This in turn shows that, although sugar was not part of an employee's allotment of food rations

¹²² Davies (1965), "Letter from Anthony Beale, Albany Fort," July 23, 1706, 16.

¹²³ A.1/24, fo.20d.-21, May 22, 1702.

¹²⁴ A.1/27, fos.14-14d., May 4, 1705.

¹²⁵ A.1/28, fo.7, April 11, 1706.

¹²⁶ Carole Shammass, "Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550-180," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), 182.

¹²⁷ A.1/33, fo.96d., May 28, 1714.

¹²⁸ A.1/32, fo.21d., May 19, 1710.

paid for by the Company, it was likely available to be purchased by employees against their future earnings – which is why families preferred to send it in care packages.¹²⁹

The sugar that the HBC sent to Rupert's Land had travelled great distances by the time it reached the Company's employees in the Bay. At the end of the seventeenth century, sugar was part of the complex trade system which ran from England to Africa, to the Caribbean, back to England and then onwards to Colonial and European venues too.¹³⁰ The second leg of this trade involved the exchange of African slaves for Caribbean sugar.¹³¹ Sugar's presence in Hudson's Bay, therefore, not only linked Rupert's Land with the West Indies via London, but also the African continent and the slaves of the Middle Passage.¹³²

Spices

Similar to sugar, spices were another group of exotic goods imported into Rupert's Land by the HBC which were included as provisions for the Company's employees and not necessarily intended for trade. Spices were desirable not only because they served to enhance flavours but, rather, because they were able to mask the tastes of rotting and rancid meats and other perishable foods. While long-distance and deep-sea shipping was being perfected during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,

¹²⁹ For more information on the political economy of trade see: James D. Tracy, ed., *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹³⁰ For more information on the growth of global trade networks and their connections to the fur trade see: Nuala Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic Economy, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³¹ Henry Hobhouse, *Seeds of Change: Five Plants that Transformed Mankind* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985), 66.

¹³² For more information on slavery see: Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (New York: Verso, 1998); and Barbara L. Solow, ed., *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

European explorers in the East and West Indies discovered spices, among other (abovementioned) items, and brought them back to their countries of origin.¹³³ When these spices began to make appearances in Europe it was usually at the courts of the monarchy and aristocracy and well out of the reach of the common man. During the seventeenth century, however, there was a large increase in supply which resulted in a decrease in cost and made spices gradually accessible to the middling and lower classes.¹³⁴ It was at this point that the HBC began sending increasingly popular spices to its employees in Rupert's Land.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the spice that was sent in the largest quantity and most regularly by the HBC was pepper. One of the main sources of pepper were the Moluccas Islands of the East Indies (known as the Spice Islands). English interests in the region were heightened in 1579, when Sir Francis Drake visited the Portuguese-owned islands and returned with a ship full of spices (the most important being pepper, nutmeg, and cloves).¹³⁵ The English East India Company (EIC) was founded in 1600 and, "in 1602...the Company's first-ever fleet visited Aceh in northern Sumatra, and took possession of Run, the most isolated of the Banda islands."¹³⁶ In 1605, however, the Portuguese lost control over the Spice Islands to the Dutch, who then continued seizing islands in the region and used them as trading outposts.¹³⁷ It would

¹³³ For more information on expanding globalization during this period see: Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400-1800* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³⁴ For more information on the emerging Consumer Revolution and economic diversity see: John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993); Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); and Erik T. Gilbert and Jonathan T. Reynolds, *Trading Tastes: Commodity and Cultural Exchange to 1750* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006).

¹³⁵ Andrew Dalby, *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 62.

¹³⁶ Dalby, 62. For more information on the East India Company see: Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: a History* (London: Longman, 1993).

¹³⁷ Brook, 65.

take another 80 years for the English to properly establish a foothold in the region, on the west coast of Sumatra.¹³⁸ Though control over the islands throughout the period switched back and forth between various sovereigns and companies, the one thing that remained constant was the importance of the region's spices, particularly pepper.¹³⁹ When the various East Indian companies of Europe began importing millions of pounds of pepper annually in the 1670s, the price of pepper gradually decreased.¹⁴⁰ The first record of pepper in the HBC's meeting minutes, however, was not until May of 1698, when the Committee Members ordered 28lbs of the spice for the next expedition.¹⁴¹ In the Fort Albany 1705-6 Journal it was recorded that 34lbs. of pepper remained in the Fort's stores as part of the employees' provisions (in addition to an assortment of small quantities of other spices).¹⁴² In 1715, the Committee ordered 10 lbs. of pepper each for the York and Albany Forts, as well as 6lbs. for the *Hudson's Bay* frigate and 3lbs. for the *Port Nelson* frigate.¹⁴³ After the turn of the century pepper had become a necessity, important enough that it was ordered annually for the Company's factories and part of the manifests of each of their outbound ships.

In addition to sending pepper to their employees living in the Bay, the Committee Members also sent large quantities of ginger. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after explorers had come to realize how accommodating the local climate could be to certain kinds of vegetation, colonists began attempting to naturalize

¹³⁸ Dalby, 71.

¹³⁹ On these themes see: Sushil Chaudhury and Michael Morineau, eds., *Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Bob Moore and Henk van Nierop, eds., *Colonial Empires Compared: Britain and the Netherlands, 1750-1850* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003).

¹⁴⁰ Chaudhuri, 320.

¹⁴¹ A.1/20, fo.19d.-20, May 27, 1698.

¹⁴² Williams, 70.

¹⁴³ A.1/33, fo.144d., May 6, 1715.

ginger on the various Caribbean islands.¹⁴⁴ Similar to tobacco and sugar cultivation in the West Indies, ginger plantations sprouted up throughout the region, though particularly in Jamaica.¹⁴⁵ Ginger not only thrived in the Caribbean climate but it shipped well when preserved in the plentiful, local sugar.¹⁴⁶ In the mid-1670s, the English EIC even faced cause for concern when, “in Poland, Turkey, and Italy ginger was being used increasingly as a substitute for pepper.”¹⁴⁷ Although the amount of ginger sent to Hudson’s Bay never rivalled that of pepper, it was sent in noticeably larger quantities than cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, or mace. In 1708, for example, the Committee sent to Fort Albany 28 lbs. of whole pepper and 28 lbs. of ginger, but only 2 lbs. of cinnamon, 1lb. of cloves, 1lb. of mace, and 1.5 lbs. of nutmeg.¹⁴⁸ Incidentally, that year whole pepper in London sold for 19 shillings per pound while ginger cost only 6s/lb.¹⁴⁹ In 1715, however, the Committee ordered for York Fort 10 lbs. of pepper and only 6 lbs. of ginger, in addition to 1 lb. cinnamon, and a half pound each of cloves and mace.¹⁵⁰ The ships also received their own rations of spices, including a higher quantity of ginger. In 1715, for example, the Committee ordered 2 lbs. and 1 lb. of ginger for the *Hudson’s Bay* and the *Port Nelson* frigates, respectively, but only several ounces of the other spices.¹⁵¹ Similar to pepper, then, ginger appears to have been a popular spice in Europe at this time and certainly important enough to be sent to the remote forts of Rupert’s Land.

¹⁴⁴ Dalby, 25.

¹⁴⁵ Bridenbaugh, 284.

¹⁴⁶ Bridenbaugh, 279.

¹⁴⁷ Chaudhuri, 322.

¹⁴⁸ A.1/30, fo.18, May 14, 1708.

¹⁴⁹ A.1/30, fo.18, May 14, 1708.

¹⁵⁰ A.1/33, fo.144d., May 6, 1715.

¹⁵¹ A.1/33, fo.144d., May 6, 1715.

Once spices were sent to the Bay they readily became a staple that was sent annually as part of the provisions for the Company's employees. The kinds of spices that were sent were determined largely by cost. Since imported spices such as cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and mace were usually quite expensive, the Committee could only afford to send very small quantities (several ounces of each spice per year).¹⁵² The spices imported into London and sent to Rupert's Land not only connected the HBC employees to very distant and exotic places, but also a growing worldwide network of shipping and communication that included prominent merchant companies such as the English and Dutch East India Companies.¹⁵³

[Conclusion]

When examining the many trade goods and provisions that were sent to Rupert's Land by the HBC throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it becomes clear that the global trade economy at this time was increasingly sophisticated and capable of bringing together a wide variety of goods and people from across the world to even the remotest regions and sparsely populated environs. Many of the items sent to Hudson's Bay during this period arrived in London through a complicated series of trade networks and legal agreements which moved people, goods, and bullion for profit.¹⁵⁴ Regardless of the distance these items travelled, be it from lands across the Atlantic or Indian Oceans or simply across the English Channel, these goods can be identified as representing the remarkable advancements in globalization of the time. Hudson's Bay

¹⁵² A.1/30, fo.18, May 14, 1708.

¹⁵³ Chaudhuri, 313.

¹⁵⁴ For more information on early modern trade networks and British imperialism see: Hugh V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid, eds., *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c.1550-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Hugh V. Bowen, *Elites, Enterprise and the Making of the British Overseas Empire 1688-1775* (Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996).

may have been an isolated, at times frozen, and distant destination for British traders, but the distances seem less significant when one realizes that the individuals who lived there were able to enjoy Caribbean sugar, French spirits, Virginian tobacco, Asian spices, Indian cloths, and European foods and wares.

What the HBC Committee Members hoped to gain through their endeavour was a share in the profits that other companies were enjoying from the transoceanic shipping business. For the HBC, this involved the transportation of popular luxury furs from Hudson's Bay to London which would then be sold at market. The desirable end results were, of course, large returns for shareholders and the continuation and expansion of a lucrative business. What the Committee Members soon learned, however, was that revenues from the Rupert's Land economy could never be guaranteed and were often based upon narrow margins of profit and loss. In order to obtain the furs, of course, the HBC had to engage in trade with local Indian populations. This business model, however, required massive amounts of effort and planning since trade goods were only part of the items that had to be sent to the Bay in order for trade to be successful. Every year, the Committee would spend months and considerable sums securing ships, crews, provisions, livestock, medicines, building materials, coal, skilled artisans and tradesmen, labourers, trade goods, and anything or anyone else needed in the Bay for the following year. These efforts and the logistical challenges they created in the seventeenth century were daunting indeed. The difficulties of this operation were compounded when one understands that shipwrecks were not unheard of and could destroy several years' worth of traded furs or an entire winter's worth of food and supplies for HBC employees.

Nevertheless, since the Committee Members continued HBC operations for several centuries, the gains clearly outweighed the risks.¹⁵⁵

What the Committee Members initially hoped to achieve in Rupert's Land was not only a trade in furs and other profitable goods, but the beginnings of English colonization in the region. At first, it did seem as though the Committee was planning on pursuing this objective. From the start, large quantities of building materials such as wooden planks, bricks, tools, and nails were sent in the hopes that the forts would be sturdy, long-lasting, and easily defended.¹⁵⁶ Seeds were sent so that the employees could grow some of their own food in a communal garden.¹⁵⁷ Livestock such as cattle, pigs, and goats were sent so that there would be a source of fresh meat and milk and even labour.¹⁵⁸ Ideally, the forts would become self-sustaining colonies, thus sparing the Company the added expense of buying and shipping food. Unfortunately, however, several factors prevented this goal from coming to fruition. Firstly, time in the Bay was divided primarily into activities that would ensure the employee's survival throughout the winter. Therefore, the men were engaged primarily in repairing the fort's buildings and houses, maintaining the palisades and other defences against enemy attacks, the daily collection of firewood,¹⁵⁹ and hunting birds and small animals, as well as fishing or ice fishing.¹⁶⁰ Once these duties were complete, the employees would prepare for the summer trading season. These tasks, which were daunting and strenuous under regular

¹⁵⁵ For information on the HBC at a later period see: John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

¹⁵⁶ Rich (1945), May 7, 1680, 61.

¹⁵⁷ Davies (1965), "Letter from Richard Staunton, Albany Fort," August 24, 1725, 106.

¹⁵⁸ Rich (1948), "Letter to Governor Nixon," June 1681, 29.

¹⁵⁹ Williams, September 15, 1705, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, *"Give us Good Measure": an Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 41.

circumstances, were worsened tenfold in the Bay's merciless and unrelenting cold weather that seemed to last year round. In 1743, for example, James Isham recorded that even alcohol would freeze in the extreme temperatures, "beer, wine, brandy spirits &c. sett out in the ope'n air for three or four hour's, will freeze to Solid Ice."¹⁶¹ The situation, then, became even more difficult when the employees tried to farm and raise livestock. Ultimately, for the employees, permanent settlement and survival during this period proved impossible due to the sheer energy needed for survival. For the Committee, however, plans for colonization were set aside when the Company's financial situation deteriorated at the beginning of the eighteenth century and preparing for each subsequent expedition became progressively difficult.

Moreover, the Company's uncertain finances were responsible for more than just the abandonment of colonization attempts during the period. One thing that stands out the most in the Company's meeting minutes, journals, and inventories, is the lack of the HBC's expansion and experimentation with their trading goods. From the Company's beginnings in seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century the kinds of goods that were sent to the Bay rarely changed, reflecting the Committee's preference for a conservative trading mentality and the safety of consistency. This may have been understandable during the Company's early years, when the markets of Rupert's Land were fledgling at best. The safest option for the HBC at that time was to send staples (such as the abovementioned goods) that were guaranteed to sell. As time went on, however, the Committee Members continued to order those staples, but not much of anything that was new or different. The main difference between the shipments of the

¹⁶¹ James Isham, *James Isham's Observations on Hudson's bay, 1743, and Notes and observations on a book entitled A Voyage to Hudson's Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949), 69.

1670s and those of the 1730s was quantity. Once the Company had established itself in Hudson's Bay and gained a loyal annual market, the Committee began ordering much larger numbers of its key staples. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Company was in such a precarious financial position that it barely had enough money to pay off its creditors, some of whom had to wait several years before they received payment for their goods and services.¹⁶²

What this ultimately meant for the Bay, however, was not only a lack of experimentation with the potentials of the markets in Rupert's Land, but also a realization that they could not create, nor cultivate a 'civilized' English colony in this desolate wilderness. Goods which were gaining popularity in England throughout this period such as tea, chocolate, and porcelain were not purchased by the Committee as part of their inventory of goods shipped to the Bay. While tea and chocolate appear in the meeting minutes of 1715, this was only as part of a hamper for Captain James Knight and was certainly not intended for trade or his ship's crew.¹⁶³ Porcelain, on the other hand, was simply not mentioned as part of any inventories of trade goods or employee provisions for the entire surveyed period. Though it is curious, perhaps, that the HBC would not send items which would become known for their quintessential 'Englishness' and European 'civility' at this time, there was understandable reasoning behind it. Although the HBC may have initially planned to establish colonies, it quickly became clear that they had little intention of carrying out this goal. Firstly, and briefly in the early 1680s, the only women recorded to have been sent to the Bay from England during

¹⁶² A.1/28, fo.13, June 12, 1706.

¹⁶³ A.1/33, fo.149, May 24, 1715.

this period were Governor Sergeant's wife, her friend (Mrs. Maurice), and her maid.¹⁶⁴ After this, the only people sent to the Bay were male employees of the mid to lower classes, most of whom (depending on their position) earned less than £5 per month.¹⁶⁵ Since many of these goods did not gain widespread popularity until the middle of the eighteenth century, they were still quite expensive during the surveyed period.¹⁶⁶ When one considers the employees' incomes, it is clear that there was no room in their salaries to purchase superfluous items like porcelain teapots or imported teas, especially not when they could purchase more satisfying goods like alcohol and tobacco. In short, Rupert's Land in the late seventeenth century was neither the place nor was it the time for the fancy and unessential – luxury – goods that came to dominate the English 'civilized' world at that moment.

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries experienced a sharp increase in the consumption of goods which British historians have entitled 'the Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period' (1680-1750). During this period, maritime navigation became better understood and, as global trade and worldwide shipping increased, waves of new consumer goods began to pour into England. At first, these goods were very expensive and within the grasp of only the very wealthiest individuals, usually royalty and members of their courts. In time, however, these items filtered down through different social groups until they became commonplace staples for all but the

¹⁶⁴ G. E. Thorman, "SERGEANT, HENRY," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Vol. 1, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–), accessed November 26, 2013, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/sergeant_henry_1E.html.

¹⁶⁵ Rich (1942), lxiii.

¹⁶⁶ Philip Lawson, "Tea, Vice, and the English State, 1660-1784," in Philip Lawson, *A Taste for Empire and Glory: Studies in British Overseas Expansion, 1660-1800* (Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1997), XIV 3.

very poorest of individuals.¹⁶⁷ What the Committee Members did in sending their goods and provisions to Rupert's Land was allow their employees to participate in the rising Consumer Revolution occurring thousands of miles away in the British Isles. The men living and working in Hudson's Bay, then, were not as cut off from the rest of the world as might have been previously imagined. They not only enjoyed goods from England and Europe but also from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. What is especially remarkable about this period is not only the fact that a man in London could enjoy goods and foods from distant lands around the world, but the fact that, after a mere ten weeks of sailing,¹⁶⁸ a man in Rupert's Land could enjoy those same goods, some of which had travelled thousands of miles before reaching him.

¹⁶⁷ Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988), 191.

¹⁶⁸ Davies (1965), "Letter from Joseph Myatt, Albany Fort," August 10, 1726, 113.

CONCLUSION

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries experienced a sharp rise in the consumption of commodities which British historians have called ‘the Consumer Revolution of the Augustan Period’ (1680-1750). Favourable circumstances in England allowed the country’s citizens to enjoy the fruits of the labours of merchants and domestic manufacturers bringing new, internationally and locally produced goods to the markets. During this period, Britons were finally able to enjoy a large number of goods which, because of their high cost, had previously been reserved for the country’s wealthiest individuals. Amongst these goods was the beaver felt hat, an item which truly reached its apex in popularity at the end of the seventeenth century. Though beaver pelts were in short supply in Europe by the seventeenth century, European merchants were able to locate new and abundant supplies in North America. Among those merchants were the Committee Members of the Hudson’s Bay Company, who, at the end of this century, began sending annual expeditions to Rupert’s Land to obtain vast quantities of beaver pelts. While numerous historians have already examined the HBC and its business venture in North America, as well as the various aspects of the Consumer Revolution, research that examines both of these factors together has proven surprisingly limited. Therefore, this thesis has sought to fully integrate these discussions with the goal of providing a greater understanding of the Consumer Revolution and its wide reaching effects by specifically examining the HBC from the perspective of the metropole – London.

By the early seventeenth century, many factors had come together which not only allowed, but facilitated, the establishment of the HBC in 1670. First, advancements in trans-oceanic shipping during the previous century enabled merchants to venture into the distant regions of the globe and return to their home countries with ships laden with new and exotic goods.¹ Naturally, this meant that the HBC now had the means to access the furs of Rupert's Land and export them to England. Second, the Consumer Revolution granted access to these new, foreign goods to the middling and lower sorts, hundreds of thousands of individuals who had previously been unable to enjoy luxury items because of their great cost.² This gave the HBC a much larger consumerist audience than the one to whom it would have previously been restricted – namely, the wealthy aristocracy and gentry. Third, the growing popularity of the beaver felt hat and the subsequent scarcity of the beaver in Europe – and later in Russia – meant that any business that could obtain large quantities of this product would find themselves in a very favourable financial position.³ Moreover, the French had already settled in North America and begun exporting furs from the continent by the middle of the century, proving that beaver fur was plentiful and only required individuals willing to harvest it. In light of mercantilist sentiments during the period, it was only natural that the English would want to reduce their dependence on foreign merchants and import the goods

¹ For further discussion of these themes see: Erik T. Gilbert and Jonathan T. Reynolds, *Trading Tastes: Commodity and Cultural Exchange to 1750* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006).

² For more information on this subject see: Neil McKendrick, John Brewer & J. H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

³ On these themes see: Murray G. Lawson, *Fur, a Study in English Mercantilism, 1700-1775* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1943); and David Corner, "The Tyranny of Fashion: The Case of the Felt-Hatting Trade in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Textile History* (Vol. 22, Issue 2, 1991), 153-178.

themselves.⁴ In light of these favourable circumstances, therefore, it was not only possible, but necessary, for the HBC to begin importing furs from Rupert's Land.

What the Company was effectively doing was supplying goods to a very demanding market. After the felt hat's debut between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it became popular with individuals of the wealthy aristocracy and gentry. By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the popularity of the felt hat had begun to rise for those outside of the upper classes but was limited in its potential because of a shortage of beaver fur across Europe. After the HBC began annually flooding markets with tens of thousands of beaver pelts, however, prices for felt hats dropped and the style was adopted by all but the very poorest of individuals. While the HBC did not directly participate in the manufacturing or designing of felt hats, they were immensely dependent on this trade for the continuation of their business. While the Company was simply responsible for supplying beaver pelts, the Committee Members understood that it would always be beneficial if they could influence this booming fashion in some way. This, of course, came in the form of presents and gifts of expensive felt hats or luxurious furs to the wealthy politicians and lawmakers who not only had political influence but also social influence. The idea behind these gifts was twofold; first, they were bribes encouraging Parliament to continue ignoring of some of the Company's semi-legal practices; second, they were meant to encourage the fashions for felt hats and luxury furs by having the country's rich and famous freely advertise them to the middling and lower sorts. Though the Company was not directly involved in the London's fashion industry,

⁴For more information on this subject see: Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, eds., *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-22.

the rising trend for beaver felt hats was crucial to its success and, therefore, not something the Committee Members could tacitly observe.

Occasionally, however, the Committee Members encountered difficulties which threatened to jeopardize their company. By the end of the seventeenth century, the HBC was plagued with financial difficulties, legal opposition, and a warehouse full of unsold – and unsellable – beaver pelts. As experienced businessmen, though, the Committee Members were not ignorant of their Company's financial situation, outstanding debts, or upcoming payments on goods or services and knew how to juggle available funds to keep their creditors at bay. With the Company annually importing nearly one hundred thousand beaver pelts during the 1690s, the London markets could only absorb so many of the pelts before becoming glutted and driving beaver prices down. In order to combat this – as well as the threat of bankruptcy – the Committee began desperately searching for English buyers. When these attempts failed, however, the HBC began to export the furs themselves to Amsterdam and the markets of Eastern Europe. Similarly, when The Feltmakers' guild of London began protesting the Company's illegal practices, the Committee Members sought allies in Court and Parliament who would continue overlooking these actions. Ultimately, regardless of the circumstances, the Committee Members were constantly altering their strategies to deal with any unanticipated hiccups in their operations.

Of course, the HBC's trade did not only involve the removal of furs from Rupert's Land. In order to effectively obtain those furs, the Company had to establish wide reaching trade operations with local Indians involving commodities for exchange such as rum, tobacco, woollens, metal wares, and guns. While some of these goods – such as guns – could be produced within England, many of the goods preferred by the

HBC's Indian clientele – such as sugar and its by-products – could not. In order to acquire these goods, then, it was necessary for the HBC to engage in the existing, and quite extensive, global trade networks. Nautical advancements of the previous century had allowed seventeenth century merchants to sail to Asia, Africa, and the Americas with greater ease, security, speed, and carrying capacity. With these improvements, traders began exporting goods from these distant places to the countries of Europe, where growing consumerist sentiments led people to buy the new, exotic goods. Similar to the peoples of Europe, the Indians of Rupert's Land were equally interested in many of these foreign products. Moreover, the HBC did not only send items to the Bay for trade, but also for the personal consumption of their employees. Thus, in the forts around Hudson's Bay one could find, in addition to English-made goods, rum distilled from Caribbean sugar and pepper from the Moluccas Islands. The diversity and extension of the global trade networks of the early eighteenth century is truly revealed not only in the fact that the peoples of Europe could enjoy foreign goods like tea and tobacco, but that, even in the remotest regions of Rupert's Land, the HBC's employees and their Indian clientele could enjoy those goods as well.

While the HBC did not generate this demand for fur in Europe or initiate the Consumer Revolution, they did facilitate a fashion revolution and played a key, if somewhat understudied, role in the creation of an "Empire of Goods" and revolution in consumption and taste.⁵ By studying the HBC from a metropolitan perspective it becomes evident that a discussion on the fur trade does not have to be limited to a

⁵ For further discussion on this theme see: T. Breen, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776," in *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 467-499; and David Hancock, "The British Atlantic World: Co-ordination, Complexity and the Emergence of an Atlantic Market Economy, 1651-1815," in *Itinerario*, 2 (1999), 107-126.

discussion about Rupert's Land. While many historians have extensively studied the HBC's place in Canadian, North American, and Indian history, recently few appear to have been interested in the Company's history on the other side of the Atlantic, let alone the end result and destination of the beaver pelts extracted from Hudson's Bay. Yet, the fact remains that the HBC, as well as its beaver pelts, have a rich history in England and Europe. Thus, the consideration on these subjects should not only be a discussion about one part of the world, but about their place in history across the globe. Moreover, research on the "metropolitan" – or English-end – of the HBC pales in comparison to that of the English East India Company.⁶ As such, this thesis reminds historians that beaver pelts from Rupert's Land need to be remembered alongside rupees of Bengal– for they were commodities of a thoroughly integrated global empire.

⁶ For recent work on the E.I.C. see: Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: a History* (New York: Longman, 1993); Nick Robins, *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational* (London: Pluto Press, 2013); Philip J. Stern, *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Philip J. Stern, "History and Historiography of the English East India Company: Past, Present and Future," in *History Compass*, 7, 4 (2009), 1146-1180.

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