"Any Ordinary Degree of System"

The Columbia Department of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Harvesting of Wildlife, 1825-1849.

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Bachelor of Arts, Victoria, 1985

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

History

ACCEPTED
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

1988

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ABSTRACT

The thesis presents a layered analysis of the collection, export and auction of wildlife in the Columbia Department in the years 1825-1849. This regional study was undertaken both as a practical inquiry into the history of the North West and as an examination of the functioning of an existing model of the fur trade. The work is unusual in that it does not focus on the movement of trade goods into the region, but on the movement of furs out of the area. Several general conclusions result from this approach: that the 1842-47 collapse of the beaver market may be an event of historical importance for future comparative studies of fur trade relations; that throughout the 1830-1840, the Hudson's Bay Company was successful in imposing a degree of system over its Columbia operations, which, if viewed from the perspective of the London Committee, reveals a company attempting to extend its managerial control through improved information channels and a standardization of products; and that fur trade studies could benefit by examining the broader external context of the evolution of business, shipping, and marketing practises.

The thesis proceeds through an examination of the local wildlife resource, the establishment of collection centres, how the transportation system functioned, and how the furs were sold in London. The first chapter examines the outflow of products through modelling theory. The second shows how the striving for a

systematic basis of business was both constrained and aided by the nature of the resource being harvested and its characteristics and discusses the process by which the Company identified a species as a potential product. The unusual role of wildlife demographics is also discussed, linking existing biological research to the fur trade. A broad range of wildlife products is also traced. Chapter Three discusses the policy and conflicts related to the placement of posts and their distinct responses to various ecological hinterlands, arguing that the species mix was critical to a post's ability to adapt to changing markets. Within the Columbia Department posts often competed with one another, and with Native traders, for control of the profit component of the trade as well as for the physical furs. Chapter Four presents the problems involved in shipping the returns to London, some of which were unique to the Columbia and some which were shared with other divisions of the Company. While the Columbia transportation system was generally reliable, delays and the constraints of the shipping season increased the complexity of Company business affairs in London in an unforeseen manner. The Company's drive to standardize products against the general background of change in nineteenth century business methods is stressed. Chapter Five deals with the European marketing of the furs, arguing that the auction served both as a buffer against market forces for the post and trapper and as a means of regulating the cyclical fluctuations of supply. However, due to the structural constraints on information and the Company's pragmatic, though limited understanding of the cycles, it intervened in the shipping process only at the level of the depot, and only when faced with massive increases in some species. It did not restrict trade at the level of the post. The Company's plan for achieving a dominant control

over the marketplace through the conservation of beaver stocks was shattered by the collapse of the beaver market, which caused the Company to intercede at the level of the post, redirecting which species were harvested and creating unrest among Native trappers. The Company was involved throughout this period in a struggle to establish a degree of system into the complex matter of harvesting the wildlife of the Columbia Department.

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CONTENTS

TABLES

FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was not done in isolation but as part of a community who I would like to thank: my supervisor Dr. Peter Baskerville for his commitment, advice, insight, and tireless support, Dr. Ken Coates and Dr. Don Mitchell for their critiques which aided me in articulating my arguments, Dr. Chad Gaffield whose seminars and directed readings resulted in the provenance research in the appendix and in the construction of the data base which this thesis draws upon, Dr. James E. Hendrickson for his encouragement of archival research among his undergraduates, of which I was one, Vilis Nams of the Department of Biology for his advice on predators and demographics, Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan, my precursor in the fur return records used, and the host of other scholars listed under the word bibliography, which for me, is not 'a history of books', but of their scholarship. I would like also like to thank the staff and my fellow students in the History Department of the University of Victoria for providing a true sense of academic family and all that entails.

The community includes the professional staff of several archives and libraries: first and foremost, Keeper Shirlee Anne Smith and her staff at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, particularly Judith Beattie, Michael Mooseberger, and Debra Moore for their support and assistance in my minor foray into that amazing collection, also thanks to the staff at 'the desk' at the Public Archives of British Columbia, who prove daily that an archive's value is measured

as much by its staff as its holdings. Particular thanks to Francis Gundry, Manuscripts Division and Barry Byers, Conservation Division, who did the real detective work for the provenance research. A debt is also owing to the Glenbow for making Poland's increasingly rare work available to me. Thanks also to the Special Collections and Inter-Library Loans Divisions of the McPherson Library, both of whom continually provided the impossible. Additional research aid was provided by Bill Sloan of Selkirk College and Dr. Tim Ball of the Rupert's Land Research Centre at the University of Winnipeg, which is the unofficial clearing house for current information on fur trade and native studies conference presentations.

The physical creation of this document, as well as the statistical analysis behind this thesis are the result of long patient hours of advice and training by Laura Proctor and the consultants of Computing User Services who assisted me through the mysteries of Waterloo Script, S.A.S. and S.P.S.S.-X. Assistance in dealing with graphics and statistical conundrums was provided by Pat Konklin and his staff in the Statistics Lab. Any errors in the production of this document are mine alone.

I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the History Department and of Graduate Studies, for making my research trip to H.B.C.A. possible and for computing time.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to my wife, parents, all the members of my family and the friends who have given such patient support. The phrase, "Oh, let him talk", comes to mind. This thesis is the result.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to Monica, with love.

Chapter 1

WILDLIFE AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE FUR TRADE

Introduction

This thesis is about wildlife and commerce, and about the Hudson's Bay Company's search for mechanisms and policies which would allow it to impose order upon a complex and volatile trade. It is about European markets and isolated fur posts and how policy attempted to co-ordinate the two. The area to be studied is the drainage basins west of the Rockies, a region which presented the Hudson's Bay Company with numerous challenges. The time period for this examination of the Company's Columbia Department is from 1825, the year in which Governor George Simpson concluded his appraisal of the newly acquired region, and 1849, when new inland supply routes were fully established and operations at Fort Vancouver were winding down. With the settlement of the Oregon boundary negotiations in 1846 the Hudson's Bay Company began its withdrawal to the new administrative centre at Fort Victoria, marking an end to a period of intense competition. Another feature of this period is the collapse of the market for the Company's traditional staple, the beaver. It will be argued that the policy shift to smaller furs such as the marten and mink illustrates the effect of market forces through the buffer of the Company's auction system down to the level of the individual post, and marks the beginning of the modern fur industry and the end of the Company's plans for market control.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of fur trade historiography in order to situate this work within the literature. As this thesis is based around fur trade modelling theory, this aspect of the historiography will also be highlighted. After examining the evolution of a working model of the fur trade and illustrating what components this thesis proposes to examine, the chapter will conclude with an explanation of how, using quantitative and traditional methodologies, the research was done and for what purpose.

It is difficult to define at what point the study of the North American fur trade began. Aside from primary documents such as business correspondence, diaries, the Jesuit Relations and other documents, there are works about aspects of the trade which date back to at least 1747.[1] The average active life span of a work on the fur trade is remarkably long. Harold Adams Innis' The Fur Trade in Canada has been in common usage for some 56 years, and despite differences of interpretation it will no doubt continue to be used as a primary introduction to the field.[2] Whether a work is applicable to the fur trade is often determined by the aspect of the trade under study. It is of interest that the fur trade, an exchange

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1 For example, Cadwalladr Colden's The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada, Which Are the Barrier Between the English and the French In That Part of the World... London: Printed for T. Osborne, 1747. [Reprint. Toronto: Coles Publishing, 1972.], or Edward Umfrevilles's The Present State of Hudson's Bay, Containing A Full Description of That Settlement, and the Adjacent Country and Likewise of the Fur Trade, With Hints For Its Improvement. London: C. Stalker, 1790. [Reprint. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1954.]

2 For an example of the recent debates over The Fur Trade in Canada see: W.J. Eccles, " A Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada", Canadian Historical Review, v. LX (December 1979), pp. 419-441; Hugh M. Grant, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Innis, Eccles, and the Canadian Fur Trade", Canadian Historical Review, v. LXII (September 1981), pp. 304-329; and, Irene M. Spry, "Innis, the Fur Trade, and Modern Economic Problems", Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980, pp. 291-307.

of trade goods for pelts, has resulted in such a wide variety of interpretations and analyses. Constitutional and imperial histories, biographical sketches of early explorers and cartographers, archaeology, anthropology, social and ethnographic history, economics and other interests all find common ground in the literature of the fur trade.

Classic studies of the fur trade have focussed on economic geography, such as the work of Innis, or imperial expansion and conflict through the mechanisms of commerce, such as John S. Galbraith's The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869. One of the most important theoretical works in fur trade historiography was not a book but E.E. Rich's 1959 article, "Trade habits and economic motivation among the Indians of North America".[3] Rich criticised the emphasis on 'heroic' biographies and the role of the fur trade in exploration, which perpetuated images of Native peoples as passive victims of European culture who had in effect 'rolled over and played dead' when faced with sophisticated commercial imperialism. Rich raised the issue of whether the Native peoples could even be assumed to respond to the European conceptions of rational economic theory. In the simplest terms, if the trade value of a beaver pelt went up at the trading post, European economic theory would predict that the Native trapper would intensify his efforts to increase his profit by trapping more beavers. This was not the case in the fur trade. If the value went up then the volume of pelts traded would remain the same or even decline. In the previous literature this was explained by the racial stereotyping of the Native population as innately lazy. Rich argued convincingly that this was not the case and that what was occurring was the meeting of European capitalism with a culture which placed

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[3] Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, v. XXVI (1960), pp. 35-53.

little emphasis on the concept of property. Two cultures with different material values had found a narrow middle-ground which was defined as much by the Indians' perception of needs as it was by the traders' wares. Native peoples were not passive extensions of the fur trade's institutional structure. A new level of dynamics had been introduced into the study of the fur trade.[4]

The new work in the 1960s and 1970s which examined the issues raised by Rich was heavily based in the social sciences, especially anthropology, and included quantitative methodology, although economic historians such as Murray Lawson had done a great deal with export statistics in the 1940s. While the North American Fur Trade Conferences begun in the sixties continue to have a strong component of Native studies, there appears to be a small revival of interest in the fur trade as business history, with an emphasis on the role of policy, markets and corporate evolution. As one of the world's oldest multi-nationals the Hudson's Bay Company is well suited to examination in light of recent literature on business history. The role of European investment capital made this trade possible and the role of the market is an area requiring further examination. This thesis parallels the work of Elizabeth Mancke, whose examination of the Hudson's Bay Company made use of literature in the history of other export industries such as tobacco.[5]

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[4] As evidence of the importance of this article it should be noted that it was in this article that E.E. Rich first emphasized the role of the Indian middleman in the trade (pp.36-39). He also began the debate on the 'Overplus Trade', a complicated book-keeping system developed in order to allow for the cost of gift-giving as part of the process of trading (p.43), and he also drew attention to the impact of the trade goods themselves (p.44). All three of these areas have been explored in detail by A.J. Ray in both Indians in the Fur Trade and "Give Us Good Measure": An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763.

[5] Mancke, Elizabeth. "Hudson's Bay Company and the Management of Long-Distance Trade, 1670-1730." M.A. thesis. University of British Columbia, 1986.

This thesis is not a rejection of the previous direction of fur trade historiography, nor is it a return to the political economy of the 1930s. The intent is to re-examine the trade from a market perspective in order to understand more fully the context of the post and the workings of the collection system. It is clearly time for a shift from individual studies of Native-European interaction to comparative studies which will synthesize the numerous micro-studies done to date. In order to do this properly the context of the post within the trade has to be defined so that its characteristics can be separated from the society around it. Native peoples are not homogeneous and this thesis will argue that neither was the post. It was a specialized unit with a corporate and a harvesting agenda which varied not only according to its managers and staff, but also in response to its ecological hinterland, administrative policy, and, sometimes, market demand. The positioning of a post was not a random act and not always just an extension of transportation and hunting systems. An understanding of these characteristics and of the functioning of Departments as a whole is a necessary precursor for comparative studies between regions and societies. This will be done by focusing on the wildlife being collected, exported and sold, an area which appears to be somewhat neglected.

Turning now to methodology, one of the more recent aspects of current fur trade literature is the usage of modelling techniques by scholars such as Arthur J. Ray and David Wishart. Before dealing with their models it is perhaps wise to step backwards in time to 1965 and consider the cautionary thoughts of Dale L. Morgan. Morgan presented a paper at the close of the 1965 Fur Trade Conference in which he made some observations on the historiography of the fur trade.[6] In it

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[6] Dale L. Morgan, "The Fur Trade and Its Historians", American West v. III, No. 2

he discussed the impact of Hiram Martin Chittenden's The American Fur Trade of the Far West, a work comparable in its influence on American historians to Innis' Fur Trade in Canada on Canadian historiography. Morgan noted that while most students of the American fur trade began their studies with Chittenden, they were equally in danger of being 'brainwashed' by Chittenden's perspective and conclusions, limiting their ability to extend the frontiers of the field or to question long-established preconceptions of the nature of the trade. Morgan recognized the historiographic danger in this view: "I seem to be arriving at the awkward position of denying the utility of written history, asking that the student forget what others tell him, return to the sources, and form his own ideas from those sources."[7] Morgan was pleading the case for fresh modelling, rather than the recycling of established vehicles. Related to this discussion of the dangers of the uncritical inheritance of models is what Morgan called 'disnoetic' scholarship, of being incapable of knowing what it is one is seeing: "I do not know how many times in contemporary historiography I have run across formal conclusions contradicted straight down the line by the 'facts' marshalled in their support".[8] The researcher must be careful to separate the conclusions of previous researchers from the models 'borrowed' from them. However, the benefit of modern modelling techniques[9] is that the method and research techniques are

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(Spring 1966), pp.28-35, 92-93. [This was later reprinted in Aspects of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the 1965 North American Fur Trade Conference. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966.] Further citations to this paper are to the paper's first publication in American West.

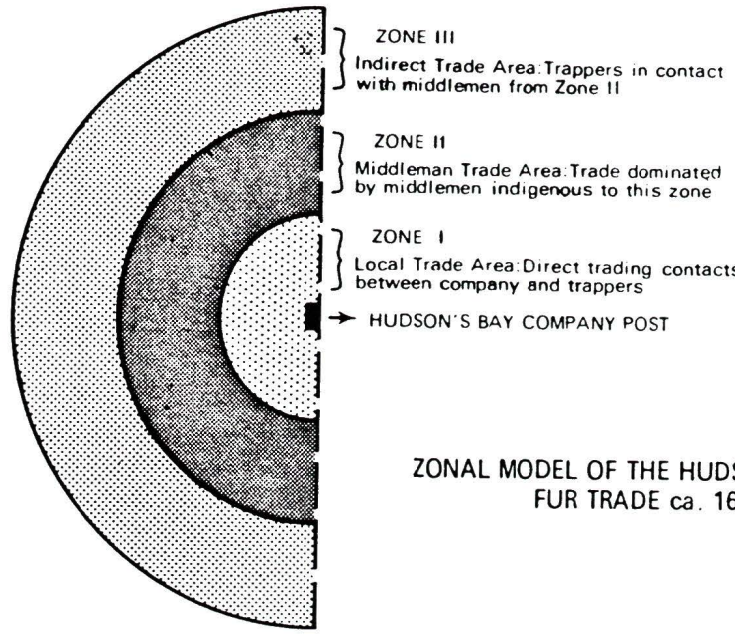
7 Ibid., p.30.

8 Morgan, Dale. "Fur Trade and Historians", American West, p. 30.

9 I use the word 'modern' to differentiate from the internal modelling that is part of the process by which narrative historians sort information and draw

explicitly stated and the researcher is forced to articulate his/her method of analysis. Given the cautions of Dale Morgan we should now turn to some of the basic models in the field of fur trade studies.

Model One: Trading Relationships at the Post Level



ZONAL MODEL OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY FUR TRADE ca. 1670 – 1763

Figure 1: The Trading Post Source: Arthur J. Ray, "Give Us Good Measure", p.48.

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the spheres of trade of the individual trading post. This model illustrates the trade with local trappers and the role of middlemen in collecting furs from the hinterland and peripheral trappers. But the model is flawed because at any given time the post may be trading with all three:

conclusions.

local trappers, distant trappers, and middlemen. Or, some hinterland trappers may choose to deal directly with the post, excluding the middleman.

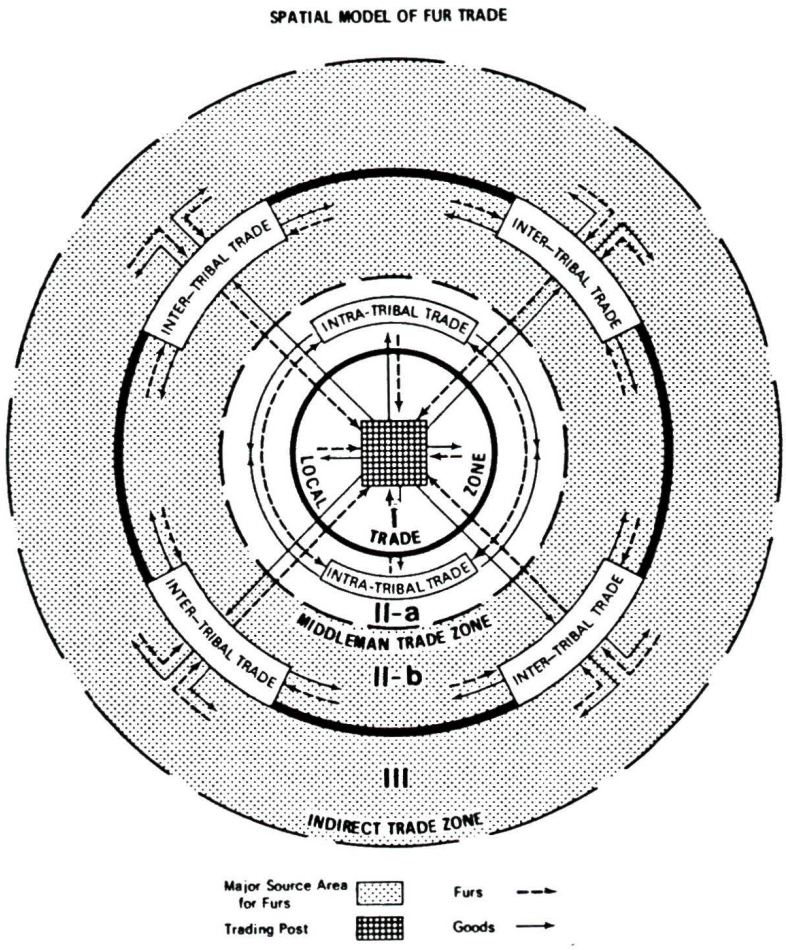


Figure 2: The Trading Post's Hinterland Source: Charles Heidenreich and Arthur J. Ray, The Early Fur Trades: A Study in Cultural Interaction, p.35.

Figure 2 is an earlier, but superior model which, because of its presentation of source of furs, clarifies the relationship between the variables. What it makes

clear is that the primary dependency of the post as well as the Natives is with the furs themselves, something which tends to get lost in Figure 1. The unit of analysis is the source of furs, not who hunted or transported the furs to the post. At this point a problem appears. Post records, and indeed the European traders at the posts themselves, could not distinguish the geographic origin of a fur, or whether the Native who brought it in had traded for it or trapped it himself.[10] So in theory, a correlation between the macro of wildlife hinterland and the micro of the individual post is not possible. Even if the specific individual who brought the furs to the post appears regularly in the business ledgers of the post, one still cannot determine the geographic origin of the pelt because of the middleman possibility. In short, there is no provenance for the pelt itself other than the date it was traded. The pelt represents a document or record of a member of a species of wildlife, but it is a record of which all that is known is size, value or quality, and date and place traded.

However, the model in Figure 2 represents a single post located in a theoretically infinite hinterland. What happens if we have more than one post, if the hinterland is not unlimited, but constrained by geographical obstructions and the presence of other duplicate posts? Even if Native peoples are not bound to respond to Euro-centric economic incentives they are still bound by the physical restraint of difficulties in travelling. They should, if all other factors are equal, trade with the closest post. So, if we have a large sample of individual but comparable posts within an area that is geographically definable it may be

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10 For a discussion of Hudson's Bay Company business ledgers see Arthur J. Ray, "The Early Hudson's Bay Company Account Books As Sources For Historical Research: An Analysis and Assessment", Archivaria, v. I, No. 1 (Winter 1975-76), pp. 3-38.

possible to make generalizations about the relationship between the wildlife of the region and posts in general. Granted, the posts should have comparable business practices and trade goods, and the Natives' choice between posts should only be a matter of physical convenience. The "Fur Trade Returns for Columbia District and New Caledonia, 1825-1858" represent such a sample.[11] After the merger between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, the new Hudson's Bay Company gained control of a region defined in the east by the Rocky Mountains, the Pacific Ocean on the west, the area now known as the Yukon on the north, the only disputed boundary being the area south of the Columbia River (prior to the boundary settlement of 1846). It may be possible that there exist differences in trading behaviour between the disputed frontier and the secured monopolistic posts of the New Caledonia District, posts whose hinterland is very much defined by the physical obstructions of landscape.

Model Two: The Institutional Structure of the Fur Trade

Figure 3 is an extension of the previous models and extends the trading relationships from the hinterland to London adding the movement of goods and furs as commodities to the model in a more sophisticated manner. The model allows for both methods of acquisition of furs, a combination of (I, II, III, IV) and (I, III, IV). A great deal of Arthur Ray's work places an emphasis on the nature of the movement of the trade goods. Through a study of this section of the model, the impact of changing or non-changing demand, changes of quality or nature of goods, social relationships such as the gift-giving process and the nature of cultural contact can be examined. Because his emphasis is on the trade

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11 A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C. See also "The Document As An Object", Appendix A.

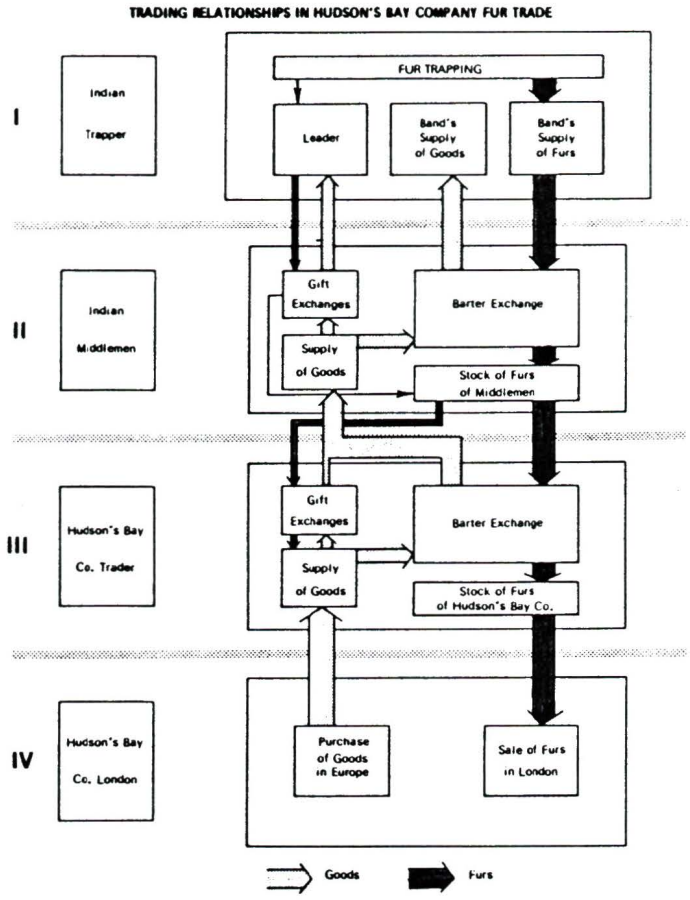

Figure 3: Structural Components of the Fur Trade Source: Charles Heidenreich and Arthur J. Ray, The Early Fur Trades, p.46.

relationship between Natives and Europeans, he focuses on the medium of exchange, Made Beaver (M.B.). The purpose filled by Made Beaver is highly unusual in practise and worth discussing further.

The fur trade, because it involves the interfacing of two cultures, has a number of obvious problem areas such as the diversity of language and culture. One of the practical problems involved in the basic act of commerce is that of establishing a common currency. On the one hand there is the trading post with its diverse stock of trade goods, each with its own related system of measurement and value: cloth sold by the yard, powder and shot sold by weight, files and kettles sold individually, different types of trade rifles, as well as brandy, tobacco and a host of other items to which European culture attaches value in various manners and measures. On the other side of the exchange there is the trapper, come to trade with a variety of large and small pelts, hides, and waterfowl. Each species of wildlife has a life-cycle which has an effect on the nature of the pelt, skin, hide, and so forth. Age may determine the size of the hide. The time of year in which the animal, mammal or bird was killed will have an effect on the colour or density of the pelt or plumage. The commodity is also subject to variations in the quality of the preparation of the pelt, and even after preparation the pelt is subject to damage from moths or the hazards of travel. All of these factors are taken into consideration when the grade or value of the pelt is judged by both parties at the post. The situation is further complicated by the fact that each species has different characteristics and when sold through auction to the European fur industry in London or Leipsic[12] will have a different end use and market value. However, it is doubtful that the trapper had a full knowledge of the demand equation that the Hudson's Bay Company faced. The trapper is also acutely aware of the ease or difficulty in securing one form of wildlife in

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12 The modern spelling is Leipzig but to avoid confusion when citing correspondence the name used during the time period being discussed has been adopted.

comparison to another, such as deer, bear, rabbit, beaver, muskrat, wolf, or buffalo. Each species would have a perceived hunting status and this in turn would be a factor in arriving at or in accepting a proposed price in trade goods. What is required to facilitate the dealings of the two parties is some form of currency, a medium of exchange. This is the purpose of Made Beaver. The term refers to a hypothetical beaver skin of prime quality that is larger than the diameter of a measuring hoop. All trade goods and all wildlife products which are traded for are converted into a portion of or a multiple of this standard of trade. For example at Fort Albany at Hudson's Bay in 1715, one large prime beaver (M.B.) would purchase 5 lbs. of shot, 12 awl blades, or 20 flints. A bear skin (adult) would be valued at 2 M.B., 2 otter skins would be valued at 1 M.B. and so forth.[13] The use of M.B. as a means of converting both Native and European value structure into a mutually comprehended value system made the fur trade much more than a simple barter system, it became a stable 'cashless' economy with an enormous longevity.

There is a danger in becoming over-concerned with the 'standards of trade' and the role of Made Beaver. The researcher begins to think in terms of this proxy-for-currency, forgetting that these are hypothetical beaver. This makes little difference if the subject being studied is the relationship based around trade goods, but if what is being sought is information on wildlife as a hinterland product of a European consumer economy, then Made Beaver becomes a dangerously misleading concept. Its usefulness is in establishing 'relative value' but not in investigating the changes in the actual numbers of wildlife involved in the trade.

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13 Arthur J. Ray, "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, pp. 262-263

Current fur trade research seems to be only interested in the decline of wildlife as it affected the economic welfare of the Native community.[14] The old perception of the Indian as a 'vanishing race' whose extinction was inevitable is now rejected by modern historians, but this same attitude is continually accepted with regard to wildlife, without an understanding of the demographics of the trade or an understanding of the roles various species had in the trade. All Native people are not the same. Are all tribal societies so similar that their differences are not worth study? This seems to be the attitude of many fur trade historians towards fur-bearers. In the Fur Trade in Canada Innis spends less than four pages on the characteristics of the beaver, which is roughly one page for every hundred of text.[15] Any species of wildlife other than the beaver receives only passing mention.[16] Later, in The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy

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14 There are exceptions. James L. Clayton's "The Growth and Economic Significance of the American Fur Trade, 1790-1890" [Aspects of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the 1965 North American Fur Trade Conference. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1967], is partially an examination of the changes in species and volume of pelts from the American West and their significance as both a domestic and export item. The standard work on wildlife and the Hudson's Bay Company policy is Arthur Ray's "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management In the Fur Trade.", Journal of Historical Geography, v. I, No. 1 (1975), pp. 49-68. The article concludes by observing that the attempt by the H.B.Co. to introduce a sustained yield policy East of the Rockies failed because of imperfect monopoly conditions, i.e. external influences defeated their attempts. The problem with this is that in New Caledonia, in the same time period, full monopoly conditions appear to have existed, but there is no evidence that conservation policies were attempted.

15 Harold Adams Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956, pp. 3-6. A notable exception is Charles A. Bishop who rapidly but clearly discusses fur-bearing animals and trapping techniques with reference to the differences between various species. Charles A. Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Limited, 1974, pp.196-206.

16 Muskrat are discussed as part of the total trade, but primarily only to explain

(1940), Innis set forth a simple approach to the study of international commerce -- start with the item which commerce was prepared to come from Europe to get. In the case of The Cod Fisheries Innis began with a study of the cod fish and its habitat, the Grand Banks. He then moved from an ecological understanding to a study of how it was collected and traded, and what the political implications of this trade were. In his work on the fur trade Innis never seems to get further than the beaver, perhaps because of the appeal of its national symbolism. For Innis the beaver may have been what Dale Morgan worried Chittenden was to aspiring scholars.

David Wishart provides several of the more sophisticated institutional models of the trade. Figures 4 and 5 are taken from his work.[17] In Figure 4 we have a representation of the linkages between the market/supply source and the resource being harvested, in this case bison. As in Figure 3, the clear flow of furs from the hinterland and of goods from the commercial marketplace is evident. In the case of the Upper Missouri the harvesting consisted of annual hunting parties, rather than individual trappers. Figure 5 is for the Rocky Mountain region, an area in which both the species of wildlife and the scale of the harvest differed from the Upper Missouri. This was the area of the famous mountain man system of individual trappers. What is of interest is the form of the model, which appears to be reasonably accurate for both forms of the fur trade, forms which reflect the American experience, rather than that of the Hudson's Bay Company.

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a point about the decline of beaver or beaver conservation policy, which involved paying more for the pelts of other species in order to direct hunters away from depleted beaver stock. See Innis, Fur Trade in Canada, pp. 264-5, 286, 327.

17 David J. Wishart. The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.

Figure 8: Spatial Organisation of the Upper Missouri Fur Trade

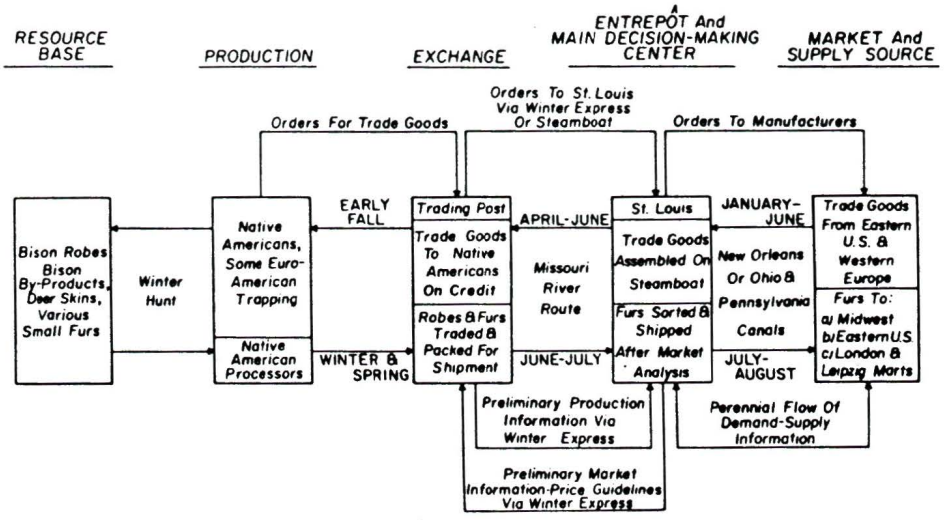

Figure 4: The Missouri Trading System Source: David Wishart, Fur Trade of the American West, 1807- 1840., p.80.

From the models of David Wishart it is a short step to the model of the Hudson's Bay Company used by Arthur Ray. Figure 6 is the most complex model and represents the state of current historiography. Work done prior to the 1960's dealt primarily with conflict between trading companies and the expansion of national interest groups into the unexplored (by Europeans) regions of North America. Such work can be sited as external to the model in Figure 6, but can also be related to the functioning of the model. The previous discussion concerning the role of Made Beaver is important because it reveals an imbalance in the approach to fur trade historiography, that being the lack of research into the other main component of the model, the flow of furs. The bulk of the work

Figure 19: The Spatial Organisation of the Rocky Mountain Trapping System

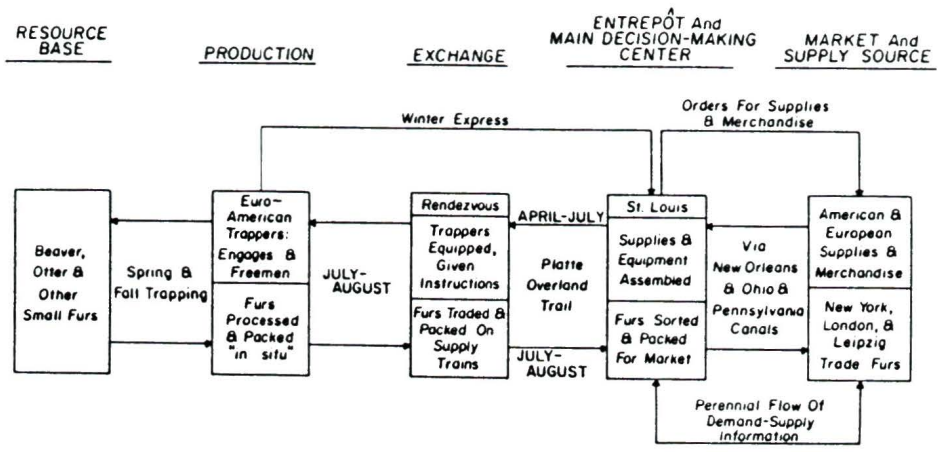

Figure 5: The St. Louis/Rocky Mountain Trading System Source: D. Wishart, Fur Trade of the American West, p.176.

done on the fur trade is concerned with the flow of goods through model 6. Where furs are discussed in the labelling of the model, such as the boxes "Value of furs marked up by Indian middleman", "Furs valued in M.B. by H.B. Comparative Standard", and "Furs revalued in pounds sterling currency", it is for the purpose of comparison as a dependent variable of goods. They are not a dependent variable. The emphasis on the role of Made Beaver makes it appear that the inflow of furs is dependent on the outflow of goods, but E.E. Rich's observation that the Native trapper will not supply furs in a positive relation to an increase in Made Beaver's purchasing power refutes that there is a dependency. What we have here are two independent variables, the commodities which two independent groups choose to trade. Why is it that both groups are studied, but only one commodity?

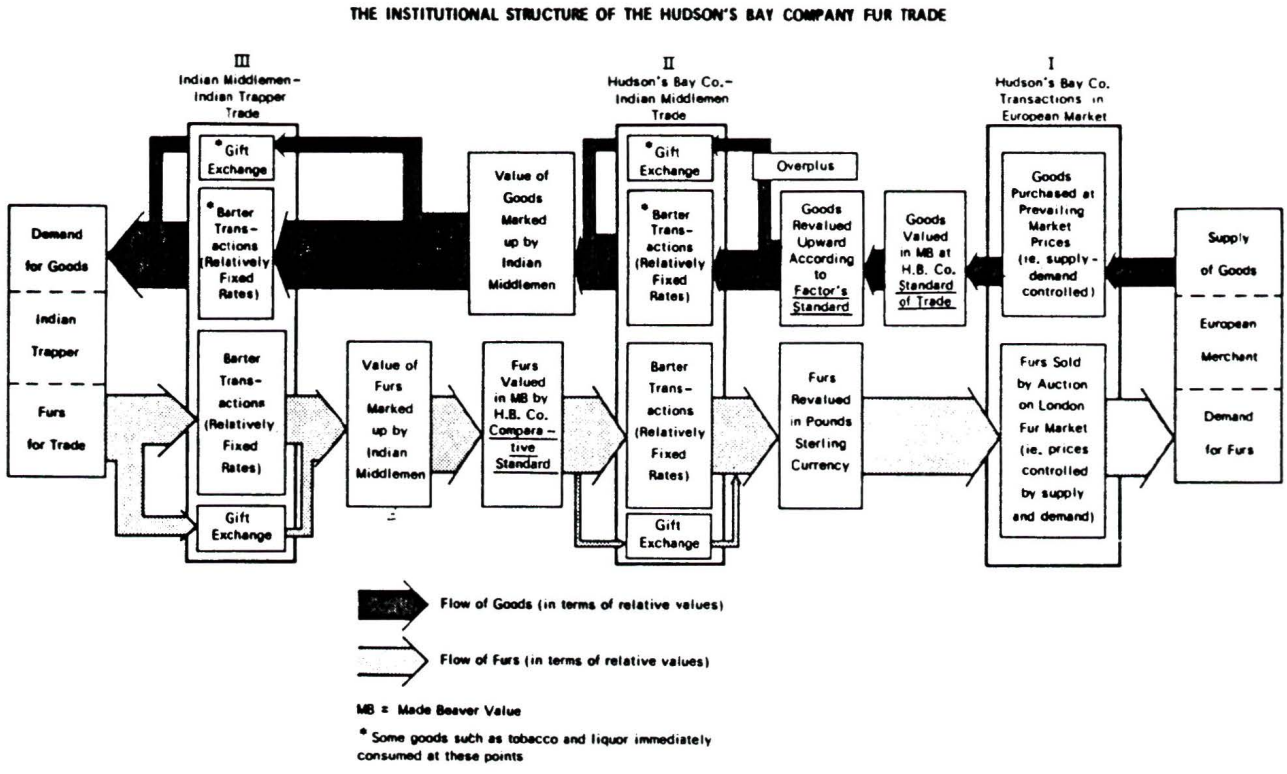

Figure 6: The Hudson's Bay Company Trading System Charles Heidenreich and Arthur J. Ray, The Early Fur Trades, p.47.

Conclusion

While the models discussed illustrate the sophistication with which historians have analyzed the fur trade, they tell us very little about the system which co-ordinated the movement of furs to Europe. The models also tell us very little about wildlife as a commodity and whether it or the marketplace had any influence on the functioning of this trade. How were the operations and expansion of the system managed? What structural changes occurred in the system over time? These are questions which reveal that the models are just that -- theoretical constructs to explain how a system is perceived to function. When these forms of questions are asked one realizes that in some areas of fur trade studies knowledge has not progressed as rapidily as one would assume. In 1943 Murray Lawson noted that Douglas McKay's 1936 statement was still valid:

> Having to choose between the recounting of men and events on one hand and capital investment and management on the other, the tendency has been to hold close to the former, even at the expense of neglecting some of the precise details of fur prices and markets and the evolution of business methods.[18]

In some areas, notably Native Studies, the last thirty years have brought a great deal of progress, but as a history of the European aspects of the commerce, McKay's encapsulation stands.

This thesis does not offer a new model, but it does, by beginning with the shortcomings of the existing models, begin to probe into some of their more obscure areas. This is done through a regional study of the posts of the Columbia Department after 1825, and through an examination of the region's wildlife,

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18 Douglas McKay, The Honourable Company: A History of the Hudson's Bay Company. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1936, p. xii, cited in Lawson, Murray G., Fur: A Study in English Mercantilism, 1700-1775. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943, p. 73.

focusing on its collection, export, and sale. This study is limited to the resource and the marketplace, and the system which linked the two.

The evolution and functioning of this system has been examined through two complementary research strategies. The first strategy has been a statistical analysis of business ledgers at key points in the model, Department returns, export handbills and annotated auction catalogues. The second method was through a search of the managerial correspondence, that of the Governor and Committee in London to Governor Simpson and to the Officers in charge of the Columbia Department. The reports of Governor George Simpson to London, and the annual letters from Fort Vancouver and Fort Victoria have also been examined for this period. Through the use of these parallel methodologies, statistical analysis and correspondence searches, a series of checks has been established which ensures a higher degree of certainty than dependence on either alone.

The current emphasis of the field has been on the barter trade and on European/Native contact. Historical context also requires an understanding of the resource itself, and recognition of this frontier's linkages with a European economy.

Chapter 2

THE RESOURCE: THE SEARCH THROUGH NATURE FOR PRODUCTS

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the basic unit of the fur trade, the wildlife resource for which the Europeans traded with Natives, in order to gain some understanding of how the commodity's characteristics influenced its collection and marketability. An ecological hinterland, such as a river basin, is amazing in the diversity and intricate variations in the lifeforms found within it, only some of which become the focus of trade. How did the Hudson's Bay Company identify a potential product and to what degree did the individual animal's characteristics shape its utility to the fur trade? This chapter, by making reference to scientific literature, both from the present and from the last century, shows how complex the harvesting of a consistent product was. The Company is portrayed as engaged in a search for products within the ecological diversity of the Columbia Department.

In studying the relationship between wildlife and human activities, historians and scientists approach the subject from slightly different perspectives. The historian is likely to place the emphasis on the human activity, whereas the scientist would place the emphasis on the wildlife. A few works, such as Frank

Roe's The Bison and Banko's The Trumpeter Swan, combine these approaches.[1] Unfortunately works such as these are not common. This combined approach is important, not only because, as the historian of the medieval European fur trade, Robert Delort has argued, "les animeaux ont une histoire"[2], but also because scientific literature on wildlife has a practical relevance to fur trade studies, particularly in the area of wildlife demographics and species characteristics.

The study of the movements and the changing demographics of wildlife is still a very new field. In the foreword to his demographic work on possible 10 year cycles in wildlife, Lloyd Keith places the origins of the field at a conference held in July 1931 on the Matamek River in Labrador, under the patronage of Copley Amory of Boston. Wildlife cycles had long been recognized in rural communities and among both trappers and sportsmen, but this conference was the first gathering of members of the various branches of science and conservation for the purpose of investigating the causes of the phenomena.

Half a century later, however, there is still no workable model of these cycles. The field has considered and dismissed theories ranging from the cycles of sunspot activity, a combination of ultra-violet radiation and malnutrition, periodic epidemics, and now has moved into the area of intricate mathematical probability equations. Keith has a wonderful commentary on this evolution:

> Theories and hypotheses confound the natural-history literature. Most are untested and as a result unanimity is lacking on many aspects of animal-population cycles. For thirty-odd years these periods of abundance and scarcity have been passed off as resulting

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1 Roe, Frank Gilbert. The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1970. Banko, Winston E. The Trumpeter Swan: Its History, Habits, and Population in the United States. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.

2 Delort, Robert. Les Animeaux ont une histoire. Paris: Seuil, 1985.

> from chance alone; lacking sufficient precision or amplitude to be acceptable; being so multifactorial as to defy appraisal; and eventually regarded as phenomena easily reduced to ridicule. Not all attitudes are disparaging or skeptical. There are zealots in the field of biology who see cycles in virtually all tabulations of natural and social interactions. From the production of pig iron to tent caterpillars, and from ozone quantity to Nile floods, cycles have been regarded as the skeletons or the souls of numerical data.[3]

This comment certainly applies beyond the field of biology but it is a cautionary statement, rather than a criticism. With this proviso he then concludes his research with the confirmation that there is indeed a "ten-year cycle", in the sense that there is a regular but not precise fluctuation for several forms of grouse, for the snowshoe rabbit and its predator the lynx, as well as some evidence for such a cycle in the fox, and the muskrat and its predator the mink.[4] All of the animals in which Keith observed cyclical population fluctuations are, and were (none being extinct) present in the Columbia Department.

Fur trade records have figured prominently in the early literature on wildlife, such as the work of Elliott Coues, Henry Poland, and Ernest Thompson Seton. They have also been used by more recent scientists such as the noted biologist Charles Elton and Stephen Ewing, a biomathematician, both of whom have made extensive use of the statistical sources available in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives.[5] Ian McTaggart Cowan made use of the Columbia returns ledger being

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3 Keith, Lloyd B. Wildlife's Ten-Year Cycle. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963., p. vii.

4 Keith, Lloyd B. Wildlife's Ten-Year Cycle. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963., p. vii. For related work on the fluctuation of muskrats see: Errington, Paul L. Muskrat Populations. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1963., pp. 522-538.

5 Researchers at the H.B.C.A., Winnipeg may wish to familiarize themselves with a brief summary of the field written by Stephen Ewing in 1984 and contained in the "Search File -- Fur Data".

re-examined in this thesis for an article concerning the fluctuations of wildlife within modern British Columbia, but he was examining the cycles, not the fur trade.[6] Some of the fluctuations did have an effect, such as the marten cycle in 1845 which coincided with a strengthening European market for the fur at a time when the Company desperately needed a new staple as the beaver hat market, supplanted by hats made from materials supplied by silkworms and mulberry trees, continued to fall. Muskrat populations fluctuate for unknown biological and known environmental reasons, such as changes in water levels. While this was not a structurally important event or characteristic for the posts of the Columbia Department it did have a large impact on the international fur market, because as a cheap substitute fur it attracted speculators, as a further chapter will demonstrate. Other fluctuations, such as those of the lynx were too extreme and too short-lived to create and supply a regular industrial market. Most of the scientific literature on these topics does not appear to be used in fur trade historiography.

While it is generally accepted that man migrated to North America across a land-bridge between Asia and Alaska, the origins and movements of the wildlife of North America are unclear. In fact, we know very little about the nature and inter-relationships of pre-Hominidae wildlife in the Columbia District. Modern archaeology, like fur trade records, can identify animals only as they relate to the sites of human habitation. We do not know very much about how and when various species came into the region or what their numbers were.

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6 Cowan, Ian McTaggart. "The Fur Trade and the Fur Cycle: 1825-1857.", British Columbia Historical Quarterly, v. 2 (1938), pp. 19-30.

We do know that the first Hominid users of wildlife, the Native peoples of the region, utilized wildlife in a number of ways: as basic food, a source for the grease and oils required for the cooking and preparation of food, sinews for sewing, bones for tool construction, such as needles and combs, leather, furs for warmth, decoration, or like the woven goat hair blankets, symbols of social status.

The harvest of wildlife also formed the economic basis for inter-group commerce through the exchange of regional specialties or surpluses, and sometimes even the means of further harvesting and hunting.[7] The evolution of this commerce and how it came into conflict with the Hudson's Bay Company is an important theme to this thesis and will be addressed in the next chapter.

The relationship between the native peoples of the region and wildlife were changed by commercial intercourse with European traders. The decimation of the sea otter population along the northern coast is the best known example.[8] Species

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[7] An example of this is described by William Eddy Banfield in one of a series of articles on the South West coast of Vancouver Island. In describing the economic activities of the native peoples at Nitnat he alluded to the inter-tribal trade in prepared seal skins which were inflated and fastened to harpoon lines in order to force whales to the surface. "Vancouver Island: Its Topography, Characteristics, & c., Number VI, Ohiat and Netinett Sounds.", Victoria Gazette, 3 September, 1858, p.1.

[8] Although there are a large number of records left by coastal traders about the trade in sea otters, a careful reading reveals that in many cases the natives were acting as middlemen rather than the primary hunters of the mammal. [For a classic example of this see A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean Undertaken by the Command of His Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere. Performed Under the Direction of Captains Cook, Clerke, and Gore, in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Discovery; in the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780. (3 vols.) London: Printed for G. Nichol and T. Cadell, 1784, v.2, p.279.]

The question of the provenance of the pelt is often left unanswerable. Was a pelt hunted locally or had it been passed from one group to another as part of the larger coastal economy? Sea otters ranged as far south as modern-day California, but we do not know if that range had an homogeneous population and how that related to the political and economic status of the hunting and

became hunted strictly for their exchange value in European trade goods; their utility changed slightly, but the scale of the harvest increased greatly. For an animal to become a product, which was the goal of the Hudson's Bay Company, required nothing more than an attitude or state of mind. When the animal becomes a product in the mind then the appropriate technologies and economic structures emerge or follow. This is an important point because it is in this attitude that the common ground and the relationships between Natives and fur traders are formed. The fur trade is based on the concept, shared by both Native and European, that the animal is a product.

The Search for Products

While not the first land based fur company to operate in the region, the Hudson's Bay Company was the most successful, establishing more collection centres and controlling a larger hinterland than any competitor or predecessor. Although the Company's specialty was in the harvesting of one particular product, the beaver, used in the hat industry to make hat felt, the Company was in fact a buyer of a large variety of forms of wildlife. The European market absorbed an astounding variety of wildlife products. Deer horns were sold to Sheffield for cutlers and stag horns for pen knife handles.[9] The tusks of the walrus, marketed as 'Sea Horse Teeth', exported from the Columbia in the 1840's as a show of goodwill to the Russian American Company (R.A.C.), were used by dentists in Britain to make dentures, although earlier in 1825 the market was overstocked

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trading groups in their inter-tribal and European trade relations.

[9] Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 11 March 1825, Para. 23. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

because of the Greenland fisheries activity.[10]

Following Simpson's first fact-finding tour of the Columbia during 1824-25, a diversification began in the harvesting of the region's wildlife. His reports from the Columbia River discuss the commercial potential of the wildlife he saw, such as the mountain goat:

> specimens of which will be sent home this season and if the skins could be converted to any useful purpose and command a price of from 10 to 15/- each, they might be made an article of Trade worthy of attention.[11]

As an experiment he joined his voyageurs in eating the two mountain goats he saw and he described them as tough. He issued instructions to have specimens provided in the next year for a naturalist, but the first specimens were sent to London for a determination of the commercial potential of their wool and horns. This was a continual feature of the Company's exploration of market potential, whether the product was a pelt, a log, a mineral sample or a barrel of salmon. Samples were sent to London and the Company located the most knowledgeable authority on the item as well as obtaining commercial appraisals about its comparable quality, market, value and probable competitors. One of John McLoughlin's earliest letters from Fort Vancouver discusses the sample of swan skins and isinglass (a pure gelatin extracted from the sturgeon's float bladder and used to clarify wine and beer) that he was sending "to know what they are worth".[12] In 1842 he was still sending samples of possible products to London as

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10 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 11 March 1825, Para. 23. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

11 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 March, 1825, Para. 20, D.4/88, Series I, H.B.C.A. And also: Merk, Frederick, Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968, pp.32-33.

part of the regular operations of the post:

> Among the articles shipped are four jars Oulachan Oil, procured from a small fish at Fort Simpson, 1 cask Spermaceti or Brain Matter, some sea horse teeth, sea horse & sea lion Hides for trial in the English market.[13]

There was a fairly regular flow of potential products from the hinterlands of the posts to London, from grizzly bears to the small hoary marmot. Some were examined by specialists while others went through the auction process in packaged odd lots, so that buyer response could be tested. There were also occasional experiments with test lots in the hopes of finding a new use or a substitute for an older product. The Company would turn to these resources in hopes of finding an alternate use for beaver pelts in the late 1840's while the market was collapsing, experimenting with using beaver pelts to make artificial seal.

A part of this process which is worth further attention is whether the relationship between the Hudson's Bay Company and the numerous naturalists the Company assisted was symbiotic: did naturalists promote new products by publicizing their existence? The red fox is the only animal examined for this and the answer is revealing of the Company's dogmatic allegiance to a recognizable and easily promoted product, even in the face of opinions from both Natives and at least one scientist that the Company was mistaken.

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12 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 6 October 1825, Para. 49. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver To the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941, p. 16.

13 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 31 October 1842, Para. 20. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver To the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-1844. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943, p. 81.

In the Columbia, as in the Company's other operations they harvested several variations of what we now know as the red fox. This fox has several colour phases, that is, individual foxes may be born a different colour and a specific fox's coat may change according to the season. Typical colour phases are the silver and the cross phase of the red fox (who can of course also be red) and there are also white and blue phases of the arctic fox.[14] During the first half of the nineteenth century the blue phase of the arctic fox was thought to be a completely different type of fox by both fur traders and biologists. John Richardson commented that opinions were divided as to whether this was a type of fox, or a colour phase of either the coat or the age of the fox.[15] No white arctic foxes were listed at all in the returns. But the red fox and its colour phases comprised in excess of 99% of the total catch. We now know that litters of this form of fox are affected by a single pair of 'gene alleles'. Rather than doing science an injustice with a tentative foray into genetics, suffice it to say that this is somewhat similar to the occurrence of different colour hair within the children of a family, except this occurs within a litter of 1-10 whelps. The resulting variations are called the colour phases of the red fox: red, cross, and silver. The cross phase results in a greyish brown coat with dark black markings down the spine and across the shoulders, the silver is, contrary to image, black with a white tipped tail and a silver frosting effect from the outer guard hairs of the coat. It is the silver phase

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14 But the 'blue' arctic fox only appears once in the fur returns for the Columbia, when two were traded in 1857 to the Steamer Beaver while she was trading on the northern coast.

15 Richardson, John. Fauna Boreali-Americana; Or the Zoology of the Northern Parts of British America: Containing Descriptions of the Objects of Natural History Collected on the Late Northern Land Expeditions, Under Command of Captain Sir John Franklin, R.N. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1829. [New York: Arno Press, 1974, pp. 83-90.]

which is the more highly valued, partly because it is almost unknown in the European red fox.[16] The percentage breakdown of these colour phase occurrences vary, sometimes due to the genetic 'dice', other times due to migratory patterns, but generally they fall within these loose bounds: red phase 46-77%, cross phase 20- 44%, and silver 2-17%.[17]

Figure 7 is a graph which shows the colour phase breakdown as reflected in returns. In the observed data the average breakdown was: red phase 58% (8,402 pelts), cross phase 31% (4,430), and silver 11% (1,608). In the market these colour phases were thought to be part of the rarity and beauty of the animal and the bidding for a prime silver fox was often as high as that for a good sea otter pelt. The silver fox remained a mysterious animal and market prices thrive on this form of mystery. The fact that the silver phase was the result of genetics meant that it was not possible to trap the fox to extinction without also taking the other two less valuable colour phases. The genetic origins of these colour phases also meant that it was not possible to obtain an increased quantity of the most valuable pelt without also accepting a larger volume of the other two colour phases, whether or not the Company was aware of this relationship. To refuse excess pelts of the other two colour phases would have the effect of discouraging the hunting of foxes in general and this would then result in a reduction in the number of silver foxes. So in this manner the characteristics of the red fox created an additional cost to the trapping out of the species, throwing upon the commercial harvester a large surplus of pelts of lesser value.

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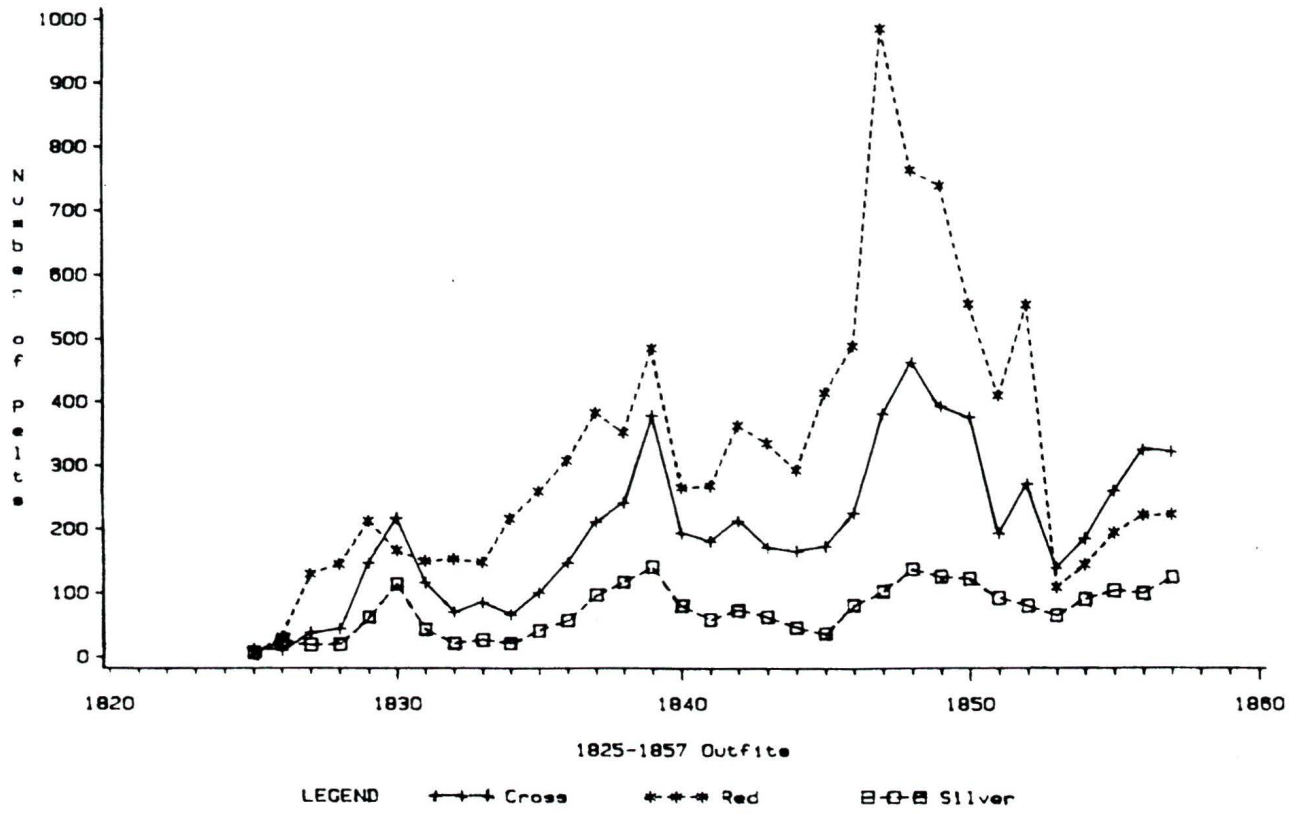
16 Richardson cites A. de Capell Brooke as noting that only 3 or 4 silver foxes are taken annually on the Lofoden islands of Norway and that they are not found elsewhere. Richardson. Fauna Boreali-Americana., p.94.

17 Banfield, Mammals of Canada., p.299.



Source: A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C.

Figure 7: Variation in Red Fox Colour Phases

This diversity in the pelage of the red fox seems to have aided in its survival. If the highly valued silver fox had been a distinct form, it would have drawn enough attention to itself to have threatened its own survival. If there was confusion in the hinterland as to what the silver fox was there was none in the market place, where the rare and obscure origins of the pelt added to its value. The concern of the Company was with establishing a distinct product in the marketplace, and the product is not necessarily the animal itself.

While the fur trade industry had a preference for distinguishing between the colour phases as if they were separate forms of fox there did exist countering opinions from the scientific community. In 1829 John Richardson commented on red and cross foxes:

> Even the Indian hunters do not know the cubs at an early age from those of the Cross or Silver Foxes, and I therefore cannot now place the reliance I was once induced to do on their report of young cross foxes being found in the burrows of the Red Fox.[18]

and also:

> I am inclined to adhere to the opinion of the Indians in considering the Cross Fox of the fur traders to be a mere variety of the Red Fox, as I found on inquiry that the gradations of colour between characteristic specimens of the Cross and Red Fox are so small, that the hunters are often in doubt with respect to the proper denomination of a skin, and I was frequently told "This is not a cross fox yet, but it is becoming so."[19]

While there was still some uncertainty as to what was occurring, Richardson did disagree with the distinctions of the fur traders. Banfield, in the late twentieth century, placed some of the uncertainty inherent in the wide bounds of the percentage breakdown of the colour phases to "selective pelting, and variation in

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18 Richardson, Fauna Boreali-Americana., p.92

19 Richardson. Fauna Boreali-Americana., p.93

the identification of the cross fox".[20] What appears to be going on here is not a refusal to accept the opinion of scientific inquiry, rather it is an industry which benefits from the flexibility of having three distinguishable but similar products. There is a middle ground between the cross and red fox in the variations of their visual aesthetics and no doubt some pelts could be placed into either of the two groups at the trading post level or later, in preparation for auction. The red fox is a good example of the constraints to which the Company's search for an homogenous product was subject and why creating an orderly trade was so difficult. This is also a good illustration of the importance of the grading process and the London warehouse staffs experience, which will be dealt with in chapter 5.

The Company's 'product loyalty' was typical of the business. Establishing a demand in the public's mind for a fur was a difficult and tenuous task, and questions that disturbed or confused the assigned status or value of a pelt were harmful to business in general and to the specific product. The silk hat, the beaver hat's competitor, received its social endorsement when Prince Albert set the fashion by wearing one. The market was a very unpredictable thing, like wildlife populations, and once regulated it was best left as it was. The former Nor'wester Ross Cox, in his book on the Columbia River, explained how fickle the market for bearskins had been. The North West Company found itself with a glut of bearskins and no buyers. One was made up into a 'hammercloth'[21] with the coat of arms in silver and given to the King's son as a mark of respect, the Company knowing full well that it would reappear to be shown off at the King's

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20 Banfield, Mammals of Canada., p.299.

21 "A cloth covering the drivers seat or 'box' in state or family carriage." It was ornamented with the symbols and arms which indicated the occupants social status. Compact Edition Oxford English Dictionary, v. I, p. 1247.

next levee. The bearskin was a fashion coup and within three weeks the warehouse was empty.[22] Both companies knew the dangers of tampering with success, and the promotional benefits, as in this case, of a good story as an aid to sales.

In other species, the Hudson's Bay Company, again by approaching wildlife as a product, came into disagreement with both Richardson and Natives familiar with the animal in its natural habitat rather than as a pelt in the post or auction room. The 1825 returns for the Columbia Department distinguished among three forms of bear skins: black, brown, and grizzly. The common black bear has several colour phases other than black, including cinnamon, honey, white and blue. The bears of the interior were evenly divided between the cinnamon-brown and black phases. Richardson noted that the fur trade perception of the species was at variance with that of the Native peoples:

> The Cinnamon Bear of the Fur Traders is considered by the Indians to be an accidental variety of this species [black bear], and they are borne out in this opinion by the quality of the fur, which is equally fine with that of the Black Bear.[23]

In the Queen Charlottes and on Vancouver Island there has been no apparent brown phase reported in recent times. A rare white form of the black bear (not a polar bear) occurs between Burke Inlet and the Nass River and an equally rare blue form is found in the region of Mount St. Elias, which in the time period under discussion was the domain of the Russian American Fur Company. The grizzly

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22 Cox, Ross. The Columbia River, Or Scenes and Adventures During A Residence of Six Years On the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains Among Various Tribes Hitherto Unknown; Together With 'A Journey Across the American Continent'. Edgar I. Stewart and Jane R. Stewart, Editors. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957, p. 243.

23 Richardson, Fauna Boreali-Americana., p.15.

bear is found throughout the region, with the exception of Vancouver Island.[24]

In the returns the black bear accounts for 90% of the skins traded, the remainder being grizzly bears. Within the black bear statistics, 75% are black and 15% are variations of brown. The white phase is recorded in three years, 1 each in 1841 and 1842, and 2 in 1847. Less than 1,000 black bear skins were collected each year prior to 1839, after this date there were never less than 1,000, and the harvest passed the 2,000 mark in 1841, 1849, 1850. After 1852 there were never less than 2,000 black bear skins taken and the 3,000 mark was reached in 1855. For the brown phase the annual hunt was smaller, between 142 in 1830 and a high of 512 in 1845. Less than 100 grizzly bears were traded annually prior to the Outfit of 1842, the high being 533 in 1848 and the average being 178 skins. But by 1844 annual totals in excess of 300 grizzlies were common and this may reflect technological change such as improved or more widely distributed firearms or a shift in Company collections policy. Again colour phase characteristics placed constraints on the supply of wildlife and aided in establishing product identity. Having touched just briefly on how the Company identified a product and how that perception could differ from biological reality, the discussion will turn to the range of species harvested in the Columbia, a species mix which diversified as the Company extended both its network of posts and the depth of its trading relationships with the hinterland.

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24 Banfield, Mammals of Canada., pp. 305-313.

The Species Mix of the Columbia Department

During the years 1821-25 the Hudson's Bay Company's operations in the region were, by default, a continuation of the previous policies of the North West Company. The emphasis in the trade was an extension of the practises common East of the Rockies, centering on the collection of beaver, otter and fox.[25] In Simpson's letter of June 1823 he refers to Columbia returns as consisting of 18,790 beaver and otter, with an additional 700 beaver from the Snake River country.[26] But detailed Columbia District statistics for the period prior to George Simpson's reorganization of the area in 1824-25 are difficult to locate and this precludes any reliable analysis. However, beginning with the 1825 Outfit[27], we do have reliable figures in the form of a private ledger kept for the use of Sir James Douglas.[28]

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25 An important difference between the trade west of the Rockies and that of the remainder of the North West Company's districts was the direct shipment of furs from the Columbia to Canton on American vessels prior to amalgamation. However even in the 1790's the North West Company had been shipping furs to China indirectly from New York. See "Account of Beaver Skins, Returns From N.W.Co. Sold by McTavish Fraser & Co. to Messrs. John Ferguson & Co. for Export to Canton, Joint Account.", A.7/1, Fos. 24-26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

26 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 23 June 1823, Para.27. D.4/86, Series I, H.B.C.A.

27 A fur trade Outfit year is a form of a fiscal year, used to calculate the profit and loss for the trade. It begins on June 1 and ends on May 30.

28 For the purpose of building a data file for analysis these figures have been compared with returns kept at York Factory and in a few cases, such as New Caledonia and the Colvile area, have been further broken down from totals to sub-groups of posts. The primary document used is "Fur Trade Returns for Columbia and New Caledonia, 1825-1857", A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C. This data was compared with a run of Columbia and New Caledonia returns for the years 1844, 1847-50 which were located among the York Factory returns. B.223/H/1 and B.226/H/1, Series I, H.B.C.A. There were minor differences between the two record groups but these reflect the fact that a number of Columbia river otter were set aside for the payment of the Alaskan Panhandle lease to the Russian American Company, which is discussed further in this chapter. River otter were also shipped into the district from other Company districts in order to meet the terms of this lease. Additional data was obtained for the New

The following statistical observations were arrived at from a quantitative analysis of these returns.[29]

Table 1 makes it clear that the traditional focus of the fur trade, the beaver pelt, was the most traded form of wildlife. But of equal interest are the large numbers of marten, mink, and muskrat, which as a group (in rounded figures) comprised 53% of the pelts harvested in the region during the years 1825-1849. These four mammals account for 80% of the region's volume of trade. In comparison the highly valued sea otter was only 0.2% of the total volume. Other highly valued pelts were equally scarce. The blue phase of the arctic fox appears only once in the returns ledgers.

There was a definite change in the diversity of the forms of wildlife that the Hudson's Bay Company harvested during the period under discussion.[30] As the

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Caledonia and Colvile District and are discussed in the analysis of district posts and regions in the following chapter. For further information on the fur return ledger of Sir James Douglas see the provenance essay in Appendix A.

29 This was initially done without reference to the more traditional sources such as journals and correspondence. The purpose of this isolation is to give full run to a form of methodology which is eminently suited to the analysis of business ledgers, accepting for the moment the dangers of making assumptions based on limited evidence in order to gain the potential of a fresh insight into a heavily studied field.

The results of this analysis are then compared and tested against other forms of documentary evidence, such as the inward and outward correspondence of George Simpson and the Governor and Committee's instructions to Simpson from London, such as D.4/85 and A.6/20 respectively, (Series I, H.B.C.A.). The sources have been used to reconstruct as much as possible how the Columbia's operations must have looked to the upper level management of the Company. All statistics cited in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are from the ledger discussed in the previous footnote.

30 The discussion on diversity is based on the use of simple frequency and cross-tabulation for the pelts, posts and years for which observations were obtained and are a composite of all the posts which comprised the Columbia District.

Table 1: Columbia Department Species Mix, 1825-1849

Animal	% of Harvest	Quantity
Beaver	27.4	443,010
Muskrat	26.7	420,648
Marten	16.6	262,301
Mink	9.6	151,535
River Otter	4.3	68,393
Lynx	2.4	38,157
Bear	2.2	33,947
Raccoon	1.4	22,043
Deer	1.1	16,992
Wolf	1.0	16,318
Fox	0.9	14,440
Fisher	0.9	14,781
Badger	0.3	4,648
Wolverine	0.2	3,419
Sea Otter	0.2	3,033
Rabbit	0.1	1,420
Hair Seal	0.1	1,367
Fur Seal	---	21
Other	4.6	---
Totals	100.0	1,578,340

N.B. -- used for figures below .1%

Company became more entrenched in the region and the number of collection points increased, so too did the diversity of species which were harvested. In 1825 the traditional furs were traded: bears -- black, brown, and grizzly, beaver pelts, coating and castoreum, fishers, foxes, lynx, marten, mink, muskrat, land otters and wolverines, totalling 16,708 pelts. The next year the total number of pelts more than doubled to 35,384, and it remained between 38,000 and 41,000 pelts annually until 1831. During this early period there was not a great difference between the above list and the forms of wildlife sought elsewhere in the

Company's operations. The expansion of the range of the trade was slow but steady. The entries for the 1826 Outfit show the first recorded collection of sea otters by the Company. In 1827 wolf pelts began to be accepted at company posts and in 1828 the first recorded purchase of isinglass was made.

The 1830's saw trade increase both in volume and in forms of wildlife, as the now securely established Company began to regularize its operations. In 1831 the total number of pelts collected was 56,732, two years later it was 79,530, and by 1839 the annual harvest was 88,740 pelts and skins. The forms of wildlife harvested also increased during this period. In 1830 badger and raccoon pelts became standard items, and by 1831 isinglass had become an annual part of the trade. They harvested fur seals in 1833, but like the hair seal, the fur seal did not become a regular feature of the trade until 1847. The records of the Outfit of 1836 include the first commercial collection of deer hides, whale oil and even a small sample of 40 hoary marmot from Northern B.C.

In the 1840's the Company slowly developed a broader base of fur trade items. Deer hides were collected annually between 1841 and 1850 as well as whale by-products such as oil and bone. Rabbits were collected during the Outfit of 1846 which may have been a high cycle year in their population demographics. In 1847 a large predator began to appear in the returns under the heading panther, more properly known as the cougar. It was also during this period that the domesticated animals of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company such as sheep, goats, horned cattle and oxen, began to appear as entries in the fur returns.

In 1840 the number of pelts collected decreased to 56,580. The annual size of the trade recovered slowly, reaching 78,310 in 1843, dipping again to 57,881 in

1844 and increasing rapidly to 90,532 pelts in 1847, five times the volume of the trade in 1825. From 1849 to 1851 the trade was constant at approximately 55,000 pelts taken annually.

Looking over the returns for the time period as a whole, one gains a sense of the Company initially seeking out peltry which had an already established market, then adding to this other saleable but less common and lower valued pelts, such as badger and raccoon. Species other than beaver, marten and muskrat accounted for 8% of the total volume of furs in 1825, 18.5% in 1830, 17.8% in 1835, 35.3% in 1840, 44.4% by 1845 and 48.5% in 1849. On becoming more efficient at the collection process the Company branched out into the regional land and marine specialties of the region and in the later period included the less valuable smaller pelts such as squirrel and rabbit. This growing diversification is also apparent in the addition of domesticated animals to the returns for the late 1840's.

While, as the preceding discussion has shown, there were general trends in the mixture of wildlife traded, there were also specific harvesting patterns related to individual species, reflecting the attitude of both the European and Native components of the fur trade. Table 1 can also serve as a crude proxy for Native trapping effort.[31] While a trap obviously cannot differentiate between species of

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31 A related area which is worthy of future attention is the examination of the relationship between social position within Native communities and the trapping of different species; were the smaller species such as martens and muskrats trapped close to campsites by the women or juvenile members of the group and distant traplines the preserve of adult males? Sylvia Van Kirk has identified a recognition of the women's prerogative over trapping and snaring certain small fur-bearers such as hares and martens among some of the plains peoples, in addition to the women's role in the dressing and preparing of furs. If this was also the case in the Pacific basin then a gender or family model may be used for interpreting Native supply and demand for trade goods, provided that a link between women and the high volume of small pelts can be established. But fur trade records such as the ones used to create Table 1 do not tell us anything about forms of wildlife which were used domestically or

animals, various factors can be manipulated to a degree by the trapper, such as the time of year and placement of the trap, the form of bait or scenting lure, and the type and size of trap.[32] Several species also have unique characteristics which placed constraints on and also gave the occasional advantage to the industry, such as volatile or stable population levels. As has been shown by the discussion of fox and bear some species had genetic characteristics which restricted the supply of pelts. Species such as the muskrat and lynx were wild cards in the marketplace because of the sudden and massive population explosions to which they were subject. The muskrat's cycle was exaggerated by water levels and the lynx's by the increase of its food source, the snowshoe rabbit. The muskrat's cycle had an even greater effect due to its suitability as a substitute for more expensive furs, including the beaver. The lynx was never as popular as a substitute fur and its rapid increases tended to flood the market destroying prices for cats in general. In the following some of these species-related characteristics are discussed.

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those which fur traders were not prepared to purchase. Van Kirk, Sylvia. "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870. Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, Ltd., 1980, pp. 71-72.

32 Although muskrat and beaver are both found in marshy areas, each is hunted with a different type of trap. The muskrat trap has serrated jaws, and like its prey, is quite small. It is usually set in the grass by the water's edge where there is visible evidence of occupation. A beaver trap kills in a different manner and is constructed to avoid damage to the pelt. A scent bait, concocted using castoreum from beaver scent glands, is smeared on a stick which protrudes above a few feet of water. The trap, which is smooth jawed, is anchored and when triggered, drags the beaver under where it drowns. By this method the submerged animal is also placed out of the reach of scavengers until collected. For an extensive examination of the technology and history of traps and their construction see the following: Gerstell, Richard. The Steel Trap in North America: The Illustrated Story of Its Design, Production, & Use With Furbearing & Predatory Animals, From Its Colorful Past to the Present Controversy. Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1985.

Forest and River: The Unstudied Harvest

This section discusses those species which receive little mention in histories of the fur trade. In the Columbia over half of the total number of animals collected were not beaver, but muskrat, marten, mink, and river otter, which together account for 57% of the harvest. Each is discussed, as well as some of the other species, which, while not numerically significant, did make up part of the diverse structure of the trade.

Table 1 shows that muskrat pelts were one of the most common furs collected, second only to the beaver. The muskrat (or as the Trade referred to it in private correspondence, The Rat), a seemingly insignificant marsh dweller which was sold in the marketplace as the musquash, had an amazing impact on the fur trade. Like the beaver, it is found in areas of shallow water where it feeds on roots and grasses. Unlike the beaver it is capable of several litters a year and dramatic fluctuations in population.[33] The fur of the muskrat is also used as an inexpensive substitute for the beaver's in the production of felt hats. More will be

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33 It appears that there is a relationship between the latitude of a muskrat population and the number of litters and the number of young within each litter. Banfield notes that muskrat in Louisiana may have 3-6 litters a year with an average of 2.4 young in each litter, while muskrat in northern Canada may have only two litters, but each averaging 7.1 young.

The reproduction cycle is also directly affected by fluctuations in the level of the marshlands in which it is found and so it also affects their survival rate during the winter when too shallow a pond can freeze. The ideal habitat should be deep enough to protect them from winter and shallow enough to support a wide variety of vegetation. As water levels can vary dramatically with annual weather patterns, so to can the muskrats population. Banfield. Mammals of Canada., pp. 198-199.

For a perspective on the Upper Missouri muskrat trade see: Wishart, David J. The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979, p. 36. For an in depth examination of the muskrat and its ecology see: Errington, Paul L. Muskrat Populations. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1963.

said on this topic in the discussion on markets. In part because of its reproductive cycle the muskrat functioned as a wild card in the fur industry, allowing for substitution and affecting prices according to its availability.

In the Columbia Department demographic peaks are detectable but they do not reflect a distinct cyclical action. Evidence of cyclical low periods was more readily observed in Figure 8. Lows occurred in 1830, 1840, 1849 and 1855. The production figures for 1825 (3,378 pelts) are questionable due to the reorganization that was taking place and the emphasis in the earlier period on the collection of the more valuable larger pelts. Muskrat figures are also generally low from 1854-1857 and the 1855 date may not be representative of a cyclical downturn, as it may have a non-biological origin. However the other dates bear a remarkable similarity to the much discussed 10 year cycle. The reason for the difficulty in determining peaks may rest in the fact that the region's weather conditions differ from those found east of the Rockies, as do the rivers and the timing of the freshets. Heavy snowfall or rapid springs may obscure and disrupt any upward movement in existing biological patterns. The observed major muskrat peaks occur in 1833-34, 1838-39, 1843, 1846, and 1852.

The marten is an arboreal member of the weasel family, often sold as American Sable. On the Pacific slope it is common to the Douglas Fir-Cedar-Hemlock forest, although it is now extinct in the region surrounding the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.[34] From 1825-1857 a total of 406,187 marten pelts were collected by the Hudson's Bay Company in the Columbia Department. In Figure 8, the graph reveals low cycles in the harvest in 1830, 1840, and 1850. Highs occurred in 1827, 1838, 1847, and 1854. Although more martens were taken

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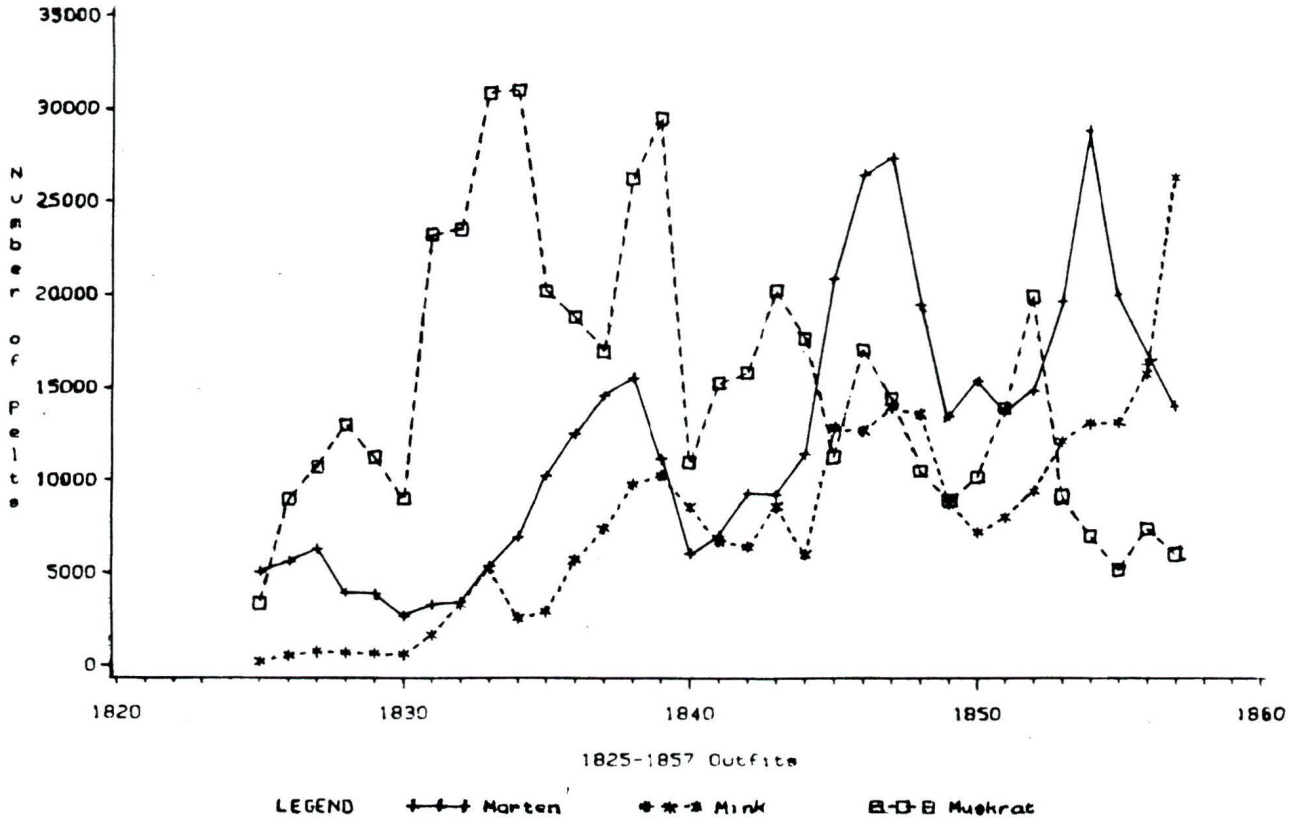
[34] Banfield, Mammals of Canada., p. 317.

in 1825 than mink or muskrat it remained secondary to muskrat until two years after the collapse of the beaver hat market in 1843. Annual marten production exceeded the figures for muskrat and for mink for every year from 1845-1857 with the exceptions of 1851 where it almost equalled muskrat production, 1852 where it was less than the total number of muskrats, and 1857 when mink production surpassed both muskrat and marten.

The mink, now a highly valued commercial animal, was the fourth most common pelt harvested. It is the major predator of the muskrat and it was observed that there appeared to be a related increase in the number of mink taken that followed somewhat behind the increases in muskrat. However the mink is not wholly dependent on the muskrat as a food source.

No Outfit took more than 800 mink until 1831 when 1,643 pelts were listed. After this date the figure of 3,000-10,000 pelts annually was common. Figure 8 shows that by 1845 the number of mink (12,914) surpassed the number of muskrat taken (11,352) for the first time. Although the number of mink dropped to half that of the muskrat for 2 of the following years, it was approximately equal for 2 years and greater than the muskrat for 6 years, including the last 5 years (1853-1857) of this period. This evidence of a shift in the quantity of mink harvested relative to the muskrat may be a Native response to the Company's demand for the newly popular furs, rather than the older products of beaver and muskrat or it may be a reflection of some other change, either in the marketplace or in the ecology. However, it is not a direct reflection of the harvesting of new hinterlands because it occurs after the initial opening of the northwest coast to Company traders in the late 1830's.



Source: A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C.

Figure 8: Annual Harvest of Muskrat, Marten, and Mink

The land or river otter was the fifth most common mammal harvested. It was also viewed by the trade as one of the more prized pelts. In the earlier reference to Simpson's summation of the 1823 Columbia returns it should be noted that he lumped the land otter totals with the beaver totals in his appraisal of the district's success. Richardson states that otter fur is very similar to the 'wool' obtained from the beaver, "having the same general colours...nearly of the same fineness...but being shorter, and not so well adapted for making felt, its price fluctuates more with fashion."[35]

Land otter production went from 267 in 1825 to 1,470 the following year, over 2,166 by 1829, 3,916 by 1833 and passed 4,000 in 1843 and 1845. Under 3,000 were harvested in the 1847-1857 Outfits, with less than 2,000 being collected from 1853 onwards.

The otter played a slightly different role in the Columbia Department than in other H.B.Co. departments because of its use as the yearly rental payment of the Alaskan Panhandle from the Russian American Company (R.A.C.). It was one of three items that illustrate the role of corporate diplomacy in the harvesting of wildlife, the other two being the sea otter and the walrus. These forms of wildlife were exchanged between the two companies in order to protect their holdings from free-lance American traders. Each recognized the other Company's specialization through the Hamburg Agreement[36] which leased the Alaskan Panhandle to the Hudson's Bay Company, and required the Hudson's Bay Company to exchange any sea otters traded in the region to the R.A.C. in exchange for

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35 Richardson, Fauna Boreali-Americana., p.58.

36 Which took effect 1 June 1840 and was supplemented by further negotiations in 1842.

beaver. The London Committee was scrupulous in its demands that both the letter and the spirit of this agreement by adhered to by its staff.

The actual payment for the lease was to be made in river otter skins. Before the Hamburg Agreement the export of the otters increased steadily as a proportion of the Company's total river otter exports, 20% in 1834, 30% in 1838, and almost 40% of total river otter production in 1839. But after the agreement, the numbers declined as they were diverted to pay the lease of 2,000 Columbia river otters and an additional sale of 3,000 Northern Department otters, which could be traded at the Hudson's Bay Company's option. Total otter exports from North America declined from 4-6,000 skins annually from 1840-47, roughly the amount of the lease. It is clear that the H.B.Co. believed it had the best of the bargain, despite the costs of moving skins through the Rockies and on to delivery at Sitka, and despite the delays caused by taking payment for the additional 3,000 skins in bills on St. Petersburg. An estimate of the true cost of the Alaskan Panhandle for one year is £150.[37] It appears the lease continued to be paid in otters until 1856. The R.A.C. also felt it had benefited, because unlike the Hudson's Bay Company, they had access to the China market for otters at Kiachta, on the northern border.

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37 From 1827-37 the average price for a river otter was 18/11, less 1/5 for insurance and other charges from the Columbia Landing warehouse, leaving 17/6 as the average worth. The R.A.C. agreed to pay 23/- each, for a 5/6 profit on each to the H.B.Co. The additional 3,000 from the Northern Department had an average value of 26/5, which, less the same 1/5 charges, left an average value of 25/-. The R.A.C. agreed to pay 32/- each, leaving 7/- a skin profit. Although the Panhandle cost £1,750 (2,000 x 17/6) a year, the hidden profit on the Columbia otters was £550 (2,000 x 5/6) and £1,050 on the Northern Dept. otters (3,000 x 7/-),making the cost only £150. "Memorandum", F.29/2, fo. 182, Series I, H.B.C.A.

Sea horse teeth, or walrus tusks, were exported to London on behalf of the R.A.C. as a show of goodwill, and also because R.A.C. freight from Europe appeared a possible method of under-writing transportation costs for the Department. The weight of the tusks made shipment by the R.A.C. overland through Siberia very expensive. As a result they were stockpiled and shipped by sea direct to St. Petersburg every 3-4 years. Simpson noted that this massive importation "naturally gluts the Russian market".[38] Half a ton of tusks was sent to London onboard a H.B.Co. vessel in 1841 as well as samples of sea lion and walrus hides. The R.A.C. was prepared to supply 5,000 to 6,000 hides annually if a market could be developed. The experiment was unsuccessful, although from 1846-1849 2,067 lbs. of walrus tusks were shipped from the North West to London.[39]

Passing comments should be made on a few of the remaining forms of wildlife and related by-products which have not been discussed. The badger is unique to one sub-district of the Columbia Department and so will be discussed in the next chapter as part of the regional characteristics of the Colvile sub-district. Little will be said about the raccoon other than the fact that it was not collected prior to 1830 and significant harvesting, between 700 and the 1847 high of 2,079, did not begin until 1835. The wolverine, a predator known to damage traplines was traded in quantities of less than 200 per Outfit until 1840 and the high was 383 pelts traded in 1851. The cat-like fisher had peak harvests in 1829, 1839, and 1848,

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38 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 30, fo. 19. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

39 The last major export from the other Hudson's Bay Company Departments was the 4,110 lbs. sent in 1835 from the Bay. This shipment accounts for 75% of all Bay exports of tusks from 1820-1849.

with the largest number (1,339) being taken during the 1839 Outfit. The average Outfit collected 566 fishers.

Figures for the lynx are slightly confused as McTaggart Cowan has pointed out, because they do not distinguish between the more southern bobcat, a generalist predator with alternate food sources, and the true lynx, a specialist predator whose numbers fluctuate in direct response to its prey, the snowshoe rabbit.[40] However, it should be noted that the composite totals for the two show peak harvests in 1829-1830, 1837-1840, and 1848-1850.

While this has only been a cursory sketch of the lesser known species which also made up the harvest, it serves to illustrate their individuality as forms of wildlife and why each represented a different set of demographic and commercial problems and opportunities for the fur trade. Some of these species received a great deal of attention, others were of little importance to the trade. Certain of the species, as in the case of those traded between the R.A.C. and the Hudson's Bay Company, became clearly divided property, and went to separate distinct markets, or like the walrus, were potential products in search of a market. The next section will examine one form of wildlife, a predator, which was perceived as a problem.

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40 Cowan, "Fur Cycles," B.C.H.Q., p. 22.

Predators and the Fur Trade: The Wolf

The Hudson's Bay Company had a decided attitude towards predators such as wolves; they were destructive to the concern and were dealt with accordingly. The attitude of both Simpson and the Governor and Committee in London are clearly documented, and in the case of this particular species, could be taken to reflect the consensus of most senior level members of the fur trade. In 1822 the Governor and Committee instructed Simpson that wolves were to be hunted in the summer and that their hides were to be prepared for use as leather:

> one or two thousand may be sent for trial. If the wolves are not destroyed they will either kill or drive away the Buffalo; it is therefore desirable to destroy them, if the skins will pay for the expenses it will also be the means of employing the Indians of the plains.[41]

In 1833, in response to Simpson's report of wolves preying on the cattle of the Red River Colony, the Governor and Committee went further, issuing the following instructions concerning the controlling of wolves around the Colony:

> sending re your request 'two ounces of Strychnine' which is considered the most powerful agent for destroying wild animals (it is used in the East Indies for killing Tigers and Leopards)...three or four grains are a sufficient dose for a full grown beast; the best way to apply it is to make an incision in a piece of flesh in which the Strychnine should be inserted, and to place the bait in situations that the animals frequent.[42]

These instructions were for the purpose of protecting domestic cattle, but they illustrate that from the Company's perspective wolves were clearly regarded as a threat to the Company's operations. However the Columbia, especially with its lack of bison, was a different matter than the plains. The issue was therefore less

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41 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 27 February, 1822, para. 48. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

42 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 7 June, 1833, Para 40. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

of an immediate threat to the concern. The first occurrence of wolves in the returns is for Outfit 1827 when 5 wolves were traded. By 1830 returns had climbed to 69 wolf pelts. But in 1831, as the Company became capable of exercising a degree of control over the hinterland through its expanding network of posts, there was a dramatic increase to 468 wolf pelts. In 1839 at McLoughlin's request poison was sent out for the use of the Puget Sound Agricultural Company farms and for general sale to settlers:

> We send by this conveyance the mercurial or Sheep's Ointment required, and a small quantity of Strychnine made up in dozes for the destruction of Wolves; it should be inserted in pieces of raw meat placed in such situations that the shepherd's dogs may not have access to them, and the natives should be encouraged by high prices for the skins to destroy wolves at all seasons[43]

The Columbia District wolf kills continued to increase, reaching a high of 1,653 pelts in 1847 and falling off in numbers through the 1850's, to as low as 76 wolves in 1853.

Beaver Pelts and the Concept of Sustained-Yield

Of all the species harvested, the beaver was without doubt the main focus of the trade.[44] The search for new sources of beaver pelts was the economic engine which drove the trade's expansion and the exploration, competition for, and

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43 H.B.C.A., P.S.A.C. Letter Book, p. 13, Pelly, Colvile, & Simpson to McLoughlin, London, December 31, 1839, cited in The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-1844. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943. p. 164n.

44 As a traditional staple the beaver has several unusual characteristics. It has a very fixed concept of territory. Its ecological impact draws attention to its presence making the beaver particularly easy to locate in the winter when its coat has the greatest value. Unlike the lynx or the marten it seldom migrates, and concepts of individual Native ownership of beaver lodges may pre-date trapline ownership in the modern sense.

management of beaver stocks was always foremost in the shaping of the managerial policy of the Hudson's Bay Company. The fur trade had developed an efficient system of harvesting the animal and the 1820's expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company into the Columbia Department was part of a drive to alleviate the depleted stocks east of the Rockies through the reliance on new sources for the market. Arthur Ray has pointed to the Hudson's Bay Company's growing concern over the depletion of the resources under their jurisdiction during the first half of the nineteenth century, as, in part an inheritance from a period of intensely abusive over-harvesting caused by pre-merger competition.[45] He observed in the Company's management of the Northern Department an early attempt at implementing the concept of sustained yield. Did the Company attempt to introduce this concept to the Columbia Department? One statistical method by which this can be tested is to examine the relationship between the harvesting of mature and immature animals. Differentiating between adult and young beaver is a difficult matter. The bookkeeping system only discriminates between large and small beaver, based on a measuring hoop of an arbitrary size through which the stretched skin will or will not pass. The possibility that the size difference may be due to differences between the sexes is unlikely, as there is almost no distinction in size between the sexes.[46] But it does seem defensible to use the

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45 Ray, Arthur J. "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," Journal of Historical Geography, 1, 1(1975): 49- 68.

46 Size difference between the sexes of the beaver are negligible. In theory the female is the smaller of the two but in practise this is difficult to distinguish. In terms of size Banfield gives the following male/female proportions:

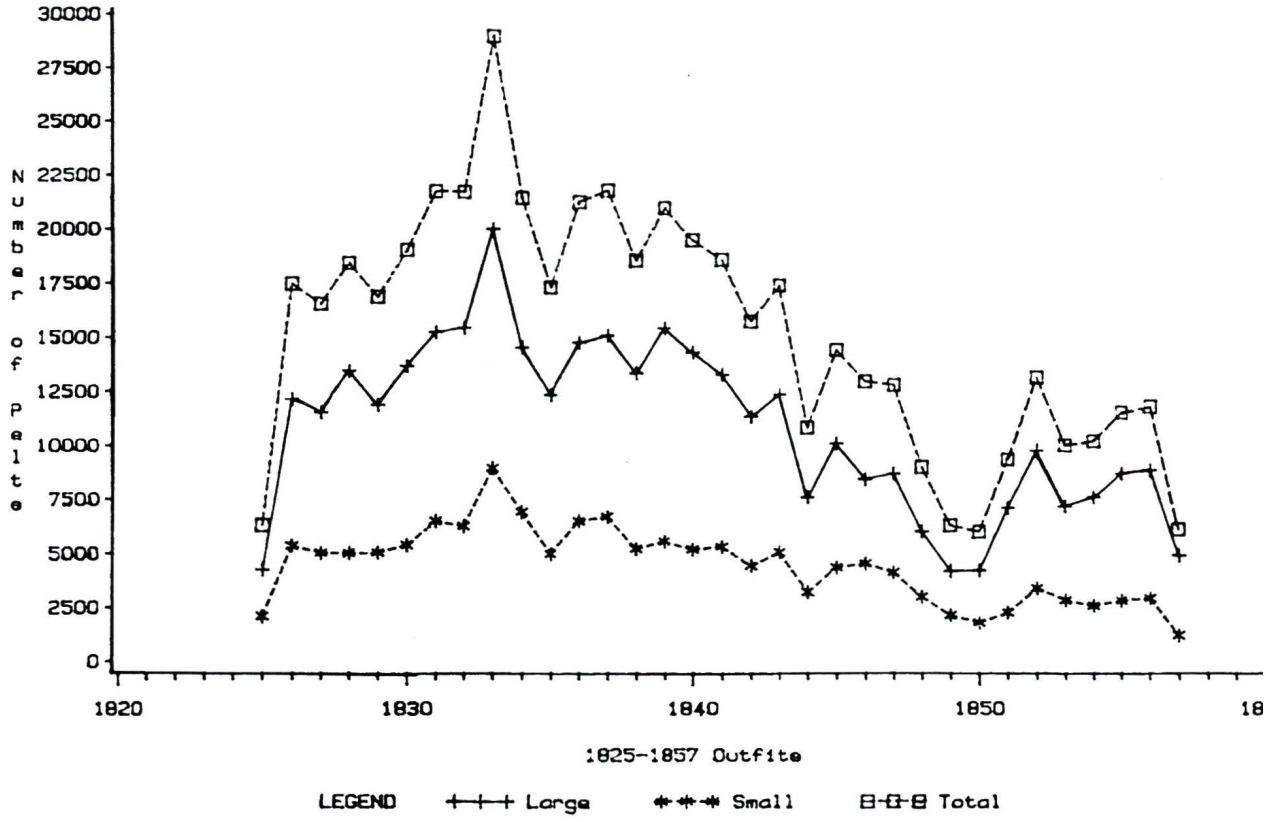
Length	Total	Tail	Hind Foot	
Male	98-113	38-53	16-19	(cm.)
Female	95-114	40-51	15-19	(cm.)

data as a proxy for the overall maturity of the beaver population. If the beaver population of the Columbia District is being subjected to short run over-harvesting, with the term short-run referring to the reproduction cycle of the animal, then this should be evident in a change in the proportion of small to large beavers. If this change is sufficient there will be a decline in the population, proxied by the harvest, because of an insufficient number of mature beaver for the maintenance of the old population level. Long run over-harvesting would be reflected in, for example, a steady decline in numbers without a change in the size ratios. This chapter will assume that the collection process is homogeneous within the district, as regional variation in the collection process will be examined in the following chapter. The results of the ratio analysis are presented by the graph in Figure 8.

The most apparent pattern revealed is the very constant ratio between the large and small beaver. Expressed as a percentage of the total beaver harvested each year, the larger pelts account for 71% on average. They were never less than 65% of the harvest and only in 1857 did they account for more than 75%, being 80% in that one year. Banfield puts the average litter size of the beaver at 3.9, with the young reaching sexual maturity by their second winter and reaching full size the following winter.[47] This rapid growth and the larger litter size may account for the apparently stable harvest in comparison with the sea otter.

For commercial purposes they are not distinguishable. Still another reason for the difficulty in sexing beaver is the fact that in both sexes their intestinal, urinary and reproductive systems are connected to a common cloaca or chamber. More confusion is due to the castor glands located under the tails of both sexes. Banfield, Mammals of Canada, pp.160-161.

47 Banfield. Mammals of Canada., p. 161.



Source: A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C.

Figure 9: Annual Harvest of Beaver

In terms of gross numbers, from its reorganization the Company moved rapidly towards the 20,000 beaver pelts a year which Simpson hoped the Department would provide, passing that mark in 1831 and reaching a high of 28,949 pelts in 1833. But on average beaver production hovered between 18,000-21,000 until 1844 when it dropped to 10,812 pelts. Production rallied for two or three years and then dipped again, to 5,991 in 1850. Columbia District beaver production appears to fall into two main periods, 1826-1843, the years of the Simpson/McLoughlin management, and the declining years after 1844. Interestingly, this division seems to occur prior to the Oregon Boundary settlement which is regarded as a serious setback to the Hudson's Bay Company operations in the region.

To recapitulate, the possible causes for the 1844 decline may be long term over-harvesting, or a change in the market structure which may have directly or indirectly influenced either the trapping of beaver or the price offered for this Native trade good. Short run over-harvesting was not demonstrated in the size ratio, the visibly close relationship between the two sizes makes it clear that this was a very stable population. A third possibility may be a cause outside the control of the European/Native components of the trade, such as an outbreak of a disease to which beaver are susceptible -- rabies or tularaemia -- but no evidence for this has been encountered.

The possibility does remain that the region experienced a less noticeable long run over-harvesting, certainly not as drastic as that experienced in the prairies during the days of competition with the North West Company, but nevertheless an erosion. However this is in part argued against by the stability of the 1826-1843 harvests. A more likely reason is the evidence of an 1843 letter cited by Ray:

> From an extrodinary break of fashion, the article [beaver pelts]...has of late fallen much into disuse in hat making, silk hats being principally worn at present, the consequence is that its value has greatly decreased in the market...[48]

The reasons for the deterioration will be examined further in the following chapters which will look at the sub-districts and experiments with different forms of posts, managerial policy, and the influence of the European marketplace.

Other Wildlife By-Products

There are several items which are commercial by-products of wildlife. The production of isinglass, technically a by-product of the fishery industry, appears in the fur trade returns. It was used as a commercial gelatin in the clarification of wine and beer, in the production of jellies and jams, and several other lesser uses.[49] 1828 production was only 3 lbs. and 14-90 lbs. were produced annually from 1831-1837. From 1838-1857 production increased fairly steadily to 689 lbs. in the last year. Beaver pelts which have been made into garments and worn for several seasons had a special market as 'coating', because this processing removed the rough outer guard hairs which protected the inner down or wool.[50] This form

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48 Simpson, Letters Inward, Hudson's Bay House, 1st April 1843, P.A.C., H.B.C., D.5/8, cited in Ray,"Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company," Journal of Historical Geography, p. 67.

49 "Isinglass", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. v. XIV, p. 872. This encyclopedia is extremely useful, both as a cultural document of the British colonial world and as a reference source on the industry and commerce of the nineteenth century. It was the last of its kind, as World War I closed the door on this form of collected scholarship. In many ways it echoes what Mel Hurtig has attempted to do for Canadian culture.

50 Coat beaver was also known as castor gras. For a full discussion of the grades of beaver see the following: Innis, Harold Adams. The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, revised 1956. pp. 64-68. And: Rich, E.E. "Russia and the

of beaver was measured by weight, not size. It was chiefly in demand by hatters in the eighteenth century and by the 1820's was of minor importance to the trade, probably because the needed volume could not be supplied in this form. In 1825 the highest amount of coating was traded, 870 lbs. The 1829 Outfit collected 823 lbs. but by 1835 less than 250 lbs. was collected annually, falling to below 200 lbs. in 1842 and less than a 100 lbs. a year after 1847. It is probable that the trade value of beaver marked the end of its use as clothing among the Native peoples of the Columbia Department.

Another by-product of beaver trade was castoreum. The castor glands of both the male and female beaver were collected and traded by weight. Castoreum was used as a scent lure for beaver traps, and exported for the preparation of medicines, and for use in the perfume industry.[51] There was no unusual correspondence between the number of beaver taken and the number of pounds of castoreum traded, so there is little evidence that native trappers became more aware of the importance of the product or that collection of it changed. The peak years of mature beaver harvests, 1833 and 1834, are also the years of peak castoreum returns, castoreum being proportionate to 3.8 and 5% of the total number of large beaver trapped.[52]

Colonial Fur Trade," Economic History Review, Second Series, VII (1954 55), p. 313.

51 Wells, Robin F. "Castoreum and Steel Traps in Eastern North America," American Anthropologist, V.74, No.3, (June 1972): 479-483. "Castoreum," The Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly, Vol.8, No. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 1-5.

52 An unexplored market trend is the rise in price for castoreum in the early 1850's, while demand for beaver pelts continued to be low. Whether this influenced trade at the post is unknown.

Conclusion

In this chapter an analysis of the wildlife resources the Hudson's Bay Company acquired from 1825-1849 has illustrated the complexity of the trade. Twenty major forms of wildlife were harvested in the Department, as well as a range of by-products and domesticated animals. Within many of these forms there were further sub-divisions, based on the colour of the coat or the maturity of the animal. Many of these animals required different methods of trapping and this broad spectrum of wildlife products greatly increased the complexity of the business. It has been demonstrated that the Hudson's Bay Company began its operations in the district by trading for a narrow range of pelts, but that in the search for products samples were always being acquired. At the same time the Company expressed little interest in examining fully the nature of the animals which provided some of their products, and they refuted the suggestions of both Natives and European scientists, if the suggestions might in any way damage the 'identity' of an established product. As the operations expanded in the 1830's the scope of the harvest increased both in volume and in diversity. In the 1840's this diversification continued. It is also clear that in 1843, prior to the loss of the Oregon Territory, the trade, especially in beaver and muskrat, was subject to a structural change, due partially to biological causes and partially to market causes as further discussion will show. In the years after 1843 a different group of pelts became prominent, the mink and marten. How this change took place reveals much about the fragility of this system of order on which the Company based its future.

Although the Company dealt in wildlife it did so very much in the manner of any other resource industry -- it was business-like in the appraisal of its products. Frequently the Company perceived several products within the colour variations of one type of mammal. The disagreement between fur traders, biologists such as John Richardson and the Native peoples over the relationships between these 'products' reflects this market appraisal. There is evidence that the Company's business was subject to naturally occurring fluctuations in several forms of wildlife and that at least outside of the Department it was engaged in predator control. In the case of the beaver the Company was harvesting a product with which it was intimately familiar, and for the Department as a whole there is evidence that until 1843 it was, contrary to common belief, a highly managed species, with a limited and consistent proportion of immature animals harvested.

The preceding have been observations based in part on a statistical analysis of Company records. There has been no attempt to identify regional specialization of posts as harvesting centres nor has there been any examination of the structural expansion which made these increasingly larger and diversified annual harvests possible. The next chapter examines these themes within the organization of the Columbia Department.

Chapter 3

THE POST IN BIOECONOMIC STRATEGY: COLLECTING THE HARVEST

Introduction

In the Columbia Department the Hudson's Bay Company experimented with a wide variety of posts, in order to fulfil a number of goals, only one of which was the harvesting of wildlife. The post was a specialized tool, combining a response to local conditions on one hand with the extension of corporate policy on the other. Some posts were primary harvest centres for wildlife, others had a support function, either as administrative, transport related or a source for provisions. A few posts had a political role as symbols of the Company's presence or as counters in international diplomatic negotiations, with the Americans with whom the Columbia was jointly shared[1], or with the Russians, who claimed the coast of North America as far south as the 51st parallel under the Ukase of 1821.

This chapter examines the role of the posts of the Columbia Department as extensions of the Hudson's Bay Company's business strategy. After highlighting the general characteristics of the posts that made up this division of the Company's fur trade operations several themes are discussed. The Columbia

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[1] This was agreed to by the convention of 1818 after Britain refused to agree to the extension of the 49th parallel as a border beyond the Rocky Mountains. This issue was finally resolved, against the wishes of the Hudson's Bay Company who argued that the Columbia River should serve as the western-most boundary, by the 1846 Oregon Boundary settlement, which extended the border along the 49th parallel.

presented the Company with several unusual problems in establishing their business. How the Company dealt with their initial lack of status and unfamiliarity with the region reveals some of the limitations of both the post as an institution and of the Company's power within the trade. Much of the post's success depended on its symbolic appearance which contrasts sharply with the reality of the Company's dependence on the goodwill of Native peoples. Frontier posts also had a defensive role as an economic perimeter, protecting the Company's interior trade through the use of competition tariffs for furs. This frontier/interior dual tariff policy created conflict within the Company's network of posts and economic opportunities for Native traders. The Company came in competition with Native traders, not for the furs, but for the division of profit attached to them. The resolution of this conflict was Simpson's policy of 'retrenchment', imposing an orderly system of posts. The chapter will also draw attention to the less dramatic uncontroversial production centres, posts whose ability to produce large quantities of furs on a regular basis underwrote the costs of the higher profile centres.

The Columbia Department as a Division of the H.B.Co.

From 1820-1849 the Columbia Department exports of furs accounted for 8% of the 18.5 million pelts and hides exported from North America by the Hudson's Bay Company.[2] Table 2 shows the comparative volume of Columbia trade. The

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[2] This is based on a statistical examination of fur importation handbills. The error between the estimated shipments and the returns in Douglas's ledger for each Outfit averaged 4% of the annual shipments from 1825-1849. Returns were subject to accounting errors, damage while in transit, or late returns from one post might be shipped with those of the following year. Despite these problems, this was the information upon which the fur industry in Europe functioned. The statistics were compiled from a data base constructed using: Fur Trade Importation Book, 1799-1912., A.53/1, Series I, H.B.C.A.

Table 2: Total H.B.Co. Exports of Skins and Pelts, 1825-1849

Year	Columbia	%	Total Exports
1825	27,275	5.1	396,534
1826	34,205	5.9	580,950
1827	32,986	5.0	666,255
1828	39,688	3.8	1,035,065
1829	41,119	3.2	1,282,047
1830	37,059	4.8	775,187
1831	32,502	3.9	826,876
1832	45,255	8.1	558,228
1833	** ***	*.*	610,353
1834	73,924	7.8	943,445
1835	67,057	5.1	1,323,164
1836	57,960	6.9	840,945
1837	55,416	8.6	640,941
1838	72,904	16.7	437,601
1839	78,902	9.6	818,540
1840	77,550	18.8	413,047
1841	60,950	19.5	312,888
1842	59,785	8.3	722,639
1843	** ***	*.*	666,269
1844	69,785	15.2	458,732
1845	59,222	11.2	526,967
1846	95,066	14.7	646,514
1847	80,253	14.8	543,205
1848	97,915	18.6	527,263
1849	74,760	17.5	427,620

N.B. ** = missing information

Source: Fur Importation Lists, A.53/1, H.B.C.A.

growth in volume reflects the coastal expansion of posts in the 1830's.[3] By 1849 the Columbia Department was producing just under 20% of all H.B.Co. furs, but this increase is as much due to a decline in production East of the Rockies as it is

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[3] The high level of exports for 1828-29 and 1835 are the result of the muskrats' North American population cycle.

due to expansion on the West side. Columbia production was fairly stable from 1834 onwards.[4] The Columbia species mix exhibited some change over time. Columbia beaver production was fairly stable, from 17-20,000 pelts a year, while the Northern Department underwent a general decline in production. Marten returns from the Columbia increased rapidly after 1846. In the next three years 44% of all the martens harvested in the Columbia from 1825-1849 were taken. This compares with less than 21% for the Northern Department during the same years. This increased harvest of Columbia marten points towards a rapid response to market influence by Native trappers.[5] Muskrat returns show massive increases during 1828-29 and 1834-36, with over 2 million pelts traded during each peak. Columbia, however, only supplied 3% of the total exports of muskrat.

About 53% of the Columbia fur returns came from only three areas: New Caledonia, Fort Colvile and Fort Simpson.[6] In Table 3 the posts are ranked according to the total volume of furs received at each during their operations. (A map, Figure 10, showing the posts and the major river systems has been provided

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4 The Columbia produced 83% of the raccoons exported to Europe, 37% of the beaver coating, beaver 28%, walrus tusks 27%, mink 24%, bear 23%, badger 19%, castoreum 17%, river otter 14%, fisher 12%, silver fox 11%, cross fox 11%, marten 10%, wolverine 9%, wolf 9%, isinglass 8%, red fox 6%, lynx 5%, and muskrat 3%.

5 The harvest of bears also shows an increase as a result of the expansion into the northern coast. In 1836 24% of all bears exported came from the Columbia Department, in 1842 41%, 1846 57%, and in 1848 49%. Production in the other Company Departments appears to have been stable throughout the 1830's and 1840's, so it is doubtful whether price changes due to increased demand for bear skins for military uniforms during the 1840's was the cause of this. This, like the relationship between beaver coating and initial contact, may be illustrative of a 'first wave' of harvesting, before the ratio of hunter to hunted population stabilizes, or the species declines.

6 The New Caledonia returns are actually a composite of the returns of several posts, which were administered as a unit.

Table 3: Fur Production of the Columbia Department, 1825-1849

Post	Quantity	% of Total
New Caledonia	383,828	24.3
Fort Colvile	280,846	17.8
Fort Simpson	173,452	11.0
Thompson River	119,548	7.6
Fort Langley	109,389	6.9
Steamer Beaver	98,149	6.2
Fort Vancouver	94,102	6.0
Fort Nez Perces	66,642	4.2
Snake River Party	64,870	4.1
Fort Stikine	53,726	3.4
Fort McLoughlin	34,856	2.2
Fort Nisqually	29,143	1.8
Fort Victoria	28,191	1.8
California Est.	18,117	1.1
Fort Durham	13,915	0.9
South Trapping Party	9,186	0.6
Nanaimo Establishment	2,604	0.1
Schooner Cadboro	380	0.1
Total Production	1,578,340	100.0

Source: Fur Returns Ledger, A/B/20/3V, P.A.B.C.

to supplement the discussions.) Interestingly, the two posts most discussed in traditional political histories of the Columbia Department, Fort Vancouver and the Snake River trapping expedition, together account for only 10.1% of the furs collected. Their importance is clearly not as major collection centres. In fact, both Fort Langley and Thompson's River (Kamloops) accounted for a higher number of furs than Fort Vancouver and the Snake River expedition combined.

The posts of the Columbia River system generated 45% of the furs in 1830, but by 1835 this had dropped to 30% of the Department's returns. The interior

Figure 10: Posts and Routes of the Columbia Department, 1825-1849

posts of Kamloops and New Caledonia were remarkably consistent, producing a steady third of the Department's production. The real area of growth was in the posts constructed along the north coast. From 1835 onwards these posts, which include the steam vessel Beaver, became increasingly important. The north coast was strong in the species that market demand shifted to after the collapse of beaver sales, unlike the posts of the Columbia river basin, where beaver and muskrat had accounted for 75% of their production. The Columbia basin was never strong in these 'new furs', marten, mink and lynx accounted for only 7% of the composite species mix from those posts.

The Post as a Symbolic Incursion

The first step in setting up a network or a single post was to locate a marketable resource, either as part of the ecology of the area or as an item in transit which the post could intercept. The posts of New Caledonia were examples of posts set up as harvest centres, while Thompson's River was a post which touched on several regions and attempted to intercept furs going to the coast. Once the Company had identified a potential source the next step was to locate a labour source, a group of Native peoples willing to provide the labour necessary for trapping or harvesting the products of an ecological zone in exchange for trade goods. In the case of the Chilcotin, the Native people refused to become involved with the labour process, they "opted out of the fur trade", as Robin Fisher describes it. [7] Often the Native peoples previous utilization of furs meant that both the problem of locating the source of furs, and an agreeable

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[7] Fisher, Robin. Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977, p.35.

labour source were solved at the same time.

The Hudson's Bay Company was a late entry into the commercial world of the Pacific coast. The Native people had been engaged in the fur trade for at least half a century prior to the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Company found itself dealing with Natives unlike any they had encountered before, engaged in complex societies with unclear political connections and with a solid understanding of commerce and the benefits of competitive markets. The Company was made constantly aware that its presence was only tolerated, and that it was not yet accepted as part of coastal society.

In 1825 the depot for the fur trade of the Columbia was moved from Fort George, at the mouth of the Columbia, to the new post of Fort Vancouver, 75 miles up river. One reason for the move was to save face in the event that the Americans re-occupied the post, which had been returned to them through diplomatic negotiations. The Company realized the importance with which the changing ownership of Fort George would be viewed by the Native peoples of the region and abandoned it to decay rather than risk being seen as having been ejected by the arrival of Americans.[8]

The Company had a number of problems in getting the coastal tribes involved in trapping. At first, trading and trapping parties were often used to influence the Natives and to encourage the systematic collection of furs among the fishing

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[8] George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 March 1825, Para. 51. D.4/88, Series I, H.B.C.A. However, as late as 1841 the Company was still operating Fort George with a small staff of six, as well as a four man post on the Umpqua river, because the Company was unwilling to totally abandon their strategic locations. George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 43, fo. 26. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

tribes who traded and hunted only as a supplement to their main activity.[9] But the interest of the coastal tribes was not with trapping, but with trading. In the same year that the example of trapping parties were being used reports of nearby American maritime fur traders caused local villages to stockpile furs in order to obtain higher prices, causing a decline in returns even before the actual appearance of the vessel.[10] The Company's defence against maritime competition was to undersell immediately. If the Company learned American traders were nearby before the Native people did, they would send runners and small trading parties from village to village to gather as many furs as possible to prevent the stockpiling and to give the impression that the region was poor in furs. This was done in 1830 when two American vessels, the Owhyhee and Convoy, were trading on the coast and in the Columbia River:

> They have brought the prices down so low that the Trade cannot yield any profit, and we have been under the necessity of following their example otherwise every skin would pass us. . . we are enabled to send parties in all directions to collect skins at the Indian Villages & camps instead of waiting until they are brought into the open market where our opponents would have as good a chance as Our selves.[11]

The move to Fort Vancouver was not without incident, which illustrated another problem. Warfare took place on the lower Columbia between the leader of the Chinook tribe and his son-in-law, halting the movement of furs inland.[12]

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9 George Simpson to John McLoughlin, 9 July 1827, Para. 31. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

10 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 July 1827, Para. 6. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

11 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 26 August 1830, Para. 22, fo. 13. D.4/97, Series I, H.B.C.A.

12 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 20 August 1826, Para. 6. D.4/89, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The cause of the dispute was the shift in power the move caused among the tribes along the river.[13] The incident illustrates the continual problem the Company had with the 'homeguard' system of Native communities -- a group of Natives who settled around the post, providing protection, labour, and assisting in the post's success as a collection centre for furs, in return for increased economic and political status. This proved to be a liability as the trade patterns that a post sought to establish often came into conflict with strong pre-existing concepts of territory and political power, conflicts in which the new post lacked the cultural, economic and military power to dictate or arbitrate. Simpson set a policy designed to avoid 'homeguard' entanglements; "we must not appear to lean to either party, but observe a strict neutrality."[14] The spatial constraints of coastal river systems, population densities, and the diversity of the Native populations made the middleman trade an area of potential conflict in the Columbia fur trade.

The precarious position of the Company among the larger Native population tempered its actions, although there were attempts to garner political and military support from the Native population. The diplomatic basis of British occupation of the Oregon region was the joint-occupation convention signed with the United States in October of 1818 which was to last ten years and was extended until the boundary settlement of 1846. In 1827, a year before the initial expiry of the convention, the Committee asked Simpson for his opinion on entering into a defensive arrangement with the tribes of the Columbia[15], Simpson replied:

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13 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 July 1827, Para. 6. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

14 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 July 1827, Para. 6. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

15 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 12 March

> We do not think the natives would come into any defensive Treaty with us. . .as in the event of a war they are aware of the advantages they would derive from opposition, on the contrary they are most anxious that the Americans should come in to the country either as friends or as foes and we do not think it would be good policy to touch on the subject at all as that would unsettle their minds, lead to the formation of parties, induce them to lay up their skins in expectation of a more favourable market and to hold themselves more independent of us than they ever were. -- they know their own strength and power which they would not fail to make use of to our destruction if any lasting advantage was likely to arise to themselves.[16]

Neutrality was not always possible or wise. Fort Nez Perces, situated at the confluence of the Columbia and Snake Rivers was put there as a convenience for the Nez Perces, enemies of the Snake. Simpson described the Nez Perces as holding "the Key of the River as they possess and are Masters of the country from Okenagan down to the Chutes a distance little short of 300 miles by the course of the River."[17] The Company was always careful in its dealings with them as their goodwill was necessary to protect inland transportation, communications and to ensure the safe passage of the Snake Trapping Party.[18] The Nez Perces also provided the Company with about 250 horses annually. For all these reasons Simpson acknowledged that it would be necessary "to maintain a Post for their accommodation whither it pays or not".[19] When the tribe objected to the plans of

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1827, Para. 6. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

16 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 July 1827, Para. 6. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

17 Merk, Frederick. Fur Trade and Empire. George Simpson's Journal. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1968. p. 55.

18 Merk. Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 55-56

19 Part of Dispatch from George Simpson Esq., Governor of Rupert's Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London, March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947, p. 51.

the Company to move the post to the north side of the Columbia to strengthen their diplomatic case for making the river the boundary, the refusal of the tribe to cross the river, even if the Company provided a ferry for their horses, caused the Committee to abandon its plans.[20]

Other tribes also placed restrictions on the Company's method of operation. When hostilities broke out between the Chilcotin Tribe and the Natives at Fort Alexandria, George Simpson regretted that because of the Company's reliance on Alexandria as part of their transportation route the post could not be closed temporarily, as was the practise on the East side of the Rockies, "inconvenience . . . might be the most likely way of terminating these hostilities".[21] The Company was again at the mercy of vulnerable supply lines.

The role of the post was not always passive or dependant on the Native population. When the Company faced competitors who harvested the furs directly it employed its own parties, both as competition for a limited resource and as a symbolic protection of what it viewed as its territory. The very rapid evolution of the Snake Party as a mobile form of post shows how quickly the Company could adapt if it perceived a major threat to itself. This group of horse-mounted trappers was in constant use as the Company engaged in a rigorous extirpation of beaver and river otters, creating what has been commonly referred to as 'a fur

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20 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 1 September 1826. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p. 26. Also: Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 12 March 1827, Para. 7. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.; George Simpson to John McLoughlin, 9 July 1827, D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

21 George Simpson to William Connolly, 9 July 1827, Para. 4. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

desert', or a 'cordon sanitaire' to destroy any inducement to American trappers and traders. To the Company, all American traders were to be regarded as precursors of their government's colonization policy drawn by the economics of the wildlife resource, and as such discouraged.[22]

The Snake Party and others like it, such as the South Party (Buena Ventura Valley, California) and the Umpqua River Party, completely by-passed the native communities, moving directly into the harvesting of the resource because of the intense competition. The trapping parties of both nations quickly realized that an early arrival at the trapping grounds was critical to the spring hunt. Until 1824, Snake beaver were trapped from June through August, resulting in the harvesting of inferior summer pelts.[23] Starting in 1825 spring hunts were introduced, which, as well as collecting the more valuable winter coats, also moved the hunt into the reproduction cycle of the beaver, which mate in January and February and give birth between late April and the end of June.[24] The intensity of the harvesting was increased by the institution of a fall hunt and eventually by year-long trapping expeditions. These mounted expeditions were unusual in that they kept their returns with them as they travelled, with little ill effect on the quality.[25] When

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22 "The greatest and best protection we can have from opposition is keeping the country closely hunted as the first step that the American Government will take towards Colonization is through their Indian Traders and if the country becomes exhausted in Fur bearing animals they can have no inducement to proceed thither." George Simpson to John McLoughlin, 9 July 1827, Para. 6, D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

23 Peter Skene Ogden to the Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, 10 October 1826. Cited in Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 285.

24 Banfield, A.W.F. Mammals of Canada, p. 161.

25 McLoughlin observed that the Snake Party furs were: "in my opinion remarkably well dressed and in the highest state of preservation, which, when it is considered some of these Furs have been Carried on Horses backs through

the Snake Party was re-organized for this competition in 1825, Simpson stated that:

> If properly managed no question exists that it would yield handsome profits as we have convincing proof that the country is a rich preserve of Beaver and which for political reasons we should destroy as early as possible.[26]

The Snake and the South Parties began staying longer and longer in the field as a more efficient logistics system was worked out. The expeditions, particularly the Snake, were profitable, despite clashes with Natives, inclement weather, losses of horses and traps, and the occasional desertions of the Iroquois and Metis freemen who were employed by them:

> even under all the disadvantages and misfortunes that have befallen it, the profits are most respectable, it moreover does much good in over-running and destroying that extended country south of the Columbia which is the greatest temptation to our opponents.[27]

John McLoughlin also concurred, citing the Snake returns of 1822, 1823, and 1824 as the cheapest furs acquired in the Columbia.[28] The Company was aware of the political dangers of this intense competition and issued a reprimand when it appeared that Ogden had passed out of the area of joint-occupation as defined in

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the Country since last fall Winter & Summer". John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 5 August 1829, Para. 5. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p. 75.

26 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 March 1825, Para. 26, fo. 18. D.4/88, Series I, H.B.C.A.

27 George Simpson to John McLoughlin, 9 July 1827, Para. 33, D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

28 John McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, 6 July 1827. B.223/b/3, Series I, H.B.C.A., cited by Harold Innis in The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p. lxv.

the Convention of 1818 by crossing over the Rockies into American territory.[29] However, they were determined that the expeditions "be kept in constant and active employment, should they even do no more than clear expences."[30]

When Nathaniel J. Wyeth built Fort Hall in 1834 on the Snake River as a provisioning centre for the large numbers of independent American trappers in the region, the Company's response was a tactical shift to fixed post competition.[31] McLoughlin responded by building Fort Boise to intercept any of the Fort Nez Perces trade which Wyeth's post might drain off. After a series of local negotiations between McLoughlin and Wyeth, of which the Committee disapproved, Wyeth finally withdrew from the trade and the Hudson's Bay Company acquired Fort Hall in 1837. A decision was made to continue to operate both posts in order to discourage American trappers and they became listed as part of the Snake Party returns, staying in operation even after the Oregon Boundary settlement of 1846, despite a request from the Columbia Department's Board of Management for permission to abandon them in 1847.[32] In fact the post

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29 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 20 September 1826, Para. 3. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

30 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 28 October 1829, Para. 18. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

31 Some 300 men and at least three large St. Louis fur companies were in operation in this area in 1835. George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 10 June 1835, Para. 6, fos. 28-29. D.4/102, Series I, H.B.C.A.

32 James Douglas wrote to George Simpson in 1839 stating that while he would like to close one of the posts as an economy measure, he did not dare because of "a well found apprehension that the Americans would immediately occupy our deserted post." James Douglas to George Simpson, 5 March 1839, Para. 7, fo. 10. D.4/106, Series I, H.B.C.A. For the Committee's view on the position of the forts vis-a-vis the Boundary Settlement see: Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Peter Skene Ogden, James Douglas, & John Work, 22 September 1847, Para. 22. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

continued to operate until October 13, 1855, when employees were ordered out during an Indian war.[33] But by 1839 the peak competition with American trapping parties was over. Simpson noted that those trappers still in the area in 1841 were having difficulty in securing advances on goods from the merchants in St. Louis.[34] He characterized the post's primary purpose as maintaining a watch on American trapping parties and encouraging the shift of the Snake tribes from buffalo to fur hunting, claiming success in both areas.[35]

The analysis of the returns from 1826-1849 shows the Snake Party in a slightly different light than the interpretations which are based heavily on correspondence sources. The Snake, if judged by the frequency of references in correspondence, was a major source of furs. This is not as evident in the returns. The Snake Party, which included Forts Hall and Boise, continued long after the 1820-40 period of 'ecological warfare'.[36] But the Snake Party only accounted for 10% of the Columbia's beaver returns from 1825-1849, despite its highly specialized purpose, beaver comprising 67% (43,113) of its returns, muskrat 16% (10,185), river otters 5% (3,346) and foxes 3% (1,755), with smaller proportions of other furs. While the deliberate over-trapping of beaver streams to deny them to competition did occur, the 43,000-odd skins is minor compared to the 132,000

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33 Ross, Frank E., "The Retreat of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Pacific North-West", Canadian Historical Review, v. XVIII (1937), p. 271.

34 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 10, fo. 5. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

35 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 10, fo. 5. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

36 It is listed in the returns until 1852 and was abandoned due to warfare in 1855-56 according to Ross, Frank E., "The Retreat of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Pacific North-West", Canadian Historical Review, v. XVIII (1937), p. 272.

taken within New Caledonia's somewhat controlled harvesting system. Fort Vancouver, Fort Colvile and Fort Simpson were all equally strong production centres and as already stated, the Snake obtained only 10% of the 443,010 pelts taken. The Snake Party was a symbol of the Company's presence, working to pay its costs.

While the Snake party has attracted a great deal of attention from fur trade historians, perhaps because of Peter Skene Ogden's biographical appeal, the survival of several of the Party's daily journals and the general topological information they provide, the statistical evidence shows that Fort Colvile was the central harvesting region in the Anglo-American fur trade struggle. Fort Colvile had two outlying posts under its jurisdiction: Coutenais and the Flat Head post, but the lack of water transportation to them was, in Simpson's words, "troublesome and expensive".[37] Of the two sub-posts, the Flat Head was the one most susceptible to fluctuating returns due to American competition.[38]

The most common problem for the Company in this region was the high price which had to be paid for furs, which, due to intermittent entry and exit of independent American trading and trapping expeditions, could not be reduced in times of minimal competition:

> I do not think it would be good policy to resume former prices, which were so extravagant that, in some places the wretched natives were very indifferently recompensed for this labour & trouble in collecting Skins, leaving the impression on their minds, after seeing the low prices introduced by our opponents, that they were formerly defrauded of their property by us.[39]

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37 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 July 1827, Para. 6. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

38 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 July 1828, Para. 43. D.4/92, Series I, H.B.C.A.

As American competition increased in 1832, the Flat Head Post was replaced with a trading party which went directly to the harvesting areas, trading with individual American trappers as well as Natives.[40] But in 1834-35 the re-organized American parties refused to trade with them and competition became fiercer, the Flat Head Party began collecting "nearly all the skins the Flat Head procured, by trading them green as they were taken".[41] In 1841 Simpson described the sub-district this way:

> Fort Colvile. . .is intended to protect and collect the trade of the Upper Columbia, and of the Kootonais and Flathead countries, which lie to the South and West of that post. I am concerned to say, the returns are gradually diminishing from year to year; this arises from no want of attention to the management of the district, but from the exhausted state of the Country, which has been closely wrought for many years, without any intermission. In the present unsettled state of the boundary line, it would be impolitic to make any attempt to preserve or recruit this once valuable country, as it would attract the attention of the American trappers, so that there is little prospect of any amendment taking place in its affairs.[42]

Simpson's opinion that, because of the intense competition harvesting should continue, was supported by the London Committee:

> We note with concern the exhausted state of the districts occupied by Fort Colvile and it's dependencies, and Fort Walla Walla, and of the Snake Country. This, however, is the best security we can have against American opposition, and we consider it good policy to maintain the trading and trapping establishments which have been heretofore employed on the Columbia proper and the countries

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39 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 26 August 1830, Para. 23, fo. 14. D.4/97, Series I, H.B.C.A.

40 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 21 July 1834, Para. 6, fo. [?]. D.4/100, Series I, H.B.C.A.

41 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 June 1835, Para. 6, fo. 27. D.4/102, Series I, H.B.C.A.

42 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 4, fo. 3. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

southward, so long as it can be done without incurring loss.[43]

At Fort Colvile and the other posts of the south-eastern section of the Department, the overland competition from traders outfitted in St. Louis became the predominant feature of the trade.

The Fort Colvile returns show that in sheer volume (280,846 pelts and hides from 1825-1849) the sub-district was second only to New Caledonia in production. Fort Colvile produced, in rounded figures, 53% of the badgers (2,456), 45% of the fishers (6,558), 42% of the muskrat (173,704), 22% of the bears (7,388)and wolves (3,542), and 18% of the wolverines (629) collected in the Columbia Department. Fort Colvile's beaver production (48,031) was about 11% of the Department's, less than Fort Vancouver (55,728) and far below the 31% which came from New Caledonia (132,158). It was the second major producer of castoreum (1,524 lbs.) and with New Caledonia accounted for 83% of that item.

The species mix of Fort Colvile shows the effect of the intense beaver harvest: beaver declined steadily to below 3,000 in 1835, below 2,000 in 1837, and from 1844-49 never above 1,000 annually. The harvesting of martens jumped from 796 in 1843 to 1,269 the following year, reaching 3,173 in 1847. Peaks in the muskrat cycles were observed in the returns for Outfits 1828, 1833-34, and in 1838-39. As a harvesting centre, Fort Colvile was strong in the areas where Fort Vancouver was weak. Its species mix gave it flexibility and it readily adapted to changing market conditions. It was a very successful collection centre and even after the Boundary settlement the Company continued to trade there, claiming the post active as late as 1866.[44] This continuity of Colvile as a production centre

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43 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 1 April 1843, Para. 3. D.4/102, Series I, H.B.C.A.

stands in sharp contrast with the administrative and symbolic Fort Vancouver, abandoned roughly two decades earlier.

Posts, Profit, and the Middleman Trade

Although tribes such as the Nez Perces had a great deal of power in and around Company affairs there was one area where the Company was adamant about its position, regardless of threat. Inland they refused to institute the coastal tariff because it was here at Nez Perces that the interior profits of the Columbia River began. During the price war with the American brigs Owhyhee and Convoy, McLoughlin instructed Samuel Black at Nez Perces not to give in to demands for the same prices:

> as it will spread from your place to Colvile District as it will be ruined by it It is true your Indians will come here But this cannot be helped and better to allow them to do so than to try and prevent them at the Expense of spoiling all the interior trade[45]

The Native protests continued and McLoughlin wrote again, pointing out that lowering the tariff would be similar "to a man setting fire to his house when a fire is raging in the vicinity to prevent its being burnt by the fire from his neighbours."[46] Black kept to the tariff, but raised the value of gratuities given.

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44 Testimony of Chief Factor Dugald MacTavish, cited in Ross, Frank E., "The Retreat of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Pacific North-West", Canadian Historical Review, v. XVIII (1937), p. 278.

45 John McLoughlin to Samuel Black, 16 August 1829. Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin, Written at Fort Vancouver, 1829-1832. Burt Brown Barker, Editor. Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, for the Oregon Historical Society, 1948, pp. 43-44.

46 John McLoughlin to Samuel Black, 20 March 1830, Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin, Written at Fort Vancouver, 1829-1832. Burt Brown Barker, Editor. Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, for the Oregon Historical Society, 1948, p. 100.

When George Barnston replaced Black at the post he was instructed:

> make no further reduction and indeed if possible you ought to bring the trade back to the former standard which if you do will be of more real service even if you only collect one fourth of the usual returns than if you trippled them. . .as you are aware that if the Tariff is lower at your place than farther in the Interior the consequence will be that the returns will come to you and cost dearer to the Company than if traded in the Interior . . .you must not appear anxious about Furs and tell the Indians who complain of the price that you are sorry you cannot afford them a higher price for their Furs and that you have no objection to see them carry their Furs to this place[47]

The staff at the Nisqually post had the opposite problem in convincing groups to cross through other villages' territories. Douglas referred to the villages as defining themselves according to "an imaginary line of demarcation, which divides the inhabitants of one petty stream, from the people living upon another".[48] The result was that he found they could not establish the regular intercourse with the Native peoples needed to encourage them to collect more furs. In a letter to George Simpson, Douglas discussed the problems in establishing the post in this complex, and to the Europeans unintelligible, coastal society:

> The Trade of Fort Nisqually Pugets Sound, has been on the decline since the close of Outfit 1835; and whatever may be the cause, it is still in active operation, as there is a further reduction on the Returns this year; ascribed by Mr. Kittson. . .to the prevalence of disease among the natives, and the wars existing between several of the Tribes inhabiting the Sound, who display in their mutual intercourse an uncommon bitterness of hostility. . .and in their few accidental meetings at the Fort Mr. Kittson could with difficulty restrain them from a general & open appeal to arms. The

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47 John McLoughlin to George Barnston, 1 August 1830, Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin, Written at Fort Vancouver, 1829-1832. Burt Brown Barker, Editor. Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, for the Oregon Historical Society, 1948, p. 121.

48 James Douglas to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 18 October 1838. The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941, p.262.

> habitations of many of these Tribes are remote and they seldom visit the establishment, so we have few opportunities of acquiring influence over their minds, otherwise we might soon effect a general pacification.[49]

As these problems continued, the Company responded by going out to the Natives in hopes of encouraging them to visit the post: "parties of runners were kept constantly on the move, visiting the different Tribes to give new impulse to their industry; these efforts have not been immediately rewarded".[50] Nisqually had very limited success.[51] It was not strategic to any middleman trade routes or rivers and the Natives around Puget Sound were unlikely to abandon their maritime economic relationships for hunting and trapping. The diversity of the coastal peoples made any trade based on the homeguard concept of the plains not only unworkable, but also potentially dangerous. While high prices served to attract furs, they also attracted Native groups intent on deterring or co-opting the trade of others.

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49 James Douglas to George Simpson, 18 March 1838, The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941, p.280.

50 James Douglas to George Simpson, 16 August 1839, Para. 8, fo. 11. D.4/106, Series I, H.B.C.A.

51 Beaver was the predominant fur harvested, averaging 33% of the returns, followed by muskrat (27%), raccoons (18%), and river otters (12%). There was a steady decline in both the number of beavers traded and their proportion of the annual Outfit's species mix. In 1834, 1,450 beaver accounted for 51% of the furs traded, dropping year after year to 25-30% of the furs traded and seldom being over 500 pelts. River otters, while only averaging 12% of the annual returns, were a very stable part of the returns. This is not surprising, given Douglas' previous comments about social territory being stream related. Lastly, although Nisqually had a large marine hinterland, only 10 sea otter adults and pups were traded there.

While Nisqually attempted to draw Natives and furs to it, Fort Langley was an example of a post deliberately established in an area where the Natives gathered -- the Fraser River fishing grounds. Fort Langley, founded in the summer of 1827, required a strong show of force to establish it "in defiance of the threats of upwards of 5000 Indians" who gathered there to fish.[52] Based on the prevalence of furs at this annual gathering, George Simpson mistakenly assumed that there were "a good many beaver" in the new post's vicinity.[53] But as a fur post Fort Langley was more than a disappointment. The beaver being traded at Langley were being drawn from the interior, past the lower prices of the Company's Thompson's River post. That the post's continuity depended on high prices is shown by the 1836 movement of trade away from it in favour of the higher prices of the Northern coast:

> our efforts to restore [the trade] have failed. . .the Native Traders having again carried off a quantity of furs, to swell the amount of the Steam Vessels returns. This species of interference can never be altogether prevented until we are in a situation to equalize the prices, on every part of the coast, and thereby remove the inducement[54]

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52 Part of Dispatch from George Simpson Esq., Governor of Rupert's Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London, March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947, p. 42. In 1828 Alexander McKenzie and the four members of the mail party from Langley were murdered and Simpson stated "we cannot venture among those numerous war-like Indians in small parties as in other parts of the country." [George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 July 1828, Para. 43. D.4/92, Series I, H.B.C.A.] This incident was not as serious to the long run survival of the post as Simpson feared but it shows the fragility of this direct approach.

53 Part of Dispatch from George Simpson Esq., Governor of Rupert's Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London, March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947, p.43

54 James Douglas to George Simpson, 5 March 1839, Para. 9. fos. 11-12.

Even after the post's daily business entered a relatively stable period in the 1840's the problem of inter-post competition continued. Langley and Nisqually were blamed for the falling off in Fort Vancouver's returns in 1841.[55]

The posts of the Northern coast, established in the late 1830's, reveal more about the conflict that the Company's posts continually faced, over gaining control of the profit, rather than the resource. The posts on the perimeter of the Company's trading territory, because of their use of a competition tariff, were in active competition with other Company operations. The Company slowly became aware that the heavy trade in furs on the coast was being drawn down the river systems, away from their more profitable interior posts to the higher competition prices at the coastal posts. Company attempts to control this outflow of furs from the interior by establishing posts at the strategic outlets of the river systems were met by Native hostility. In the Caledonia region, Innis' characterization of the fur trade's expansion as the history of the competition for the control of the high ground between river drainage basins is inapplicable. The North coast's mountainous high ground makes movement between river basins impractical and so control of the 'doorway' to each system becomes critical and continues to be reflected in British Columbia's settlement patterns.[56]

D.4/106, Series I, H.B.C.A.

55 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 43, fo. 26. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

56 Innis, Harold Adams, "Introduction", Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-31. Harvey Fleming, Editor. London: Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1940, p. lxxiv.

This strategic expansion which characterized Company operations throughout the 1830's began in 1828, with information-gathering forays in the area of the Nass river, that 'Grand Mart of the Coast'.[57] As Figure 10 shows, a network of posts was constructed at the mouths of the major river systems: the Nass, Stikine, and Taku, each an important outlet for the middleman trade in Interior as well as coastal furs. In 1838 the Governor and Committee sent private and confidential instructions to James Douglas to make a second attempt to extend the Company's operations into the Stikine river, the first having failed due more to Native resistance than Russian opposition. They instructed him to take a Chief from Fort Simpson to explain to the Natives the advantages of allowing a post on the river "inasmuch as it will afford them the chance of two markets for their furs and the benefit of opposition prices".[58] As the Company's hold over the trade increased, aided by the 1839 agreement with the Russian American Company over

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57 The furs gathered there in 1828 were .1% of the Department's trade, but over time this trade grew in rapidly in importance (1830: 1%, 1832: 11.5%, 1833: 18%, 1837: 25.9%, 1841: 38.5%, 1845: 41.1%, 1848: 44.8% and 1849: 38.3%). The Northern Coast had a diversity to its species mix which gave the trade a viability throughout the nineteenth century, in the early phase the business could look to the sub-district's returns which supplied 19% of the beaver, half that of New Caledonia, but still 81,845 pelts, and 26% of the river otter, 17,869 pelts. After the collapse of the beaver market the area was capable of shifting to the alternate furs; from 1828-1849 the area produced 38% of the Columbia Department's marten pelts, 70% of the mink. In the later half of the century the region would adapt again, this time to the sealing industry in the 1890's. Throughout all of this there was a steady production of bears, 39% of the Department's returns and of the now depleted sea otter stocks, 73% of which came from there.

58 This expedition in force, planned for 1840, was made unnecessary by the signing of an agreement with the Russian American Company which gave the Company possession of the Point Highfield post on June 1, 1840. The expedition was to be kept secret, ostensibly it was for the establishment of a post at the southern tip of Vancouver Island. Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to James Douglas, 'Private and Confidential', 31 October 1838. A.6/24, Series I, H.B.C.A.

the leasing of the 'panhandle', they began to pursue the Native traders' portion of the profit of the trade. The Letter of Instructions to Douglas in 1838 told him to sell:

> at such low prices (lower than the Russian tariff) as to attract the Indians towards us, until we are enabled to establish inland posts, at which to trade with the Fur hunters in the Interior and thus intercept on more favourable terms the skins that now form the trade on the coast.[59]

Evidence of the Company's awareness of this competition appears a decade earlier. In his 1828 dispatch about the Columbia Department, George Simpson noted that the trade on the North Coast was not "so extended as we were led to suppose" and that the bulk of the furs were from the interior and traded at the mouth of the Nass River.[60] By 1829 Governor Simpson knew that the key to

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59 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to James Douglas, 'Private and Confidential', 31 October 1838. A.6/24, Series I, H.B.C.A.

60 Part of Dispatch from George Simpson Esq., Governor of Rupert's Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London, March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947, pp.78-79.

The staple production of Fort Simpson rested on three types of furs, beaver, marten and mink, which accounted for 77.6% of all the furs traded there between 1828-1849. Beaver, the traditional staple, (39,532 collected) began a noticeable decline in 1840. The strength of the region was in what are viewed as 'modern furs', the marten (50,234 taken in total) and the mink (44,685). The other staples of the post were bears (6,134) and river otters (8,684). There is evidence that something, perhaps the introduction of a more powerful rifle, caused a rapid increase in the number of grizzly bears being traded. 51 of the 83 grizzlies traded in the period 1828-1849 came from the Outfits of the last two years. Such a dramatic increase was not observed in any other species traded, nor at any other Columbia post.

Despite the fact that the post was on the northern coast there were no seals listed prior to 1847, and then only a few dozen were traded annually. There was a steady trade in deer skins from 1841 on, a year after trade began in the hides of their major predator, the wolf. There was also a regular trade in whale by-products, such as oil and bone, after 1841. The muskrat was of relatively little importance on the north coast, with only 6,381 traded. Its limited appearance may mean it was obtained through middleman trade with

gaining control of the fur trade on the coast lay in establishing strategic control over the mouths of the major river systems.[61] Wresting control of the trade from well-established Native traders became the constant aim of the Company. The Committee agreed, having set out a similar policy on the rivers of the lower coast.[62]

Natives may have been responsible for forcing the removal of the first Fort Simpson, at the Nass. When the post was established in 1831 by Lieutenant Aemilius Simpson, he met with a mixed response from the Natives. He identified some of the skins they traded as being from the Interior because of the method by which they had been stretched and dressed. Simpson, in commenting on his report observed:

> The Indians Lieut. Simpson saw it is supposed are merely Traders /not hunters/ who obtain the Skins in barter from the inland neighbours; and they had sufficient penetration to discover that an establishment at the mouth of the river would interfere with their Trade, they were therefore by no means communicative, and we are so much accustomed to their deceit and misrepresentation that little reliance is placed on what they say.[63]

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the interior. Dramatic fluctuations typical of muskrat-producing regions are missing from these returns, perhaps filtered out as a result of interior-coastal transportation constraints. The very valuable furs such as silver fox and sea otter were few in number, with only 1,030 adult sea otters and 27 silver foxes traded during the period.

61 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 26 August 1830, Para. 27, fo. 20. D.4/97, Series I, H.B.C.A.

62 Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee to John McLoughlin, 4 December 1833, Para. 7. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

63 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 18 July 1831, Para. 23, fo. 10. D.4/98, Series I, H.B.C.A.

Governor Simpson was well aware of how dangerous the position of the post was and within three years it was moved to Point Maskelyne, near Dundas Island[64] the reason given was that the new location would facilitate access for sailing vessels, but removing the post from the threat or the control of the local tribes may have been a more important factor.[65]

George Simpson's eventual solution for the problems of the Northern coast was 'Retrenchment', closing several posts which required large compliments of men for their defence, and replacing them with a steam vessel, the Beaver:

> the establishment of Fort Simpson alone, with the Beaver Steamer, will answer every necessary & useful purpose, in watching and collecting the trade of the whole of that line of Coast. . [the Beaver] visiting the principal trading stations. . .at stated periods six times a year, which would be sufficiently often for the purpose of collecting the trade, and of supplying the Indians, and would be more convenient to the natives generally, than the permanent trading establishments now occupied, which many of the more remote Indians are unable to visit, in some instances on account of the distance, and in others, from an apprehension of difficulty with the home-guards. . .[66]

The result of this was that the middleman and the 'homeguards' could be by-passed and the trade, by being divided among a series of isolated villages instead of a populous central location, could be better managed, with the Company always able

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64 D.4/102, fo.29d, H.B.C.A., cited in, Post Histories -- H.B.C.A. Finding Aid.

65 The statistical evidence shows that beaver returns dropped from 7,659 to 1,338, marten from 1,450 to 624, and mink from 2,946 to 52 in the first year of the new post's operation, making the move extremely costly and suggesting that the explanation that it was a convenience for the sailing vessel is not the full answer. The returns of the post recovered slightly (3,242 beaver in 1836) but beaver declined steadily to only 328 in 1849. Marten and mink were plentiful from 1836-1838, in the area of 4,000 of each per year, dropping to less than 2,000 a year through the early 1840's until a resurgence in 1845 to the 1836-38 levels, which is a combination of demographic action and market demand.

66 George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 23, fo. 15. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

to withdraw an individual villages from the trading system.[67] When the Company took steps to reduce the high coastal tariff in 1839, George Simpson made it clear that the purpose of the reduction was more than a simple matter of economies in management, its intent was the manipulation of local economies and peoples:

> we shall forthwith be enabled to reduce the price of Furs, to their fair value, and to discontinue the sale of Arms, Ammunition and Spiritous Liquors, which will be productive of a great saving in Wages, as when deprived of warlike Stores, they will no longer be the formidable people, they have been accustomed to be, but be manageable with less force,...the natives seem to have done little in hunting during the past year, owing to the reduction introduced lately in the price of Furs, as a means of checking the current of Trade from the interior of New Caledonia to the Coast, which the former opposition prices, gave rise to; thus sacrificing their own comforts, for a time; to the expectation that by obstinably holding out, they would force us to resume the former standard of Trade; but when they find, we are not likely to give way, they will resume their hunts, and as their territory is in the meantime allowed to recruit, this temporary falling off in the returns, will soon be productive of advantage on the Coast, and settle the interior Trade which was of late becoming fluctuating and unsteady.[68]

Inter-Post Competition

The Company had, by its use of differential tariffs between the coast and the interior, become the victim of a system of its own construction because the posts were dependent on the use of tariffs as an economic defence. Once set in place such tariffs could not be easily reduced, as the removal could under-cut any trade influence. Also, the re-appearance of competition could not be predicted, especially when small free-lancing traders and whalers were involved. The advantages of the monopoly they held in New Caledonia were offset by the

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67 Whether this did take place is a matter for further investigation.

68 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 8 July 1839, Para. 9, fos. 40-41. D.4/99, Series I, H.B.C.A.

constant drain on the Department's profitability occurring at the coastal posts, a loss which the Native trading system realized.

This was also a problem on the lower coast, especially between Fort Vancouver and the lower coast posts of Langley and Nisqually. There were of course other non-monetary factors: the convenience and general attraction of a new post; possible inter-tribal conflicts along river systems which forced changes in trading preference; and the search for comparative trading information, which included more than price. The following example shows two of these factors at work, convenience and the attraction of the new post, Fort Langley:

> The trade of Fort Vancouver had in some degree fallen off in consequence of part of its returns going to Fort Langley. That of Nez Perces or Walla Walla had likewise diminished, in consequence of several of its hunters having traded their skins with the Snake Country Expedition.[69]

In 1827, trade at Thompson's river dropped as a result of "several of its hunters having gone to Fort Colvile with their returns".[70] Again in 1838 Thompson's River was mentioned in the group of posts whose furs were being drained off either directly or through Native middlemen due to the higher coastal tariffs, but the Governor and Committee saw no solution to this problem until control of the coastal trade could be assured.[71]

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69 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 July 1828, Para. 43. D.4/92, Series I, H.B.C.A.

70 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 July 1827, Para. 6. D.4/90, Series I, H.B.C.A.

71 Governor and Committee to James Douglas, 31 October 1838, Para. 13. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The managerial staff of the Columbia Department was acutely aware of the problem and knew that the matter was beyond solution unless a complete monopoly could be established on the coast, allowing for an equalization (downwards) of tariffs. Simpson knew in 1832 that beaver from the family-owned ponds and traplines of New Caledonia was being offered for sale, not to the nearby posts in Caledonia, but on the coast.[72] James Douglas, while commenting in 1838 on the extension of coastal trade by the steamer Beaver, pointed out the strategic problems to the Committee. More posts were not the answer. He explained to the London Committee that the steamer's trade could not be easily expanded into new areas without further damage to the interior posts' trade:

> Our trade now embraces almost every accessible portion of the Coast . . . and in the interior . . . Owing to this connected occupation, by our various establishments, & shipping, we are straitened for room, and we cannot greatly extend the business at one Post without producing, at some other, a corresponding depression.[73]

The new coastal policy based on the steamer did attempt to disrupt the middleman trade routes through its mobility, but after all, its purpose was as a post, not as a policing mechanism for the trade and this conflict was inevitable as long as a price differential existed.

In discussing the movement of interior furs from New Caledonia and the Chilcotin to coastal villages at Bentinck Arm, Douglas may have had an important influence on Simpson's decision to change the organization of the coastal trade:

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72 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10th August 1832, Para. 47, fo. 23. D.4/99, Series I, H.B.C.A.

73 James Douglas to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 18 October 1838. The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941, pp. 245-6.

> If circumstances permitted the introduction of even a very limited measure of retrenchment in the standard of trade at this place [Fort McLoughlin] it would be of the utmost importance in protecting the interests of New Caledonia, as the proximity of the Western Posts of that District will expose them to be interfered with, by Native Traders who, at the present Tariff, can buy up the Caledonia furs and retail them on the Coast at a considerable premium. . .For this evil I see, at present, no advisable remedy; as it is difficult to prevent an intercourse which holds out a prospect of great mutual advantage.[74]

The severance of this trade route may have been as important a factor in the closure of Fort McLoughlin as the cost savings which are said to have resulted.

So, while New Caledonia appeared to be geographically isolated, it was in fact intimately connected to the workings of coastal trade. Company policy on the coast was as much a response to internal trade, the draining of profits from what they viewed as their own preserve, as it was a response to external traders. While the bulk of the furs did eventually come to Hudson's Bay Company posts, the cost of buying them was often 90% higher than in the interior.[75]

Several attempts to establish a route between the northern coast and New Caledonia through the Russian territory at the Stikine river, led the Company to the conclusion that the interior should remain as isolated as possible:

> in as much as a very small establishment of people would suffice to deal with the poor timid Indians of the Interior, who are the hunters, whereas a large establishment would be required to deal with the numerous and warlike Indians of Stikine, who are the traders; and the natives of the Interior would sell their skins to us, at a moderate tariff, whereas the Stikine Indians, who are accustomed to

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74 James Douglas to George Simpson, 18 March 1838, The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941, p.272.

75 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 20 November 1840. The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943. p. 24.

opposition prices, would give their Skins to the highest bidder.[76]

New Caledonia was to remain part of what George Simpson referred to as "a well regulated and highly cultivated Estate which at the pleasure of the proprietor . . .can be made to meet the demands of the market."[77]

Specialization: New Caledonia and the Beaver Market

New Caledonia was a network of posts on interior lakes which provided a very efficient collection network because of its family-owned traplines, despite the problems in the outflow of its produce.[78] Beaver accounted for 46% of the trade. Of these 40,106 pelts, only 30% were classed as small, reflecting the controlled harvesting system which preserved immature stock. Martens made up 31% of the harvest (28,220) and muskrats provided a further 12% (10,587). Lynx accounted for

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76 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 8 December 1835, Para. 12. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

77 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 1 September 1825, Para. 74. D.4/88, Series I, H.B.C.A.

78 The fur returns ledger gave only the total district returns for New Caledonia, but an examination of a surviving series of Fort St. James Post Journals allowed for a limited study of the returns from Outfits 1825-1831. Statistics were gathered from the following sources: "Comparative Statement of the Returns of the Different Posts in New Caledonia for the Years 1826 [Outfit 1825] and 1827 [Outfit 1826]", B.188/a/8, fo. 155; for Outfit 1827, B.188/a/10, fo. 36; for Outfit 1828, B.188/a/12, fo. 51; for Outfit 1829, B.188/a/14, fo. 23; and for Outfit 1830, B.188/a/17, fos. 8-9, which also contained incomplete information on part of Outfit 1831. All of these Outfit statements were checked against the master ledger and published sources. There are some inconsistencies, notably 1831, but for the purpose of demonstrating general themes such as post specialization and the proportions into which New Caledonia's trade fell, these are relatively unimportant.

From 1825-1830 the posts produced the following volume of furs for the region: Fraser Lake 25% (23,136 pelts), Stuart Lake 22% (19,825), Alexandria 18% (16,432), McLeod Lake 15% (13,571), Babine Lake 13% (12,331), Connolly Lake 5% (4,339), and Fort George 2% (2,222). [Both Fort George and Connolly Lake were only open for part of this period.]

5% (4,307), mink 2% (1,770) and river otters 2% (1,448). Over 2,100 lbs. of castoreum was also gathered.

Within the New Caledonia posts there was a degree of specialization. 57% of 131 silver foxes were traded at Fraser Lake. The next highest post, Stuart Lake, received only 20%. Fraser Lake also accounted for 42% each of the 309 fishers and 149 cross foxes trapped, and 41% of the 80 red fox. It was the second largest source of lynx, providing 31% of the pelts. Stuart Lake produced more bears of all forms than any other post: 43% of the brown, 32% of the black, and 37% of the grizzly bears traded. It also accounted for 38% of the muskrats and was the second largest source of wolverines. Babine Lake was the second major source of fishers, 24%, and the largest supplier of mink, 36%, lynx 35%, and wolverines, 34%. Alexandria produced 75% of the beaver coating, but this is a reflection of a massive trade in the item during first contact with the Chilcotin tribe in 1825, which accounted for half the coating acquired in New Caledonia during the five year period. There is also evidence of a muskrat peak during Outfit 1828, and a corresponding increase in lynx that year.

The most interesting species is the beaver, given the family ownership of trapping grounds. Simpson observed that the Carrier Tribe, both at Stewart Lake (Fort St. James), which had neither extensive nor well-stocked Beaver hunting grounds, and at Frasers Lake, where there were larger stocks of beaver, had developed a system of regulation:

> the hunting grounds, as regards Beaver, however, belong to particular Families, who merely take from time to time such quantity as they requires, and any encroachment, even by their next door neighbours, is tantamount to a declaration of hostilities, and frequently punished by death; but the small Furs are common to all[79]

McLeod Lake was the main source, with 80% of its total production in beaver products: 10,363 of 13,041 pelts, as well as 53 lbs. of coating and 477 lbs. of castoreum. Fraser Lake was second, followed by Alexandria and Stuart Lake which produced very similar quantities. These four posts collected 81% of the large and 85% of the small beaver pelts in New Caledonia. While the production of other pelts, such as fox, climbed in 1830, the number of small beaver pelts remained the same with the collection of adults increasing about 1,000 pelts to 6,089.

Arthur Ray has argued that on the Prairies "without a monopoly it was not possible to manage the fur trade on an ecologically sound basis since the primary suppliers of fur pelts, the Indians, did not readily support the Hudson's Bay Company's conservation programme."[80] New Caledonia is a good test of this statement. The Native peoples were already practising resource management, so the difficulties of re-education did not apply. Nor was external competition from other trading companies a threat, with the Columbia posts serving as a protective buffer. However, the narrative evidence shows that the Company had only limited success in New Caledonia because of the existence of an inter-tribal trade network for exchanging interior furs for coastal trade goods.[81]

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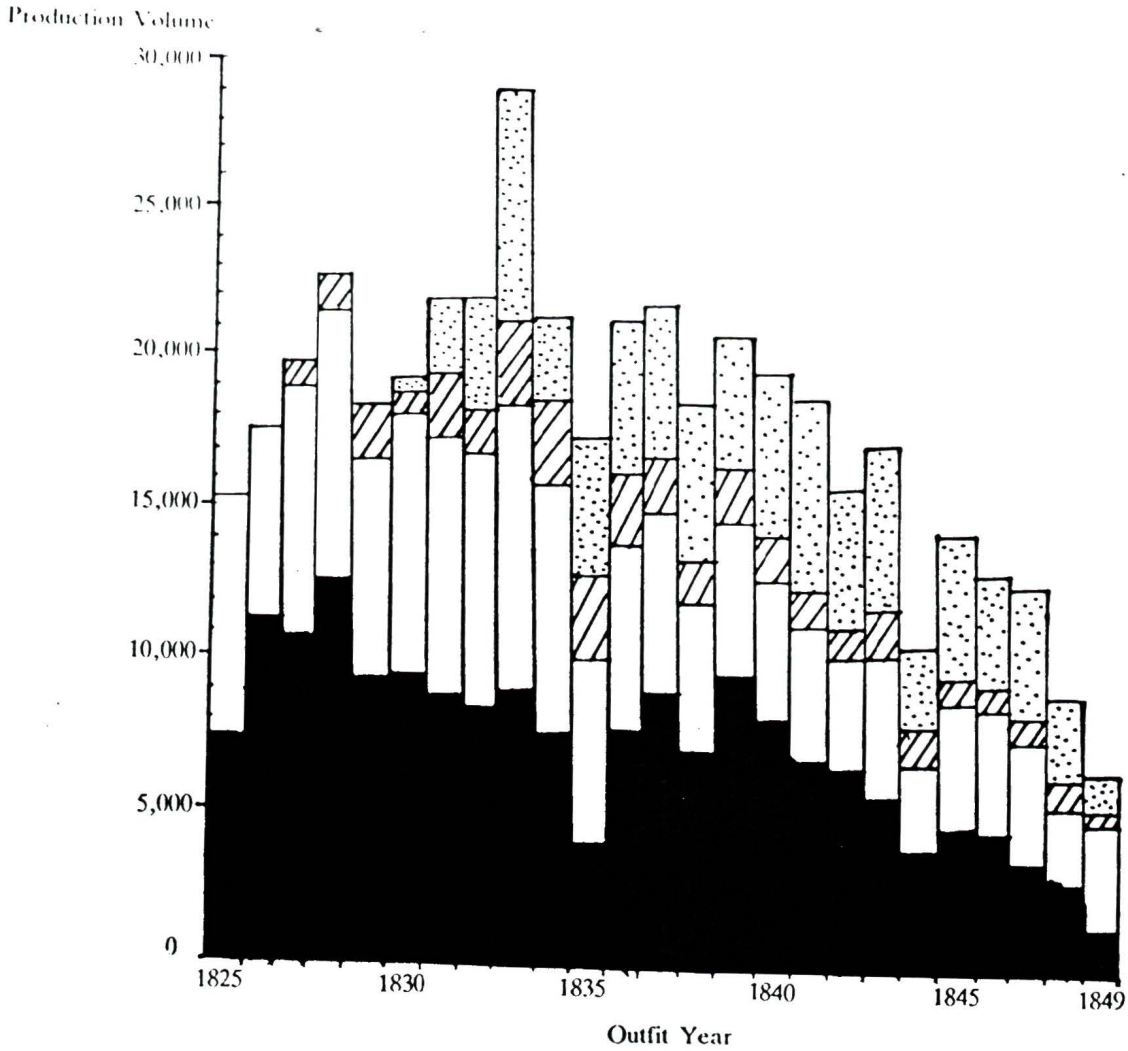
79 Part of Dispatch from George Simpson Esq., Governor of Rupert's Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London, March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947, pp.18-19.

80 Ray, Arthur J. "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade." Journal of Historical Geography, 1, 1 (1975), p. 58.

81 When Lieutenant Aemilius Simpson visited the mouth of the Nass in 1830 he showed a beaver trap to the Natives, one of whom recognized it and explained to the others present how castoreum was used as bait. Lieutenant Simpson immediately made the connection that this knowledge was proof of contact



LEGEND

Northern Coastal Trade including S.S. *Beaver*

Gulf of Georgia and Puget Sound Trade

New Caledonia Trade (including Thompson's River)

Columbia River System Trade

Source: A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C.

Figure 11: Columbia Department Beaver Production by Sub-District, 1825-1849

How did New Caledonia compare with the rest of the Department as a sub-district? George Simpson commented in 1829 that while the coastal furs were important, "it is the Land Skins of our interior Country, that renders it all worth following". [82] From 1825-1849 it produced more furs than any other area in the Department. Its 383,828 pelts and wildlife by-products account for 25% of the total volume of the Department. 58% of the lynx, 41% of the martens, 40% of wolverines, 31% of all beaver, 20% of the muskrat and 9% of the river otters came from there.[83] As Figure 11 shows, New Caledonia beaver production, which reached a high of 8,545 pelts in 1833, declined noticeably in 1835, had another high in 1841 before dropping the next year to half of the 1833 figure. The declining beaver returns of New Caledonia after the 1830's show evidence of over-harvesting, the drop to the new level occurring in 1840, prior to the shift in the European marketplace. As would be expected, castoreum production followed the same pattern.

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with New Caledonia. 'Captain Simpson's Report of his voyage to Nass.', The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p.311.

82 Part of Dispatch From George Simpson Esquire, Governor of Ruperts Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London, March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947, p. 81.

83 These are the official figures from the fur returns ledger and they do not reveal anything about the additional traffic in interior furs which were traded as part of the returns of coastal posts.

The trade in martens was very large, 107,484 pelts, 41% of the Columbia Department's production. It shows a cyclical increase, followed by a corresponding decrease in returns. Returns are high, in the region of 5,000 a year, during 1825-1827, dropping 2,800 in 1828. Another peak is from 1834-1838, with a more gradual decline until the next increase to 5,000 in 1842, followed by a drop of 1,700 the next year. The peaks appear to be of about three years duration, although occasionally they drop quickly.

When the main buyer of beaver pelts, the European beaver hat industry, was driven under by the popularity of the inexpensive silk hat, New Caledonia's fur based economy responded to new markets quickly due to the flexibility of its species mix. The new staple furs were now marten and mink. In 1845 marten production jumped to 7,383, to 9,586 in 1846 and 8,618 the following year. In 1848 this dropped by half to 4,436 and in 1849 it is 2,652. The large number of martens harvested, while clearly a response to market forces, also represent the coincidence of high prices with a high demographic peak. Unlike the muskrat, which had a very low market value and a high demographic peak, the marten did not exist in sufficient numbers to create a glut and collapse prices. The large numbers traded represent the Native trapper's response to its increased value. This change in the trade must have had structural and cultural reverberations in New Caledonia society, due to the abandonment of the depleted family-tenure beaver ponds in the search for a more valuable and, in the marten's case, more mobile commodity.[84]

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84 McTaggart Cowan states that the marten and the lynx both undergo mass movements after the decline of a rabbit cycle. Ian McTaggart Cowan, "The Fur Trade and the Fur Cycle: 1825-1857", British Columbia Historical Quarterly, v. II (1938), p. 27.

The returns for New Caledonia in Figure 11 show a gradual decline of beaver stocks, a decline which accelerated through the 1840's, and began well before the severe changes in the European beaver market, arguing against the practical implementation of sustained yield. This has two possible and not mutually exclusive causes, over-harvesting either in the trade within the region or through the less documented inter-tribal commerce. The rise in the price of martens provided an alternative to the fixed family-tenure of the beaver ponds. It is clear that the region's species mix, rich in both marten and lynx, allowed New Caledonia to shift easily from one staple fur to another. The New Caledonia cyclical peak in marten may have, fortuitously for the trade, matched the changing market's preference for the fur. Unlike the muskrat, the size of the marten population was within such bounds as to be easily absorbed by market demands. If the market had not shifted away from the beaver, the New Caledonia trade could have continued, but to a lesser extent than observed in the early 1830's. The social effect of this change on the Carrier peoples is an area worthy of future study, touching as it does on the issues of native ownership of trapping grounds and the change of the industry's focus away from the animal whose ecological habits defined those grounds, towards the less rooted marten whose fate depended on the fluctuations and migratory movement of the rabbit population.

Conclusion

The Hudson's Bay Company's attempts to establish a rational system of posts in the Columbia Department reveals the complexity of the interaction between business strategy and the realities of external and internal competition, between

differing societies, topography and the characteristics of resource ecology. Getting physical possession of a product is not the sole criteria of business success. Posts did not guarantee profits, and despite Innis' view that the fur trade can be viewed as a series of strategic manouverings involving the placing of posts on watersheds that explanation, while appealing, is incomplete. Interior furs moved through non-European trade networks, from one watershed to another in response to both traditional arrangements and market information. The hinterland of a post is rigidly bound in a geographical interpretation, a function of the watershed. But this hinterland becomes far more fluid when economic and political relationships are introduced. The Columbia fur trade illustrates the complexity of even a seemingly simple commerce. It is also clear that while the social, diplomatic and political issues generated a great deal of records, the basic producing units of the Department upon which all was based generated little comment because none was needed. It is about these other units, such as Fort Colvile and New Caledonia, that future questions concerning the impact of the fur trade should be asked.

This social and business history of the battle for control of the profits of the fur trade reveals a conflict which older traditional histories of the Department have not addressed, but one which is not far removed from the conflict suggested by Robin Fisher. However, it does suggest that the Company's retrenchment was not mutually beneficial and that the changes Fisher ascribes to settlement had their roots in this earlier period.[85]

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85 Fisher, Robin. Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations In British Columbia, 1774-1890. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977, pp. xiv-xv.

Chapter 4

EXPORTING THE HARVEST

Introduction

The export process was more than a transportation system. It was the mechanism through which the harvests of scattered posts were gathered into a series of increasingly homogeneous 'products', as furs made the transition from traplines to European industrial usage. In this respect the exports of the Columbia were similar to the exports of other divisions of the Hudson's Bay Company, and their handling reflects the accelerating standardization of operations as the Company strove to establish 'any ordinary degree of system'. The Columbia exports also presented several problems that were unique to its export route, due to the distance, the preferred season of passage round Cape Horn, difficulties with Captains and crews, and preserving the cargo as it passed through the equator twice on its voyage to London. The timing of the arrival of these returns, which was the result of a combination of the above factors, had an important structural effect on the marketing of furs in London, one which the Company was not fully successful in controlling to its advantage.

Like the returns in other departments, the Columbia furs were traded at the post in a semi-processed state. The animal had been skinned, the inner part of the skin had been 'fleshed' or scraped, and it had been stretched to cure or season.[1] In

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[1] Green or unseasoned skins were only accepted at Nez Perces during a period of intense competition.

the spring the post's returns were packed in 80 lb. bales and sent to the central shipping depot, Fort Vancouver, by the brigade which returned with the supplies for the next winter's trade. For the posts on the Lower Columbia, this was a simple task, involving the use of batteaux, boats somewhat similar to York boats. Other posts sent their returns to the river by horse pack trains. In the late 1830's the posts of the Northern coast sent their returns on the Beaver, which brought them to Fort Nisqually. These returns were sometimes delayed because of their dependence on a single vessel for their movement, and the returns vessel did not always wait for the steamer at Fort Vancouver. New Caledonia, as Mary Cullen has demonstrated, had special problems because of its isolation and the inaccessibility of the Fraser river as a transport route.[2] New Caledonia was roughly 1,000 miles from Fort Vancouver by overland travel and 2,578 miles from York Factory.[3] After a brief experiment with the York Factory route after the merger, Simpson realized that the old North West Company route down to the Columbia was better suited to the annual cycle of trade and resupply as there was no guarantee that the brigades returning from York Factory could reach their wintering grounds before weather closed the rivers. Difficulty also lay in timing the arrival of these returns with those of the trapping parties, parties who were often unsure themselves as to their location or when they would return. Generally all of this was co-ordinated, although precision in timing was unlikely, especially with other factors such as shortages of food, horses and manpower, hostile Natives

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2 Cullen, Mary. "Outfitting New Caledonia, 1821 1858.", Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray, Editors. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980, pp. 231-251.

3 Old Trails, New Directions., pp. 236-237.

along the transportation routes, and the level and speed of the river systems which fluctuated according to differing spring run-offs, were taken into account.

When the returns reached the depot at Fort Vancouver the clerks from the outlying posts checked their tallies with the central bookkeepers and accounted for the various bales. Labourers -- men, women and children -- cleaned, beat, aired, and re-packed the furs in preparation for shipment to London.[4] McLoughlin, as officer in charge of the depot, oversaw the loading of the returns vessel. Once loading was completed the furs were the sole responsibility of the Ship's Captain until receipt was taken of them at dock-side in London.[5] Advance information on the returns was then sent by various routes to London to allow time for the Company and the buyers to assess the impact of the shipment on prices, buying strategy and the general market. It was this information that increasingly comprised the first part of the export.

Creating a Standardized Product

Both the Committee and Simpson were constantly concerned with maintaining quality as the Company sought to deliver consistent, standardized products for the European marketplace. This was partially achieved by the experienced trappers and traders at the level of the post, who acted as a filter, refusing or discarding unsuitable pelts before they entered the Company's transportation network. The

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4 It is not clear how much of this was done at the level of the post and how much was done at the depot. New Caledonia furs were probably packed before being brought out, while those of the Lower Columbia may have been dealt with at Fort Vancouver. North coast furs were probably prepared at Fort Simpson rather than at Nisqually.

5 This division of authority was delineated at Simpson's request in 1823. Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 13 March 1823, Para. 52. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

culling or discarding of low quality furs was not considered wastage, but a measure of the trader's expertise. Quality standards were reduced only when market demand was insatiable, because the Committee realized that a small high quality shipment, by its combination of quality and restricted size, was of greater value than a larger harvest of mixed grades.

The Governor and Committee constantly stressed the need to ship only winter skins. Damaged and staged beaver pelts could be sold for the felt trade but there was little market demand for seconds and thirds of other species.[6] The Governor and Committee believed that shipping these sub-standard pelts was harmful to the trade as a whole:

> In packing up the furs before being shipped all staged and summer skins ought to be thrown out accept those of Beaver. This year there was a great many cats, foxes and bears of this description which injured the sale of the good ones and many did not sell for the amount of the duty.[7]

This problem of insufficient culling became worse through the late 1830's and early 1840's as beaver returns declined. The Committee informed John McLoughlin that prices were continuing to drop, both from the change in fashion and demand, but also because of "there being a greater quantity of staged skins in each successive shipment".[8]

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6 Staged pelts had the less valuable summer coat and included pelts killed in the spring when the winter coat is shedding or present in patches as the summer coat grows in. For a discussion of the evolution of the term see Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-1844. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943. p. 70n.

7 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 13 March 1823, Para. 64. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

8 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 8 September 1841, Para. 2. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The Committee was also concerned with another aspect of the initial processing of pelts. They wrote to the Columbia Department that the returns of beaver skins, which were traded for and later sold by the pound, had deteriorated during shipping due to improper scraping, and ordered that trappers be paid by the skin: "They would then have no inducement for making the skin heavy."[9] This problem was complicated, as John McLoughlin noted in 1826, by the fact that in coastal river basins heavy winter rains and the fluctuation of water levels meant that beaver were often trapped only during the low water levels of summer. Summer pelts, being thinner, proved more difficult to scrape properly without damaging the pelt.[10]

The initial processing was crucial to prevent damage to the skins from moths which laid eggs on them, which resulted in 'the worm'. After the 1825 shipment had been damaged by improper cleaning, the Committee reminded the traders that:

> pelts should be thoroughly dried, as soon after they are traded as possible and deposited in a cool place free from damp, during the warm weather, it is desirable that they should be beat at least once a month with small sticks both on the pelt side and fur side of the skin and afterwards kept in a situation as free from air and heat as possible.[11]

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9 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to the Gentlemen Chief Factors in Charge of the Columbia, 12 November 1823, Para. 2. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

10 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 July 1828, Para. 18. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p. 60.

11 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to the Gentlemen Chief Factors in Charge of the Columbia, 27 July 1825, Para. 2. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The London buyers complained about the in-country processing of furs. They objected to the reddish colour of pelts which had been rubbed with wood ash to remove grease before being packed.[12] The Committee ordered this practise stopped, feeling it could be better carried out without discoloration in their London warehouse.[13] But as labour costs rose in Europe in the 1840's the Company tried to transfer these costs back to their establishments in North America:

> The labour of beating, dusting and turning many of the furs forms a heavy item in the warehouse expences here: this expence may be much reduced by beating and dusting the Beaver and Bear skins and turning the Lynx, and by removing the genitals of the male martens prior to being packed at the different Posts where they are collected. You will therefore issue instructions...[14]

Children may also have been a component in the labour process. When George Simpson visited Sitka in 1842 he observed how the Russian American Company stored and cleaned furs prior to export, reporting on this to John McLoughlin:

> The schoolboys here, are kept certain hours every fair day occupied in dusting or beating the skins, even every Mink skin is beaten with two switches, by holding each end of it & laying alternately till not one particle of dust remains, & wiping the Grease carefully from the pelt; a certain number, perhaps 50 or 100 skins, are given out to two boys in the morning and they are taken back in a clean state in the course of the day. It is desirable you should give particular instructions on this subject to every person in charge of a post, and if that system of dusting and airing were followed, the furs would not be likely to suffer so much injury in passing the tropics, & less expensive labor would be required at the H.B. House.[15]

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12 Where in the system this process occured is unclear.

13 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 20 September 1826, Para. 5. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

14 Governor and Committee to Duncan Finlayson, 4 March 1840, Para 20. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

15 Sir George Simpson to John McLoughlin, 18 May 1842. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-1844. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943. p. 293.

It is likely that something similar to this took place at most fur trade posts, where children could have provided the labour for this monotonous but necessary task. In this preparatory aspect of the shipping process the Company adopted new methods and was quick to take advantage of savings in labour costs.

Packing the Harvest for Export

The packing of the export furs required a great deal of careful attention. It is probable that the bales brought down from the posts by the brigades were repacked. McLoughlin commented that the boats in use in 1827 were unable to transport the larger export bales and so 80 pound packs were used instead to forward late returns to the departing vessel which had been delayed in the Columbia river.[16]

The bulk of the furs were forced into tight layered bales with a large fur press. These fur presses made bales 60" x 30", with a double wooden screw forcing the furs down into tight layers before they were bound. There were also smaller single screw presses (30"x 18") used to pack inland furs in the Northern Department, which may have also been in use in areas such as New Caledonia.[17] This method was generally successful, as this exchange concerning the minor

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16 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 11 August 1827, Para. 2. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p. 49.

17 In 1822 George Simpson patterned these improved presses on those of William McGillivray's Montreal warehouse. The older presses at York Factory were slow, complicated and inefficient, requiring eight men to operate and packing 20 bales a day. George Simpson to Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 1 September 1822, Para. 17. Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-1831. R. Harvey Fleming, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1940. p. 380.

damage to some bales of beaver in the 1826 cargo shows:

> but owing to the closeness with which the bales were presspacked, the worm were unable to penetrate far into the skins, it may therefore be as well in future to let the cords or whatever may be used to tie up the bales be several times fastened round them, which will considerably press in the edges of the skins.[18]

McLoughlin replied that there was a shortage of leather cordage and he hoped to make use of wooden cases supplied by the Fort Vancouver sawmill.[19]

Dressed skins, such as deer, were used as wrappers for the export bales of pelts. In 1824 the size of the bales of beaver pelts was standardized at around 200 pelts each, with similar sized bales for each other form of wildlife.[20] This size was chosen to prevent damage from the shifting of the cargo in transit. Cased furs (marten and wolverine) were hung to cure, assuming a somewhat cylindrical shape. They were then tied together in groups, like fish, and shipped in casks and puncheons. Top quality furs such as silver fox were often shipped in flat wooden cases. River otters were shipped in from the east side of the mountains for shipment to Sitka where they were sold to the Russian American Company. They required more cautious packaging because of the dangerous long overland route and were put in "well seasoned dovetailed painted boxes" with tallow used to make them water tight.[21]

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18 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 12 September 1827, Para. 1. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

19 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 1 September 1826, Para. 16. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. pp. 60-61.

20 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to the Gentlemen Chief Factors in Charge of the Columbia, 22 July 1824, Para. 2. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

21 John McLoughlin to George Simpson, 20 March 1840, Para. 19. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee,

Other wildlife produce were packed in standardized units quite early in the period. The uniform shipping units were a convenience for the buyer, rather than a shipping precaution. For example, castoreum was packed in 60 pound kegs:

> This article is sold in Lots of that quantity generally for Exportation and if imported in packages of that size it will sell to 1/- to 1/6 per lb. more, than if the purchasers have to repack it, previous to being exported.[22]

The preparation and curing of isinglass caused some problems at first, the shipment of 1825 being unsaleable. But the preparation of this item was soon improved to market standards.[23] In these specialty products the Company moved rapidly to accommodate the smaller market of industrial end-users and their requirements dictated the gathering and shipping of the products in the Columbia Department.

The use of country sawn wood for shipping containers and for the dunnage[24] on which the bales were placed in the hold created difficulties. Green or unseasoned dunnage under bales caused the outer wrappers to rot. Cases made of unseasoned wood damaged 5 boxes of furs shipped in 1827, while those packed in rum puncheons and pressed bales arrived in excellent condition. George Simpson was instructed that "no cases of Country wood ought to be used, but the Furs

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Second Series, 1839-1844. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. pp. 235-6.

22 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 2 June 1824, Para. 58. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

23 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 20 September 1826, Para. 7. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

24 A piece of wood perhaps 4"x 4" and 6' or more in length. Two parallel pieces of dunnage are put on the ground or in a cargo hold in order to let air circulate freely underneath the bales placed on them. Dunnage is also used throughout the lumber industry for the same purpose, to prevent damage by soil bacteria and water.

ought to be packed close in old spirit casks or impressed bales."[25] In his defence over this particular incident, McLoughlin blamed moth-damaged muskrat pelts from Nez Perces, which he had ordered rebeaten and sealed in the better rum puncheons to protect the other furs. He denied that the damaged martens were placed in 'green' wood boxes, stating they were put up in sealed English hat boxes, with the chinks sealed with pitch. Regardless of responsibility, the dispute sheds some light on the Company's emphasis on a packing hierarchy; the valuable martens should have been placed in the better casks.[26] McLoughlin mentioned other details of shipping preparation; the next shipment had been repeatedly beaten and tobacco was put in with the furs to discourage insects, and he asked that the casks be returned from London with a few gallons of spirits in each "as furs are never injured by insects when packed in casks whose Staves are well saturated with Spirits".[27]

By the 1830's most of these shipping problems had been overcome, and a consistent product was being delivered to London. This was in part due to the 'Fur Box', an innovation of McLoughlin in 1826:

> the Captain allows us to make Up a large Apartment in the Vessels hold to stow the Furs in: it is made with Dry well seasoned planks tongued and Groved and I hope they Will get home safe. It is only by stowing them in this way we can Expect to keep them free of Insects if the Vessel takes a cargo of Hides, as I understand is Intended, at Rio.[28]

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25 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 6 February 1828, Para. 31. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

26 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 5 August 1829. Letters of Dr. John McLoughlin, Written at Fort Vancouver, 1829-1832. Burt Brown Barker, Editor. Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, for the Oregon Historical Society, 1948. p. 32.

27 Ibid., Para. 19, pp. 37-38.

The fur returns were not sufficient to fill the ship, occupying perhaps only half of one deck level. In 1831 the Company experimented cautiously with shipping private cargo from the Sandwich Islands in an attempt to underwrite the vessel's return trip. But there was concern that the contract freight, mostly cattle hides and tallow, might damage the returns. The fur box was made airtight by pitching the seams and it was constructed in a portion of the upper hold, above the contract cargo. This was done for every subsequent shipment.[29] The 1842 loading of the Cowlitz illustrates the time involved in the preparation and loading of the vessel; "She returned to Fort Vancouver 17 September was unloaded, fur box made, and began to receive the furs on the 11 and dropped down the river on the 20th instant."[30]

Once these shipping methods were perfected, the Company was understandably loathe to risk further experimentation. The potential losses involved in an unsuccessful experiment discouraged risk-taking and emphasized the importance of a regular system. When both the 1839 Moose Factory and Columbia shipments were received in damaged condition the Governor and Committee made their position clear on shipping changes:

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28 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 1 September 1826, Para. 17. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941. p. 30.

29 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 29 February 1832, Para. 9. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A. Also Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 14 September 1832, Para. 10. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

30 John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 31 October 1842, Para. 41. The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-1844. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1943. p. 92.

> Until this year we have not for a length of time had occasion to complain of the damaged condition of the furs: the depreciation or loss caused by such damage, having in the Moose and Fort Vancouver shipments of last autumn been very heavy. That damage has evidently arisen in some instances more from a desire to improve upon the former mode of packing than from inattention, but whole alteration in that respect is not required by us, it may be infered that we have no grounds for complaint & that innovations and changes are therefore uncalled for.[31]

While constantly reiterating the theme of culling summer skins from the shipment, the Company refined the packaging standards. In 1838 the Committee issued general instructions on the subject:

> in packing the Furs for shipment at the Factory it is desirable that each package should contain but one description of furs, say all Martin, Otters, Beaver, Lynx, etc., instead of a variety of furs being in the same package as heretofore, and that the Lynx should be packed up with the Fur instead of the pelt outside, if received at the Factory that way. Such furs that cannot be put up in casks or cases should be covered with inferior Buffalo robes, parchment or large unseasoned Bear skins to preserve them from damage or injury by friction or rubbing.[32]

The harvest was now being sorted into 'products' at the depot, not in London.

While the actual shipping process, like the products being transported, received early and constant attention, the paperwork related to it did not. But by 1840 the Committee began to require a more accurate and systematic invoice system from the districts:

> We are surprised to observe that the packing accounts of furs at the depots rarely correspond with the district statements of returns and in very few instances correspond accurately with the unpacking accounts in the warehouse. The latter, we feel assured, are correct because they are counted over both by the revenue officers and by our own people in the warehouse.[33]

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31 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Duncan Finlayson, 3 June 1840, Para. 67. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

32 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to the Chief Factors and Traders of the Northern Council, 7 March, 1838, Para. 38. A.6/24, Series I, H.B.C.A.

They ordered that the packing be overseen by a Commissioned Gentleman or a:

> . . . clerk of correct habits of business who will not be satisfied with the tale [tally or count] of the subordinate employed in the stores, but will check their tale by passing every skin thro' his own hands and if that be done with any ordinary degree of system, we shall not have a recurrence of the irregularities that have discovered themselves in the packing accounts of late years.[34]

Accuracy as a business concept, the nineteenth century precursor of the commercial information network, was moving out from the counting house into the warehouses, cargo holds and the collection system of the Company's operations. This striving for "any ordinary degree of system" is more than a concern over missing furs or profits. Instructions had already been given to discard any sub-standard pelts, so the concern is not with wastage, but with inaccurate information and sloppy business practises. This is a very important step in the Hudson's Bay Company's evolution and, while Simpson is deserving of the credit given him for the reorganization of the Company, this ignores the fact that the nature of the business world, of which the H.B.Co. was only a small part, was changing.

The Transportation Route and Its Implications

Shipping the harvest of the Columbia Department involved several problems. Distance is the most obvious. It took about two months to ship furs from York Factory to London, but the returns vessels ran the risk of undue delay or an early winter forcing them to remain in the Bay until spring.[35] Shipping the Columbia

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33 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Duncan Finlayson, 4 March 1840, Para. 22. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

34 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Duncan Finlayson, 4 March 1840, Para. 22. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

returns to London involved a voyage that was more than three times longer, about 7 months, as Figure 12 shows. This varied according to weather conditions, and whether the return vessel was delayed while taking on additional freight to underwrite expenses at the Sandwich Islands. For example in 1831 the Ganymede left the Columbia River with the returns, crossed the bar at the mouth on 8 November, and arrived at Oahu on the 10 December. After taking on freight she departed for London on January 1, 1832, arriving in the Thames on May 15th. Over a decade later the time involved remained the same. In 1844 the Vancouver left the Columbia late in the season, on November 30, for the Sandwich Islands, departed there on January 5, and reached London 157 days later.[36] The returns vessel had to proceed south through the heat of the equator, around Cape Horn before the storm season, perhaps be delayed at Rio for repairs, and then across the equator again to London. The dangers of water and storm damage, the climatic changes, and the long period without airing had the potential for ruining the cargo.

Another problem involving the shipping of the returns was the danger of the loss of the returns vessel at the mouth of the Columbia river, an area of shifting sand bars. The Isabella, the William and Ann, and the Vancouver were all lost by the Company during this period. Surprisingly no returns vessels were lost. Manpower, specifically the lack of reliable Captains, caused more problems than

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35 In 1822 the Prince of Wales arrived at York Factory from Stromness in an unusually rapid passage of 48 days. George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 1 September 1822, Para. 1. Minutes of Council, Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-1831. R. Harvey Fleming, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1940. p. 376.

36 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 8 June 1832, Para. 18. A.6/22; Archibald Barclay to John McKenzie, 18 June 1844. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

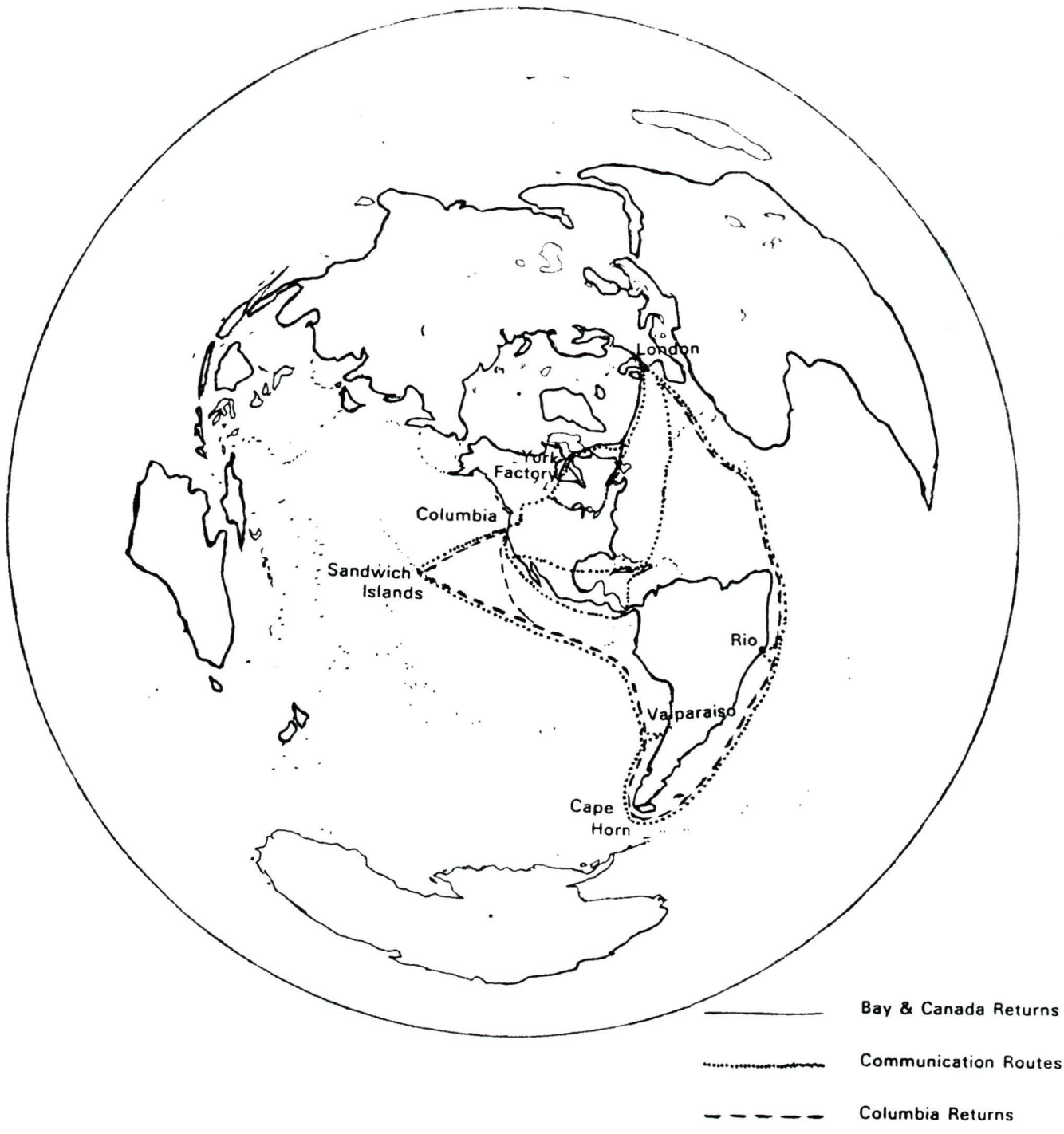

Figure 12: Export Routes of H.B.Co. Fur Returns

the bar at the mouth of the river. The negligence of alcoholic Captains topped the list, as Kaye Lamb has pointed out.[37] The most notorious example of this problem was Captain Leonard J. Hayne who left the Columbia with the 1829 returns and instead of proceeding to London, sailed into Hobartstown in Van Diemans land in a state of confusion. The local authorities took it upon themselves to replace him after certain conduct, and out of their own purse hired a replacement Captain to take the vessel to London.[38] While all of this was going on the Company was waiting for Hayne's arrival with the year's harvest, in complete ignorance of the events. Captain James Davidson, a victim of dropsy and fever, changed course on the return voyage, put in at Valparaiso on the 17th December, and died two days later.[39] The crews also caused problems, like the men of the Ganymede, Captain Hayne's former command, who were so "turbulent" in port at the Sandwich Islands that the new Captain had to request the aid of "Civil Powers" to confine them until departure.[40] The problems involved in shipping the returns obviously did not end when the cargo was stowed and the manifest handed over to the Captain in the Columbia river.

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37 The Letters of John McLoughlin: From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-1838. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941, p. lxxxvi - lxxxvii.

38 Ibid., and Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 June 1830, Para. 20. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

39 William Smith to George Simpson, 1 June 1827, Para. 43. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

40 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 8 June 1832, Para. 19. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The Committee wanted to have the Columbia returns in London by the last week in March:

> which would allow sufficient time to assort the Beaver and bring it to Sale before the departure of the Ships for the Bay and by this means the General accounts of the Outfit can be so far closed as to ascertain the amount of Profit on the trade it may be expedient to divide and to carry to account on the 1st of June of each year. We think the Vessel ought to leave the Columbia the end of August or the first week of September at the latest, and should not be detained for the arrival of any further quantities of furs[41]

In McLoughlin's acknowledgment of the dispatch he made no reference to meeting this schedule and the returns continued to leave in October or late November, probably because the Department could not meet such an early deadline. Several years earlier Simpson had commented in his 1829 dispatch from the Columbia that:

> We cannot make certain of having a return Cargo in readiness for Shipment, before the Month of September, which does not seem to occasion any delay or inconvenience, as we do not find the Captains willing to start earlier; and we have reason to believe, that by Sailing about the 1st of October they have time enough to double Cape Horn at the most favourable season, altho' all seasons are now considered nearly alike for that Navigation[42]

The shipping time had important structural implications on the annual cycle of the marketplace. Figure 13 shows the relationship between shipping of Returns from the three major sources of furs for the London H.B.Co. auctions. The Bay returns were made up of two exports; the Moose Factory ship often lagged slightly behind the York Factory vessel. Both arrived during late October or early

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41 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 1 May 1833, Para. 8. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

42 Part of Dispatch From George Simpson Esquire, Governor of Ruperts Land to the Governor & Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company London March 1, 1829. Continued and Completed March 24 and June 5, 1829. E.E. Rich, Editor. London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1947. p. 93.

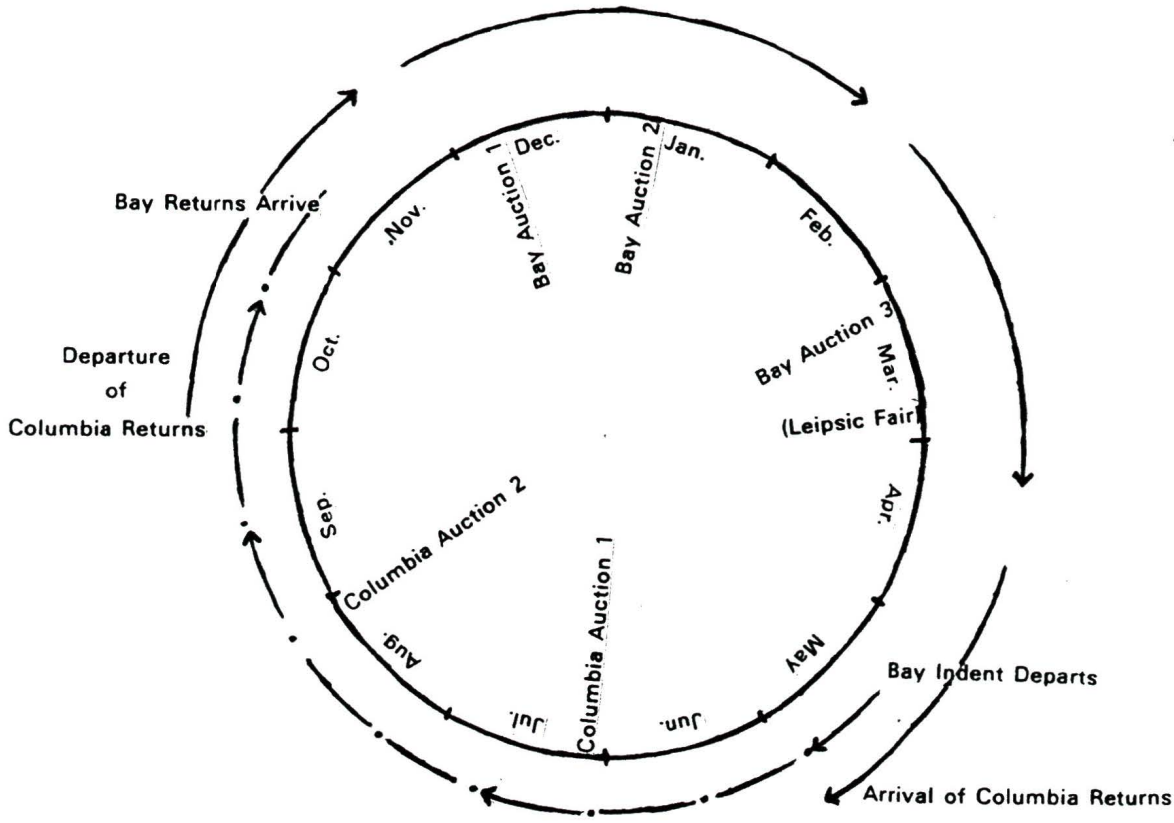

Figure 13: H.B.Co. Annual Export Cycle

November. Both returns were sold together, in three auctions. In December

(Figure 13, Bay Auction 1) the perishables and industrial products such as castoreum, isinglass, quills and feathers, and commercial leathers such as deer skins were sold. The January auction (Figure 13, Bay Auction 2) was almost exclusively made up of beaver and muskrats for the summer hat trade. Other furs, sold for export to Europe, were offered in March (Figure 13, Bay Auction 3), prior to the Easter trade fair at Leipsic, where the furriers met. The Indents of trade goods were then sent out at the end of May and the loaded vessels returned in September, reaching London two months later. Within seven months of the goods for one year being sent out, the first auction of the previous year's harvest took place.

In contrast to the efficient turn-around of the Bay ship, the Columbia Indent was just sailing from Europe as the return vessel put out from Fort Vancouver. Both ships left in October to take advantage of the optimum season for rounding Cape Horn and did not arrive until April, usually before the Bay Indent left. But due to the time it took to prepare the furs for auction it was not possible to forward this post-Leipsic auction information to the Northern Council. This meant that the possibility of manipulating supply, the Bay returns which were sent in late August, by either restricting supply or modifying quality, was denied to the Company. Nor could the books be closed on the Outfit year until the Columbia furs were disposed of.

In a perfect system the Company would have been able to offer its returns immediately before the Leipsic fair to speculators, or after it, in order to meet any excess demand. But the Columbia returns came to market too long after the main buying seasons. While the additional auctions made increased sales possible,

they were in fact out of step with the pace of the industry. This is illustrated by the lack of system in the Columbia auctions. Sometimes, if the returns were early, there would be two auctions, Continental furs and perishables in May and beaver and muskrat in July. But the order of the auctions changed as well as the months in which they occurred. In one year there were two separate auctions, in the next only one combined auction. In 1833 after rushing to prepare a late Columbia shipment for a mid-summer sale the Committee informed Simpson that:

> as we understand it will be an accommodation to the Buyers to have the Sale in August everything on hand will be prepared by the 7th of August and we hope to have a clear warehouse before the Return of the Ships from the Bay.[43]

What the Company had hoped would be a spring sale, timed to mesh with the Continental markets and the sailing schedule of the Bay ships had become -- although they probably did not fully appreciate this -- an administrative and a marketing liability assumed by the Company as a convenience for the buyers. The combined or beaver only sale in early August became a mid-August sale and then a late August/early September sale. The potential for market conflict between the sale of the Columbia returns, to which had to be added as much as another month for removal of the lots from the warehouse by the buyer, and the arriving Bay returns was increased. The Company now had to deal in a market where the buyers knew that the warehouse containing Columbia returns had to be cleared quickly before the arrival of the Bay returns. The vulnerability of the Hudson's Bay Company to a major price collapse had been potentially greatly increased by the consistently late Columbia returns.

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[43] Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 7 June 1833, Para. 48. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

Conclusion

The export process represents the Company's attempt at reconciling the needs of the market with the realities of trapping through a system of quality control and by an increasing emphasis on standardization of both products and business practices. Experimentation and flexibility was allowed in matters related to the cost of processing furs but not in the area of transporting them. By the 1840's the Company was concerned with the details of organizing the export in an accurate and systematic manner, questioning irregularities in packing lists and insisting on the separate packaging of the various forms of wildlife in order to simplify marketing.

The transportation system for the Columbia returns was also quite different from that of the Bay returns, being longer in duration and potentially more hazardous to both vessel and cargo. The timing of the arrival of the Columbia returns caused increased complexity in Company affairs. The Columbia returns gave the buyers an increased number of opportunities to make their annual purchases, while the limited time between the Columbia auction and the arrival of the Bay returns restricted the Company's market options and increased the buyers' power to dictate price.[44]

This wildlife harvest, the country produce of trapping activity, traded as an ecological bundle of the life cycles and diverse species of each post's hinterland, became transformed through this export process into 'products' of distinct

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[44] It is difficult to state whether the increase in the number of auctions was advantageous or harmful, but there may be a relationship between the frequency of opportunities of entry into the marketplace by both buyer and seller and the fluctuations of price. ie. Information increases opportunities and the 'swing' of prices increases directly in proportion to the use or refusal to make use of those opportunities.

qualities and grades. Skins, pelts, tusks, glands and organs had become extensions of the industrial ecology of the European marketplace.

Chapter 5

MARKETING WILDLIFE: COLUMBIA FURS AND THE EUROPEAN MARKET.

Introduction

In the auction room of Hudson's Bay House the value of the wildlife harvest of the Columbia was decided by the relative strength of supply and demand. Final value was determined in a lot-by-lot auction as the buyers, dealers, speculators and manufacturers' representatives worked their way through the harvest and arrived at a determination of value. The market rose and fell in both a general and a species-specific manner according to changes in fashion, weather patterns, military supply contracts, labour disruptions in Paris, the state of the money market, the consumers' willingness to buy new furs, unsold retail or wholesale inventories and the changing demographics of wildlife. In short, it was a business which was woven tightly into the fabric of the nations in which it existed, all of which, especially France, Germany and England, had representatives at the Hudson's Bay Company auctions in London. The American trading houses were also part of the market, but their influence reflected the competition that characterized the Columbia trade, although contracts of mutual benefit were often negotiated. The Hudson's Bay Company, as will be shown, also had plans of its own for controlling the marketplace.

This chapter examines the market by analysing what happened to the Columbia export when it reached Europe. While few of the Columbia Department products -- and at this point they were products -- were unique, they do serve to illustrate the influence that the marketplace had in the post's hinterland. While the collapse of the beaver market has attracted some interest among historians it should and will be examined further here. Intransigence in the face of a new product, the silk hat and its related technology, is the obvious theme when examining this event, but as one of the world's oldest multi-nationals the Hudson's Bay Company's survival in this clash with new technology is an aspect which has been under-emphasized. It is argued that the flexibility derived from the species mix of wildlife products allowed the Company to make a rapid 5-8 year transition from its traditional staple to what became the modern fur industry, and that the change began with the marten. Before examining this change in the industry one should have an understanding of how the Company managed the fur trade in Europe, an area which has received little or no attention from traditional historiography. The assignment of value to a fur lot was a complicated matter, requiring an unusual combination of standardization, preparation, product expertise, salesmanship and commercial information.

Market Information: Improving Accuracy and Speed.

The growth and rapid dissemination of commercial information as a component in the evolution of corporate industrialism is an area just beginning to be studied. James Beringer has pointed to auctions as an unstudied transitional period in commerce prior to the development of modern rational distribution

networks. The auction was a means of introducing, on a test basis, potential new products as 'odd lots'. For example, wolf and wolverine were first listed in the H.B.Co. catalogues as 'Sundries', and as demand increased they were sold as distinct catagories of fur, or products. The auction served as a processor of market information.[1] Allan Pred, in his studies of the relationships between industrial cities, has concluded that in the evolution of trade networks:

> there was a casual relationship of indefinable proportions between spatial biases in information availability, entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviour and the differential growth of leading urban system and subsystem units.[2]

These relationships are found in the inter-continental commerce in furs.

The Hudson's Bay Company's London auctions illustrate the increasingly rapid growth in the speed and accuracy with which trade information was disseminated. The acquisition of information began before the harvest physically arrived at dock-side in the Thames river. The Company's initial information on the harvest came while it was still at the individual posts through the district reports and general despatches. The information was not specific as to the numbers of all pelts, but it did identify trends in the major forms of wildlife: beaver, muskrat, and later, marten. The buyers and dealers also had their own access to information about the Company's harvest. The Committee told Simpson that there was little to be gained by stockpiling surplus beaver at York Factory during the declining prices of 1846:

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1 Beringer, James R. The Control Revolution. Technology and Economic Origins of the Information Society. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 144-153.

2 Pred, Allan R. Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1840. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, p. 283. Also see his companion volume: Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

> we see no advantage in retaining any of the beaver in the country, as the fact that such beaver is on hand is perfectly well known to the trade here, and we think it is much less exposed to deteriorating causes in our warehouse than in York Factory.[3]

How the buyers knew was not stated.

The next level of information was more precise, being the tallies sent by the spring express, prior to the loading of the harvest for export. From these the Company prepared the Fur Importation handbills, announcing to the trade what the shipment was expected to contain, but without reference to the quality of grade. In 1826 the Company published expected Columbia import figures along with the Bay imports in October, but as of June 1, 1827 they knew only the number of bales and puncheons in the Columbia cargo, which arrived June 27.[4] By 1837 accurate Columbia information was being published, usually in the month after the cargo's arrival, but sometimes prior to arrival. The use of increasingly accurate and published trade information in the nineteenth century impinged on the influence of the great annual markets such as the Easter fair at Leipsic which had previously determined market demand and price.[5]

As the returns vessel approached England the Company received news of its progress from several sources. Commercial traffic from the Sandwich Islands and from Rio brought news of the progress or delays in the import vessel's voyage. On rare occasions British naval vessels from Valparaiso passed along information

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[3] Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 3 April 1846, Para. 4. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

[4] William Smith to George Simpson, 1 June 1827, Para. 3. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

[5] This trade fair is conspicuous in its deliberate avoidance of any public presentation of trade information. "The Great Fair at Leipsic.", The Times, 25 October 1849, p. 7.

about the vessel's progress and the Mexican mail system was used until war with the United States disrupted it in the fall of 1847. The Company was very interested in the 1837 proposal for a steam packet to Chagres, on the Eastern side of Panama, which was to begin in 1841. The new system meant that the internal Company correspondence would arrive within 8-10 weeks.[6] However the steam company's financial problems made this route unreliable until the California Gold Rush of 1849 provided the incentive for the establishment of a dependable transportation infra-structure. The 1849 extension of steam packet service to San Francisco brought a demand by the Company's for monthly Departmental reports. Previous business communications had taken a full year from query to response.[7] These improvements in both public and private trade information reflect the stabilization and increasing efficiency of the business system.

This improving information system had a practical role in the exporting process. The letters gave the date of safe passage over the Columbia Bar or the vessel's final departure from the Sandwich Islands, allowing the Company to calculate the arrival of the vessel to within two weeks. As soon as the import vessel reached the British coastline it would drop a mail packet and cargo list at Beachy Head, which was forwarded to London before the ship had entered the Channel. With the ship still several days from dock-side on the Thames the warehouse had been alerted and unloading arrangements were ready.

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6 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 30 December 1839, Para. 27. A.6/ 225, Series I, H.B.C.A.

7 Archibald Barclay to Peter Skene Ogden, James Douglas and John Work, 28 December 1849. A.6/28, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The Warehouse and the Broker

While the growth in communications came primarily after 1835, the London warehouse arrangements were stabilized much earlier. The physical problem of storage led to standardization of package sizes soon after the merger; Customs regulations also encouraged systematic and regular practises throughout the period. However, the critical function filled by the Warehouse Keeper or Broker, whose skills were the result of long experience, symbolizes the continuity which was so much a part of the Company's success.

After the 1821 merger the Company faced problems in storing the returns while they were being prepared for auction. In 1824, after having rented additional warehouse space for two years, the Committee decided to extend their premises. They added another story to the old warehouse, converted some of the front houses to storage and covered in the spaces between the houses and the warehouse.[8] There was also a reference to "the blending of the property of the Capitalists" into the Joint-Stock Company, which may mean that title to the property was exchanged for stock.[9]

The standardization of bale sizes for the shipping and loading of furs was also to aid in handling by the warehouse staff and to prevent pilfering during shipment. The Committee gave a rare mention of the unloading process, which took about 10 days, when a shipment of oversize York Factory bales caused problems:

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8 The warehouse was on Fenchurch Street, a block in from the Thames River, between London Bridge and the Tower of London, and just behind Billingsgate Market. There were Company Offices at No. 2 Lime Street and the warehouse was behind them, facing out onto Fenchurch.

9 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 11 March 1825, Paragraphs 40 & 41. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

> . . .much too large particularly those containing 3000 Martin skins which are not only very unwieldy and difficult to get into the warehouse (as there is no crane) but in moving them in and out of the Ship and loading them in carts at the London docks the sides of the bales get torn open and the skins from their size (which makes them easy of concealment) are liable to plunder.[10]

Once the bales arrived in the warehouse they were inspected and reports were prepared on any damaged bales; this information, including the bale number and the post of origin if known, was sent to Simpson to investigate. This process, from docking to final inspection of the cargo in the warehouse took about two weeks.[11] The furs were then aired, dusted, and cleaned. After being prepared to market standards the furs were graded and sorted into auction lots.

However, before the responsibility for the cargo could be transferred from the Ship's Captain to the Warehouse Keeper and the bales unloaded, they had to be jointly inspected by the Keeper and British Customs to determine duty. The Columbia Department was also involved, providing Customs documentation for the cargo. In 1824 the Department was issued with a supply of:

> Certificates of Bonded Goods, Quarantine & Oil, to be signed by the Chief Factors and returned with each Cargoe from the Columbia in the packet (Quantities may be left blank)[12]

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10 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 12 March 1827, Para. 36. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

11 The Ganymede docked on May 31 in 1830 and the inspection of the bales, both onboard for Customs and by the Company in the warehouse, was completed by June 12. William Smith to George Simpson, 12 June 1830. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

12 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John Dugald Cameron, 22 July 1824, Packet List Item 6. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A. 'Train Oil', (rendered whale or seal oil produced by boiling blubber), or any salt cured seal skins sent had to be accompanied by a declaration that they were either the produce of an English settlement or British built vessel in order to be admitted. The Columbia also received copies of priced auction catalogues and reference works such as Ellis's British Tariff and Prince's Price Current with which to make decisions on whether new items were worth exporting.

The Company became liable for a high 20% Duty on any furs or pieces which were not enumerated or described in the Customs declaration and 75% on any dressed fur or skin. The duty on other furs varied by species, an undressed beaver skin being assessed a low 4 pence duty.[13] When the Custom House regulations were revised in 1842, McLoughlin was informed in a separate letter and the year's export was made to conform without incident.[14] The insistence on accuracy in bale size noted earlier was partially due to this regulatory inspection of commercial shipping.[15] After Customs inspection the furs were placed in Bond until redeemed by a buyer.

The Warehouse Keeper, William Hagell (1806-1837) or Edward Taylor (1839-1847), was now responsible for all aspects related to the furs until they were handed over to a buyer, had a very important function in the fur trade, as every pelt passed through his care and was graded under his supervision by a staff trained by him. He was responsible for the safety of the returns and also for dealing with wharfage, transportation from the dock to the warehouse, storage and protection of the returns, and supervision of the airing and cleaning of the returns. He held the final authority in determination of grade and quality standards, made decisions on the sorting and ordering of auction lots and advised

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13 For a description of the duties see Frewin, Richard. A Digested Abridgment of the Laws of the Customs. London: T. Egerton, 1819, pp. 282-296. Also Poland, Henry. Fur-Bearing Animals In Nature and Commerce. London: Gurney & Jackson, 1892. p. lii.

14 Archibald Barclay to John McLoughlin, 27 March 1843. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

15 For example, the Company Secretary pointed out in one instance that duty had to be paid on the full invoice even if the bale was missing skins, and any undeclared pelts were subject to seizure. See William Smith to Thomas Thain, 29 October 1822, fos. 61d-62. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

about suitable auction dates. He acted as the Company's Broker, with his name, and professional reputation, appearing on the bottom of both the published importation lists and in the auction catalogues. He is also noticeably absent from any academic study of the fur trade.[16]

In 1823 the Committee set out rules of conduct and linked salaries to the volume and success of the fur sales. The Keeper and warehouse clerks were to attend business from 9-6 daily, with 1 hour for dinner. The Committee ordered that no Warehouse Keeper be allowed to act as a Broker for the buyers and that to "receive any money from the Buyers on any pretence whatever" would result in instant dismissal. Salaries for the Warehouse Keeper, William Hagell, and the Assistant Keeper, Edward Taylor were based on a commission of 0.5% of the net proceeds of the import and the same percentage of the proceeds of the auction sales, of which Hagell received two thirds and the other third went to Taylor. One of Hagell's sons was apprenticed to his father, but without salary.[17]

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16 A search of the biographical index at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives provided no information on any of the nineteenth century Warehouse Keepers and Brokers. William Hagell and Edward Taylor do not appear in any of the indexes in the Hudson's Bay Record Society publications examined, nor are they in Thomas Rennie McCloy's's "Fur-Trade Biographies: An Index.", British Columbia Historical Quarterly, v. XV (1951), pp. 203-212. Hagell's name is found on importation lists which pre-date the 1821 merger. Webber and Oakey are listed as Brokers for the Company's furs in 1800, Francis Oakey is listed as sole Broker in 1805 and the following year Hagell's name appears on the import list with Oakey. In 1812 the names of Hagell & Sterzel appear and in 1817 William Hagell name appears alone. He continued as Broker until 1837 and Edward Taylor's name appears from 1839-1847.

17 Minute, 10 November 1823. A.3/1, Series I, H.B.C.A. In 1848 the name William Hagell reappears on the Columbia/North West import lists until 1870. This may be the unnamed apprenticed son, although a notation in the Secretary's Press Cuttings Book lists a William Hagell as deceased on 9 December 1870. (A.64/38, fo. 7, Series I, H.B.C.A.) After 1871 Edward Harris is listed as Broker.

The preparation of the skins for market remains a somewhat obscure art, given the lack of contemporary sources. It is likely that Henry Poland's 1891 description of the method -- he draws distinctions between various nations' fur industries -- is typical of the early half of the century:

> The skins are first placed in a lye of alkali; when the pelt has become soft, the skins are tubbed, and then shaved by passing them over a large knife, placed in an upright position; they are next buttered, and put in a large tub of sawdust by men half naked, who tread on them for some time, the heat of their bodies rendering the leather soft and supple; they are then beaten out and finished.[18]

It is unlikely that the Hudson's Bay Company processed all the returns to this extent, the labour and time involved being costly and an expense better passed along to the buyers, some of whom bought for export to Europe where the furs were sold again. But some of the more valuable furs such as silver fox and sea otter, being fewer in number, may have been fully processed to enhance their value.

After processing, the furs were sorted by grade, determined by colour, texture, thickness, in the case of beaver by weight, as well as according to the time of year caught and the maturity and size of the animal's pelt. Grades may have been adjusted according to market demand and the volume of supply. Each pelt differs and so too does the opinion of each grader, therefore continuity for the marketplace was a function of the experience of the grader. The longevity of Brokers, such as William Hagell's 31 years with the Company, reflects the experience necessary to divide the importation into auction lots.

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18 Poland, Henry. Fur-Bearing Animals, p. xlvii.

The Auction and the European Market

The auction itself was held in Lime Street, after bidders had inspected the lots with the aid of a catalogue which listed the total number of furs of each species arranged in descending order by grade classification. The earliest catalogue which includes Columbia returns was the last sale 'by candle'.[19] Samuel Pepys described the sale of naval vessels and supplies by candle in the 1660's. Bidding began when one inch of candle was lit and ended with the last bid as the flame went out. He commented "and good sport it was to see how, from a small matter bid at first, they would come to double and treble the price of things."[20] and "how backward men are at first to bid; and yet when the candle is going out, how they bawl and dispute afterwards who bid the most first."[21] The auctions following this were probably less entertaining, although tradition had its place. Poland tells us that while the sale was conducted by the Warehouse Keeper in his role as Broker, the bids were knocked down or gaveled by the Governor or another member of the Committee.[22]

The London Minute Book shows that on January 16, 1824 a draft of conditions of sales was approved and adopted. Additional conditions were added but from 1828 onwards the terms of sale remained basically unchanged.[23] The lots went to the highest bidder, who was required to pay for them in full prior to removal from

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19 Wednesday, 2 February 1825. A.54/29, Series I, H.B.C.A.

20 Pepys, Samuel. The Diary of Samuel Pepys. Latham, Robert and William Matthews, Editors. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970. v. II, p. 45.

21 Ibid., v. III, p. 185.

22 Poland. Fur-Bearing Animals., p. xxxviii.

23 Minute. 16 January 1824. A.3/1, Series I, H.B.C.A.

the warehouse no later than one month after the sale. Interest, storage and beating fees for the furs were charged after that date. If a buyer defaulted he was liable for any losses incurred in reselling the lot. Government regulations required the lots to remain relatively small in size in order to make quantities available to small businesses[24] and the Company often made up small lots of mixed species when there were not sufficient numbers of a species to interest buyers.

The auction year consisted of several public offerings. Non-fur produce such as quills, bedding feathers, isinglass, and the ever unsuccessful buffalo tongues were auctioned in December. The bulk of the York and Moose Factory beaver, castoreum and muskrat were sold in early January, when the largest purchases of beaver were made. They were bought for the summer hat trade.[25] The other furs were brought to auction in March, in time to compete with or be resold at the Leipsic fur mart.

The Columbia exports were sold in two auctions. Before 1832 the beaver and its substitute, the muskrat, were offered first, often in June, in order to allow the hatters time to work the product for their fall market. The 'small' furs, other species including mammals as large as the grizzly bear, were offered to Continental furriers, export houses and speculators in August. The late arrival of the 1833 Columbia returns meant that the beaver and muskrat pelts could not be

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24 The conflict between wealthy furriers, artesians and the skinners guild resulted in the insertion of a small lots clause in the Company's 1690 charter from the House of Commons. This issue, and the related ambivalence of the H.B.Co. over Navigation Act protectivism or direct sales from North America to Europe is dealt with in: Rich, E.E., "Russia and the Colonial Fur Trade", Economic History Review, Second Series, v. VII (1954-55), p. 319.

25 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 29 February 1832, Para. 14. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

ready for auction until mid-summer, which was inconvenient to the buyers for the hat trade. The sale, as mentioned in the last chapter, was postponed until August, a time more fitting for the hat trade's manufacturing cycle. With the tardiness in the dispatch of the Columbia returns, the late August sale became more and more a feature of the trade. Auctions which were originally intended for two distinct markets, hatters and Continental furriers, were often combined.

After 1838, separate Columbia importation lists were printed a month before the auction and the catalogues were distributed a week before sale. As the Bay ships were expected at the end of October, the failure of a September sale, or even a large buyer who exceeded the month allowed after the sale for removing the goods, had the potential for creating serious storage problems and interfering with the larger Bay returns.

The Company faced other problems in disposing of the importation and specifically in dealing with the buyers. "They grumble as is their custom", was how Secretary Archibald Barclay described them to Simpson.[26] As a group the buyers, or as the Company called them 'the trade', were a very closed community. A high demand for bear skins to fill military contracts in Germany and England caused a bidding war at the August 1852 auction, when an 'outsider' tried to bypass the London dealers:

> The trade are jealous of interlopers, and a gentleman from Hungary, whom they looked upon as coming under that description, became a bidder personally at the sale, the consequence of which was that they ran up the lots against him to an enormous extent, one lot fetching £10-1 per skin -- a thing which has not happened for fifty years.[27]

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26 Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 20 February 1852. A.6/29, Series I, H.B.C.A.

27 Archibald Barclay to Sir George Simpson, Aug. 29, 1851. A.6/29, Series I,

The 'trade' had a dynamic of its own, in 1836 fiercely competing with each other, driving up prices and then the following year forming a united front against the Company for reasons that mystified William Smith, the Company's Secretary. The Columbia beaver and muskrat were put up for auction on June 21 and September 6, 1837. The result was the same on both occasions:

> from circumstances at present unknown, not an individual would bid for a single lot, and as a result they were taken in; a party has however since made an offer...from the general state of trade anticipate a considerable reduction on the prices latterly obtained for these articles.[28]

The lots were sold on a private contract to a buyer who two days later, agreed to take them all -- perhaps it was one of those buyers who had refused to bid earlier. So the market, composed of a diverse group of buyers, was a composite of emotional and self-serving behaviour, as well as the more predictable rational responses. The Company had to be prepared to respond to all of these factors.

Climate also affected the state of the market. Weather, which determined the thickness of fur-bearing animals' coats in North America also had an influence on the consumers' preference for fur garments in Europe. The unusual cold spell in 1838 in Europe raised Company hopes for a strong market for small furs. Mild weather in 1842 depressed prices. Barclay, faced with a high inventory in 1846, wrote cheerfully to Simpson that:

> Fine cold weather has set in and if it continues any considerable time there will be a good opportunity for clearing off stocks . . . and that no doubt will have an important effect on next year's sales.[29]

H.B.C.A.

28 William Smith to James Keith, 6 Sept. 1837. A.6/24, Series I, H.B.C.A.

29 Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 3 December 1846. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The cold winter of 1847 was good for the fur trade, which should have meant that the Columbia returns would have found a strong market demand and depleted inventories, but another factor intervened. The buyers and dealers made "great complaints that ladies are satisfied with repairing the old instead of purchasing new."[30] Consumer spending was down and so even cold weather could not always be relied upon as a market force.

The late arrival of cargo could also disrupt the market for furs. Early winter ice in Hudson's Bay trapped the Bay ships in 1833-34, disrupting the marketplace, causing lost profits and interest on the delayed cargo and decreasing the value of the following year's returns because of over-supply. The cargo of one vessel, the Prince Rupert was submerged in arctic waters, but after careful drying most of it was saved. In order to protect its control of the market, the Company negotiated a compromise with the Underwriters of the cargo, settling for £11,000 rather "than allowing the cargo to be sold for the benefit of the Underwriters, which would have reduced prices and injured the sale of the other cargoes."[31]

Political, social and economic events often affected the market. The approach of cholera in 1832 resulted in quarantines on vessels and all travelers, including commercial buyers.[32] Social unrest and diplomatic tension may have been part of the causes behind the spate of military contracts for items such as bear skins that have already been touched on. Political unrest on the Continent in

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30 Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 16 January 1847. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

31 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 10 December 1834, Para. 5. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

32 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 29 February 1832, Para. 15. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

1848 depressed fur prices:

> The decline has been principally in the finer description of Martins, which are usually exported to France, where, owing to political causes, all trade is at present paralized.[33]

This interruption of the French fur industry was seized upon by German dealers and manufacturers, and speculators bought heavily through the next fall and winter for the German commercial market.[34] The general state of the economy and the money market also depressed prices, especially during the 1840's. The Committee blamed the drop in demand for furs in 1840 on:

> the distress that pervades the mercantile interests generally and the consequent scarcity of money in England. That distress and scarcity are but of a temporary nature, and we have no doubt will soon be succeeded by an improved aspect of affairs in the commercial world, when an amendment may be expected in the fur trade, in common with all other branches of commerce.[35]

The 1847 drop of 25% in marten prices was also attributed to the state of the money market and other unspecified factors.[36]

Many influences played upon both buyer and seller in the fur auctions. Using the word 'external' to describe these influences is incorrect because this industry and its sales process was not distinct from the daily lives of buyer, seller, consumer, nor from the social complexities of climate, economy, and politics. While these factors, such as a cold winter in England and political unrest in Paris,

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33 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 April 1848, Para. 3. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

34 Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 25 January 1850. A.6/28, Series I, H.B.C.A.

35 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Duncan Finlayson, 4 March 1840, Para. 2. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

36 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 7 April 1847, Para. 2. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

had an influence on the strength of the market, their influence on the Department and at the level of the post was diffused. They were forces the marketing process was able to absorb. Two species illustrate forces that the trading system had difficulty in regularizing. One was the beaver, whose rapid price collapse during the 1840's caused the Committee to re-direct trade at the level of the post, as further discussion will show. The other was the muskrat, whose demographic fluctuations threatened the stability of the market, and also provided opportunities for speculation. The next section will illustrate how the Company attempted to regulate the supply of muskrats at both the level of the shipping depot and in the marketplace, defensive strategies which proved ineffectual during the 'beaver crisis'.

Wildlife Cycles, Speculators and Hat Manufacturers

Prior to the 1840's beaver was sold not as a fur but as a source of wool. It was used to make a visually appealing and functionally waterproof hat felt. [37] The outer or guard hairs of the pelt were removed and discarded, and it was the inner layer of fur which was used by feltmakers. The fur could be readily matted together to form felt 'plate' or blank because the inner hairs had barbs which interlocked. The feltmaker placed a measured amount of shaved fur, or wool, on a flat surface and caused it to oscillate by passing a vibrating 7 foot bow, of a design similar to a giant violin bow, just above the pile causing the loose fur to rise up in a dense inter-locking mound. The wool was then flattened and the

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37 For an overview see Skynner, Caroline L. "The History of the Beaver and the Beaver Hat." Unpublished seminar paper from Dr. Jennifer S.H. Brown's Northern Historical Studies course, University of Winnipeg, 1984. PP 1984-7, H.B.C.A.

process repeated.[38]

It is in this part of the hat manufacturing process that the inter-relationship of wildlife species in the fur trade takes an interesting turn. The feltmaker, and in England the process remained a craft until machinery made its appearance in the late 1850's, selected a mix of furs for the plate according to the type, and more importantly, the quality and price of the hat for which the felt was intended. This series of choices made by the individual feltmaker is a perfect symbol for the larger choices being made by the buyers and the consumers in the marketplace, and illustrates the characteristics of the industry as a whole. Unlike pelts selected for use as furs, the hatmaker often preferred paler skins with a short coat.[39] Rabbit fur was used as the base fur for the upper section of the hat with beaver wool added for strength, water resistance and appearance. The felt for the brim had a higher proportion of beaver because it was subject, like a house gutter, to more risk of water. The cheaper the hat, the less beaver fur used. (Beaver was sold for 17-32 shillings per pound, of which only a portion was the inner fur. Additional costs were incurred in extracting this inner 'wool'.) In the selection of raw materials the smaller muskrat, which sold for from 3-13 pence each, depending on supply, provided the industry with a cheap substitute for beaver.

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38 The physics of the operation may have been related to static electricity or acoustical resonance, indicating the existence of a 'lost' technology. A diagram and the dimensions of the bow are given, along with a full description of the process in "Hats.", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910, v. XII, p. 60.

39 The beaver from the mild climate of the Columbia was said to be more useful than the Northern York Factory pelts, which were darker and longer. William Smith to George Simpson, 22 January 1827, and 1 June 1827, Para. 43. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The fur obtained from the 'lowly' and plentiful muskrat was also waterproof and its population fluctuations meant that periodically the market was flooded with a cheap material that could be substituted for beaver. Although somewhat aware that the increases were part of a recurring pattern, the Company could not predict when the cycles would occur. But they did have a good understanding of how long the peaks would last and what would cause them to end. They attempted to protect the market from these inundations.

The Company constantly attempted to deflect muskrat surpluses out of the London marketplace through private export contracts in order to support beaver prices. The million skins taken in the cycle year of 1829 was a very real threat to the trade's stability. The Company reacted by limiting the importation and paying close attention to animal demographics, knowing from experience that such an increase was of limited duration and would, as it was in this case, be followed by an equally drastic collapse in muskrat populations:

> it is evident that the importation of next year will be small compared with that of the present, owing to a mortality which has seized the tribe [muskrats] in several parts of the Country, we beg leave to suggest that a part only be exposed to sale this year, and the remainder held until the following, when 'tis probable they will command better prices.[40]

A large increase in lynx and muskrat shipped in 1839 drew this reaction:

> we do not wish that more than half the quantities shipped. . . this year, but that the surplus be laid aside for shipment the following season by which time those animals will in all probability become scarce as we rarely find they continue numerous three years in succession.[41]

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40 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 30th June, 1829. D.4/96, Series I, H.B.C.A.

41 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 4 March 1840, Para. 23. A.6/25, Series I, H.B.C.A.

The down-side of these demographic cycles was equally important to the Company's position in the market. After such a 'crash' the wholesalers in the industry rushed to take control of the previous over-supply in anticipation of a shortage. Simpson wrote in 1831 that he suspected that the heavy buying by Astor's fur company was such a speculation:

> We are of opinion that it is in the anticipation of such scarcity Messrs. Astor & Company have purchased so largely, not for immediate consumption, as we have reason to believe they were at the time this purchase was made large holders of the American Fur Company's Musquash, but on speculation with a view to benefit by the demand which the probable scarcity will occasion. And as this falling off in quantity must increase the prices for all description we have not thought it advisable to destroy the small inferior skins as Your Honors have suggested, which we trust You will approve.[42]

In addition, the cycles provided inter-market competition. The Hudson's Bay Company had little or no control over the entry of American muskrats onto the London market or directly from North America to the European continent. The American Fur Company's entry into the English market caused the Company to adjust its transportation schedule in 1834 in order to beat the arrival of its furs to market and gain the benefit of first prices.[43] The muskrat, because of the speculative opportunities in the sudden appearance and disappearance of large numbers, became an important factor in this competition between and in both the English and American markets.[44]

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42 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 18 July 1831, Para. 5. D.4/98, Series I, H.B.C.A. Astor had approached the Company about contracting for muskrat in 1827 but the Company wanted a guarantee that he would take 70-100,000 a year at a fixed price for 5-7 years, a dangerous contract given the fluctuations. See William Smith to George Simpson, 30 May 1827. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

43 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 March 1834, Para. 28. A.6/23, Series I, H.B.C.A.

44 The 1835 total importation of 1,111,646 muskrats came to a market that had

Muskrat returns were the subject of speculation by smaller dealers and houses. When an 1824 contract for a large sale to an American house fell through "on a flimsy pretext", the Committee consoled themselves that this meant the consumers would have to come to the English market.[45] The next year's sale of 150,000 skins to Henry Carey & Co. of New York was made on the condition that the skins not be resold on the English market.[46] This contract also fell through and the Company reminded Carey that he was liable for any loss incurred in reselling the skins.[47] Again in the 1840's, the large numbers of muskrats harvested caused the Company to restrict the next year's importation. [48] This continued to be a characteristic problem of the trade, in 1846 one American dealer alone brought 600,000 skins into the English market.[49]

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been paying 9.5 pence per skin, giving the theoretical value of £44,000 to the import. But the failure of the market to absorb these quantities is shown by the prices given for the 1837 shipment of 838,549 skins, 3 pence each, or a book value of £10,000 if all were disposed of. A.54/, Series I, H.B.C.A.

45 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 2 June 1824, Para. 54. A.6/20, Series I, H.B.C.A.

46 William Smith to Henry Carey & Co., 16 June 1825. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

47 Due to the depressed state of the market the Committee decided to bend on the issue and accepted £300 compensation for the loss when the muskrats were resold. William Smith to Henry Carey & Co., 1 February 1826 and 12 June 1826. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

48 In-country posts continued to trade for them. This was in part because of the symbiotic nature of trade relations at the post, to deny the furs to other traders, and to give the Company enough stock to influence market prices if needed.

49 Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 3 February 1846. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

While 'Galbraithian' historiography stresses the element of competition between British and American fur traders on the frontier, these divisions are not as clear in the marketplace, where furs moved back and forth through private contracts and speculative practices. True, the muskrats of the Columbia were a small proportion of this overall trade, but they were part of this speculative 'penny-stock' trade, where a price change of 2 pence per skin decided profit or disaster, affecting the value of not only Columbia muskrat but, because of substitution, also the market for beaver.

The muskrat cycle did create problems at the Departmental and post levels. The large numbers of easily trapped muskrats placed a drain on post inventories during the first year of a high cycle and created an inventory problem both during and after the peak:

> The immense trade made for two or three successive years in the article of Rats was the cause of the increased demands from all parts of the country for goods, which led to the overstock we now have of many articles. This overstock will however be carried off by the outfits of next and the following years. . .[50]

But in general, the system was self-regulating, able to absorb the muskrat surpluses whose roughly three year peak cycle was well known to fur traders.

While muskrats were capable of disrupting the marketplace by virtue of their sheer numbers, the Company had worked out a series of responses which could be implimented either in London or at the shipping depot. The interest shown in the speculative nature of the down-side of their demographic cycles shows that there were even opportunities for those prepared to gamble. The image that emerges is one of a slightly passive adaptation by the Company as they attempted to create

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50 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10th August 1832, Para. 3. D.4/99, Series I, H.B.C.A.

an orderly system of business, leaving the bulk of the speculation to others. But the Company was not passive -- it did not succumb to the collapse of the beaver market. It responded vigorously and in fact was involved in an aggressive long-term strategy to gain market dominance in a specific area.

Beaver Conservation and Market Domination

Beaver, the historic staple of the fur trade, suffered a serious collapse, as the volume and price graphs in Figures 14 and 15 show. During the 1840's the silk hat, symbolic of changing culture in the age of machinery and steam, caught the consumers' attention and sense of fashion. The Company was slow to recognize the change in fashion and to respond to the challenge of what it regarded as an inferior product. A simple explanation would be to attribute this to an inability to accept the social changes, of which fashion was symptomatic, which were occurring throughout Europe. But this is not true. The Company may not have approved of disruption and change in the social order but it was neither blind nor unwilling to adapt. The failure of the Company to accept the decline of the beaver wool industry was rooted in its own plans for re-vitalizing the industry by drastically lowering prices, in order to compete and ultimately to make it economically unfeasible for other traders and companies to continue in opposition. If successful this policy would have given the Hudson's Bay Company control over both the marketplace and the resource.

This was to be done through a policy of conservation in the districts of which the Company had undisturbed possession. The policy's strength lay in the advantage which the Company's size and market longevity gave it over its

competitors. Its weakness lay in the assumption that market demand would continue unchanged. The conservation policy was also difficult to implement because of the incentive system the Company's managerial organization was based on. The adoption in 1821 of the wintering partner system of the North West Company, linking salaries and pensions to the success of the concern, carried within it a liability. It perpetuated a personal profit motive and a frontier machismo which came into conflict with the implementation of the Company's conservation strategy.

Old habits and the related system of prestige could not be easily changed in practise. In the past, individual traders much like the individual Native trapper had been judged by the Company and their peers according to the size of returns generated. Under the conservation policy Simpson stated: "now we must judge of their talents by the quality alone not the quantity." [51] Convincing the Commissioned Gentlemen in Council to agree to decrease the returns was one thing. Putting the changes put into practise was another:

> many of them give it their best attention, which a few, who either cannot or will not understand either their own interests or the interests of the country and natives, give it but very little attention. They all, however, while assembled here, talk of the subject as if fully convinced of its importance, and make fair promises of giving it their best support, but I fear that many of them lose sight of it before they reach their wintering grounds.[52]

Arthur Ray has attributed the failure of this conservation strategy to opposition by American, Metis and Native trappers, all of whom were disinclined

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51 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 20 August 1826, Para. 30. D.4/89, Series I, H.B.C.A.

52 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 August 1832, Para. 27. D.4/99, Series I, H.B.C.A.

to absorb the related short run losses for the benefit of the Company.[53] While this is true it ignores what Simpson clearly viewed as a managerial resistance, structurally rooted in the profit system of the Company. In 1841 Simpson, faced with an accelerating decline of beaver stocks throughout the districts, placed the blame on the Commissioned Gentlemen:

> but all our endeavours I am sorry to say, have been fruitless, owing very much in my opinion to the disinclination of many Gentlemen in charge of Districts & posts, to occasion a reduction in the returns, even as a measure of preservation to the country, from an over anxiety as to the appearance of turning their charges to profitable account, and in some cases perhaps, from a mistaken notion that by curtailing the returns they were injuring their own immediate interests.[54]

Few traders were willing to sacrifice their short term income in favour of their successor's, who would reap the benefits, or, although they would not say so in Council, the Company's long term position.

By instituting conservation strategies the Company sought to combine the advantage of the scale of their operations with a monopolist control over the 'nursing' or 'recruiting' of beaver stocks, enabling them to supply sufficient beaver to:

> meet extended consumption and secure to the Company the entire control of the Trade, as, [in] the countries exposed to opposition the expenses are so heavy that those who now pursue it will not then be able to meet us in the home market.[55]

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53 Ray, Arthur J. "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade.", Journal of Historical Geography, v. 1, 1 (1975), p. 57.

54 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 20 June 1841, Para. 31. D.4/109, Series I, H.B.C.A.

55 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 10 July 1828, Para. 9. D.4/92, Series I, H.B.C.A.

If the plan had succeeded it would have meant the end of the Columbia Department's frontier competition: "and at once put an end to opposition in those Countries where we have no exclusive privilege, as the high prices of Beaver alone enables the small Traders to continue".[56]

The Committee supplied Simpson with a mathematical argument for the Northern Council which demonstrated the benefit of this policy over a seven year period in a hypothetical district. If the district produced 1,200 pelts annually without depleting stocks this would amount to 8,400 pelts exported in total. If conservation took place, restricting the harvest to 400 pelts for each of the first two years, 600 the following, 800 the next, 2,800 in the fifth year, 14,000 in the sixth and 20,000 in the seventh year, the total harvest would be 39,000 pelts, with a living surplus of 38,800 animals remaining in the district, available for any increased demand.[57] The Committee acknowledged that this model was no doubt overly optimistic, but that even with a 50% error the benefit was clear. They would then be able to bring to market twice the volume of fur and even at half the going price, squeeze their competitors who faced the same Outfitting costs as the Company for trade goods.[58] Unspoken is the implicit lowering of the value of a beaver pelt at the trading post, which such a system would require if the harvest was doubled. The Company would either absorb the loss in trade goods or Native trappers would have to bring in twice the number of furs for the same amount of

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56 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 16 January 1828, Para. 10. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

57 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 23 February 1826, Para. 36. A.6/21, Series I, H.B.C.A.

58 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 25 October 1832, Para. 14. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

goods. In some manner the tariff would have to be adjusted, although an increased beaver population would probably require less proportionate time and labour to harvest.

The Company understood that it was not possible to increase the consumption of beaver in Europe unless there was a very material drop in price. Until they were in a position to achieve this they restricted the importation to maintain the high prices needed to subsidize conservation. The Committee told Simpson in 1830, a decade before the market collapse:

> it is more profitable to keep the importation moderate until the animals become so numerous as to enable you to double the importation, which then might be sold so cheap as to force a larger consumption either by means of exportation or by making Hats so cheap as to induce a larger class of the people of this Country to use Beaver hats. We consider the effect on the market this year, holds out the strongest inducement to preserve in the plan of nursing the Country, as it shews that such an increase of quantity as has been made this year only diminishes Profits, and that it would have been better if the animals had been allowed to live and multiply.[59]

It was a calculated gamble, which, given the declining numbers of trapping parties in the Columbia in the late 1830's and their problems obtaining the financing of supplies from St. Louis, appeared to be working. But the Company had under-estimated the extent to which beaver populations had been eroded and the extent to which consumer preference was irreversibly changing, a change which the Company's traditional buyers had no choice but to follow or go under.[60] The slow reaction of the Hudson's Bay Company to the silk hat's erosion of its traditional markets was a reluctance to abandon the investment in the system that

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59 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 3 March 1830, Para. 2. A.6/22, Series I, H.B.C.A.

60 This should be qualified with the acknowledgment that we know very little about the buyers and whether they adapted to this change or were made redundant by the technologies associated with silk hat production.

this long-term market strategy had attempted to achieve.

The first blow to the market occurred in the Columbia auction on August 31, 1842. Secretary William Smith, in forwarding catalogues of the sale to James Keith in Lachine wrote that the demand for beaver had fallen off considerably as a result of the silk hat's popularity.[61] In their Spring letter to George Simpson, the Committee wrote:

> From an extraordinary freak of fashion, the article [Beaver], moreover, has of late fallen much into disuse in hat making, silk hats being principally worn at present; the consequence is that it's value has greatly decreased in the market, as will be seen by the accompanying sales catalogues. This depression however is but temporary, as no doubt exists that beaver hats will soon again come into more general use, when of course an amendment may be expected in the price. . . . The martens on the other hand, as you will observe by the late sales, have commanded very high prices.[62]

The Committee was wrong and prices began to plummet auction after auction. While the Columbia furs were being prepared for auction in the warehouse, the male population of London was turning out for the summer promenade, dressed like Prince Albert in the new fashions.

The August sale in 1843 proved that a careful presentation of "best Beaver" was not sufficient to rally prices, which continued to drop.[63] To McLoughlin the Committee wrote:

> The continually decreasing price, when considered in connexion with a constantly decreasing supply, holds out no cheering prospect for the future, unless the tide of fashion change, and the consumption of Beaver in the manufacture of hats become more general than it has been for some time past. We hope that the low price may have some

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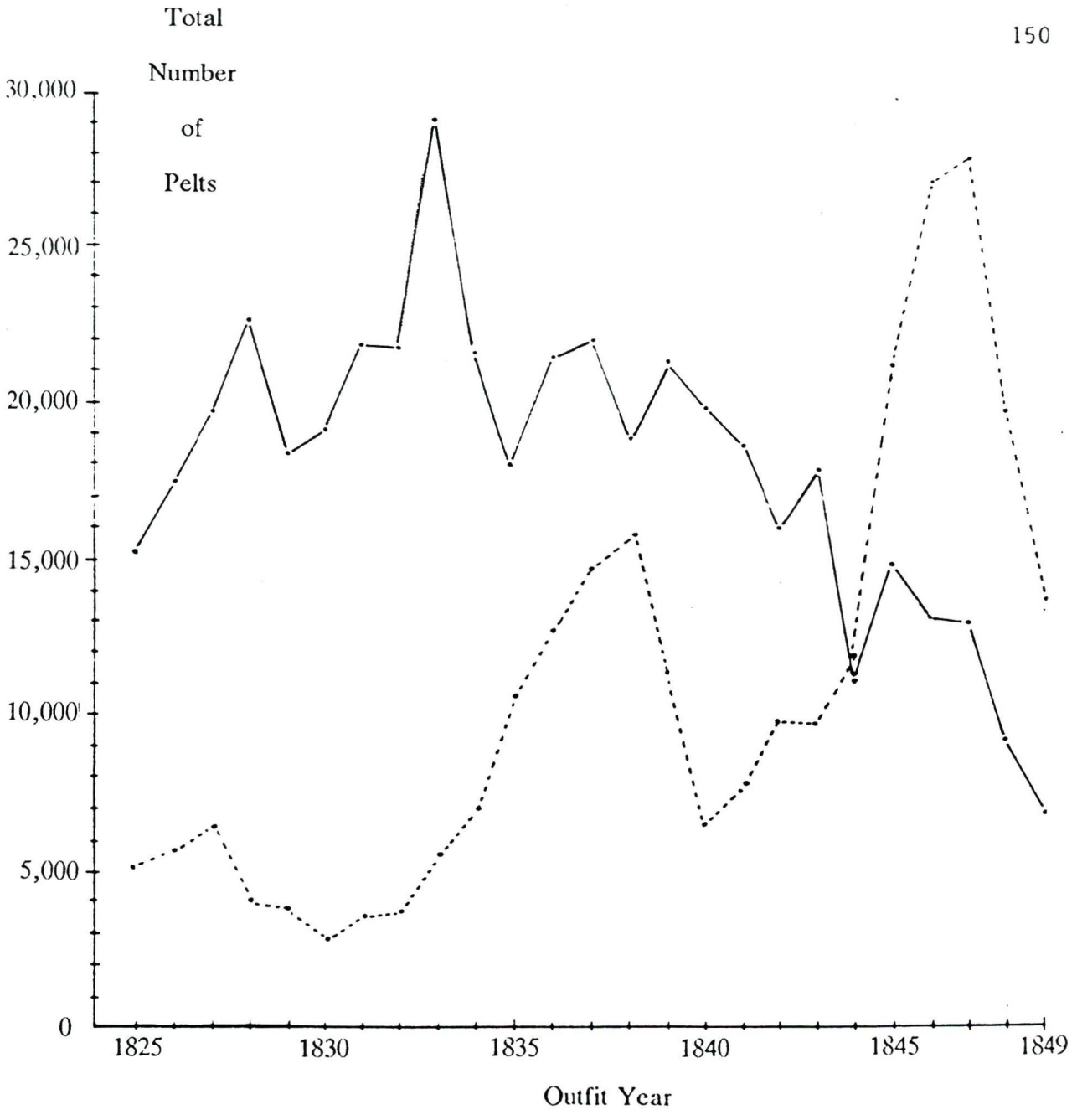
61 William Smith to James Keith, 3 September 1842. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

62 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 1 April 1843, Para 23. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

63 Archibald Barclay to James Keith, 4 September 1843. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.



LEGEND

Beaver Production ·—·—·

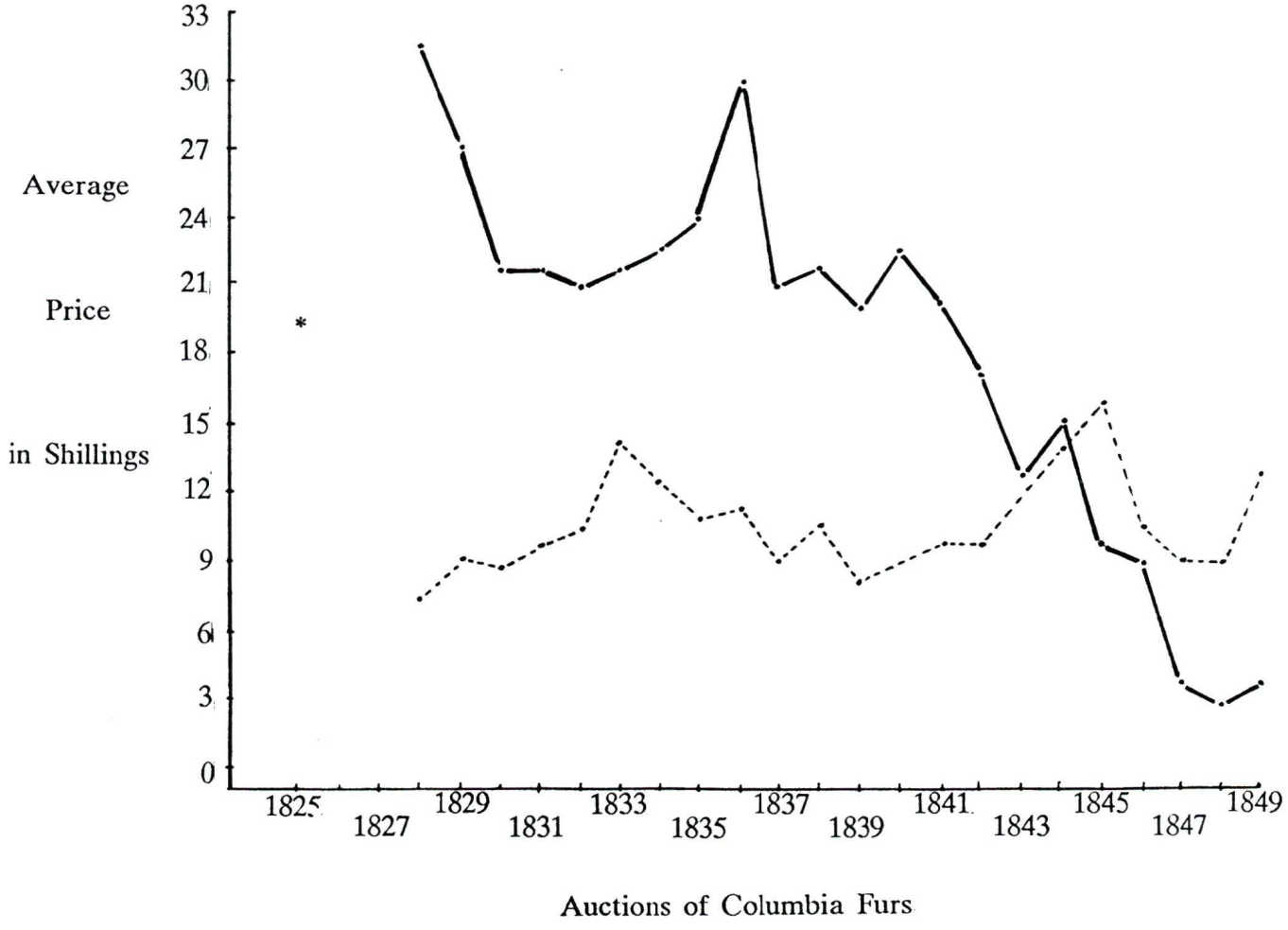
Marten Production ----·----

Total Beaver 443,010

Total Marten 263,301

Source: A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C.

Figure 14: Columbia Beaver and Marten Production, 1825-1849



Source: A.54, H.B.C.A.

* First auction of Columbia beaver, low grades on

Figure 15: **Columbia Auction Prices for Beaver and Marten, 1825-1849**

> effect in bringing about an alteration in the public taste, but no hope of this must lead us to neglect any means, by which our great expences may be safely curtailed...doubly so when prices are declining and returns annually diminishing.[64]

Prices dropped further at the January auction. In March of 1845 the Committee told Simpson that they would probably continue to fall. Rather than publicly accept the reduced bids being offered the bulk of the furs were brought back in to the warehouse while the Company searched without success for a discrete private buyer with whom they could clear the total inventory.

The silk hat was by 1845 firmly established both in England and on the Continent: "the best description of which may be purchased at retail shops in London about fifty percent cheaper than the first quality beaver hat".[65] In the next year, 1846, the market was inundated from the United States with the beaver wool substitute, muskrat. Having lost the higher priced market and being unable to compete with muskrat prices for the lower market the Company finally conceded that a revival was very unlikely.

In the meantime the warehouse inventory of unsold beaver pelts continued to grow. The auction catalogues show that the Columbia auction which usually offered a selection of furs from the two previous Outfits, grew to a backlog which included unsold beaver from five separate Outfit years. In 1847 the Company could delay no longer and the inventory was cleared at whatever price was necessary to remove it.[66] Beaver which sold for 30-35 shillings per pound after

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64 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 27 September 1843, Para. 9. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

65 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 11 March 1845, Para. 3, A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

66 Auction. 1 September 1847. A.54/182, Series I, H.B.C.A.

the 1821 merger, was cleared for 3-4 shillings. They began to consider alternate uses for the pelt:

> We are not without hope that great cheapness may have the effect of forcing the article into consumption in some form or other, as the ingenuity of purchasers will naturally be stimulated to the means of applying it to new purposes.[67]

For the Company the beaver was no longer a viable product and they began to experiment with methods which could make it into one again.

The experiments undertaken were ingenious. Pelts were shaved by a new process, which was to come into wide spread use during the fur seal vogue of 1890-1910, and then dyed to resemble fur seals. The skins were taken to the 1847 Leipsic Fair for industry response, but there was little interest as many of the fashionable furs, including marten, went unsold.[68] By 1847 the price of a beaver hat had dropped to that of silk one, but consumer response was negligible.[69] A cloth woven from beaver wool was patented in 1850, but while it was saleable, the cost of production was too high for wide spread use and it remained a low volume luxury item.[70]

The Company continued to experiment, preparing 1,000 fully dressed and dyed beaver pelts as 'fur', a novel use for the pelt which had, strangely enough, never before been attempted. The market chosen was Canada but only 500 were sent

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67 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Chief Factors Peter Skene Ogden, James Douglas, & John Work, 8 September 1848, Para. 2. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

68 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 June 1847, Para. 6. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

69 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 7 April 1847, Para. 3. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

70 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 25 March 1850, Para. 3. A.6/28, Series I, H.B.C.A.

due to delays in procuring the required machinery for equalizing the length of the pile over all parts of the skin and several London fur dealers, aware of the Company's plans, sent shipments in advance of theirs.[71] In another attempt to rally the market some of the unsold stock was sent to dealers in the United States, where the beaver hat was still in use.[72] A shipment was sent to the Chinese market, which was not able to absorb the quantities needed to relieve the North American trade. After these explorations the 1849 importation from North America were severely restricted, in 1849 to 20,000 skins, formerly the average output of the Columbia Department alone. The beaver, slowly being accepted as a 'fur', had ceased to be of any importance in the European hat industry.[73]

The Company's plans for market dominance had failed due to internal and external causes, but corporate experience had been gained in dealing with the market crisis. The Hudson's Bay Company had demonstrated a willingness to experiment and promote alternate uses for its products, tempered with the knowledge of when to cut their losses. The focus on a 'new' product, the marten, shows the flexibility that the species mix or inventory of products gave to the Company.

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71 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 April 1848, Para. 7. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

72 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 April 1848, Para. 5. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

73 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 5 April 1848, Para. 4. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A. Also: Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 4 April 1849, Para. 4. A.6/28, Series I, H.B.C.A.

Martens, Fashion and Information: Origins of the Modern Fur Industry

While the steady decrease in the price of beaver created 'gloom' among Company officials such as Barclay, there was some consolation in the corresponding increase in the value of the marten. As Figures 13 and 14 show the marten's value was strong but the best evidence of its importance is found in the tremendous volume produced. In fact, when the Company was experimenting with beaver as a fur, Edward Taylor had expressed concern that, if successful, the large quantities of beaver, contrasted with the smaller numbers of marten, might cause the market for both to collapse. As Edward Roberts told Simpson:

> The fur is beautiful and when dyed looks as well as sea otter. . . I showed a specimen to Nicholay the Queen's furrier, who has a high opinion of the fur and thinks it likely to come into extensive use for trimmings, and also for muffs, and does not think it will come into competition with Marten, so as in any way to affect the value of that article which our friend Taylor is very much afraid of.[74]

The Company realized that sales depended on the perception of distinctly separate products, and they were careful to maintain the distinctions.

In the discussions of auction trends prior to 1838 the marten received only passing notice until the increased demand started prices on a steady upward climb. The declining population cycles of the Columbia Department's marten and lynx in 1839-40 actually further stimulated prices. Simpson considered the declines only temporary:

> By the knowledge which has been acquired by experience, of the habits of these latter animals, however, there is every reason to believe that this diminution in their numbers is merely temporary, arising either from migration to other quarters, or from disease, but that as soon as these causes shall be removed, they will become as plentiful as formerly, and assist in retrieving the present

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[74] Edward Roberts to George Simpson, 3 February 1846. D.5/16, fos. 168-169, H.B.C.A., cited in Skynner, "History of the Beaver and Beaver Hat", p. 27.

unpromising aspect of affairs in this district.[75]

The decreased supply reduced the furriers' inventories and prices continued to climb. By 1843 demand was very strong and prices began to set new levels as they attracted the more speculative buyers. The increased prices in 1844 more than matched the losses incurred by declining beaver stocks and the Columbia posts began to actively encourage trappers to switch from beaver to marten and other small furs. The Committee proposed new incentives to offset the losses which beaver were taking in the marketplace:

> beaver has again fallen in price, But, as a stimulus to exertion in hunting martens, lynxes, musquash and all other furs, increased prices may be offered, as we can afford to be liberal in that way, inasmuch as all those furs are at present much in demand and have advanced, musquash as much as 40 percent on the price of last year, as you will perceive by the catalogues.[76]

The Columbia Department Board of Management was sent instructions to concentrate on martens in the fall of 1846, and the Company benefited from both high marten prices and a now increasing supply that was large, but not large enough to glut the market the way muskrat, rabbit and lynx often did. Their experience with the population cycles of other species was used to play the market as closely as possible. They cautioned in the fall of 1847 that the import from the Northern Department should not be so excessive as to weaken prices.[77]

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75 George Simpson to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 25 November 1841, Para. 7. D.4/110, Series I, H.B.C.A.

76 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 11 March 1845, Para. 3. A.6/26, Series I, H.B.C.A.

77 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to George Simpson, 18 September 1847. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

Against the background of this market-driven activity, changes were instituted in the Columbia Department trading system. Four factors combined to affect the Columbia's harvest, especially on the northern coast. The first two were the Company's wish to reduce coastal middleman trade and their response to declining beaver prices in Europe; the tariff was reduced 30% after discussions with the Russian American Company.[78] The third was the disruption of trade and trapping by epidemics which were spreading along the coastal centres, which would have undermined Native economic resistance to the change and may have disrupted the trade structure of inter-Native commerce. Finally, the marten began one of its endemic declines. James Douglas commented:

> A heavy decline in Beaver and Martens. The former apart from the measles, which also severely afflicted the natives of the District wherein the Steam vessel carries on trade, was partly the effect of the reduction in prices; the decrease in the latter is either caused by want of exertion in the hunters, or which is more probably it arises from a scarcity of the animal producing that valuable fur. From the great abundance of martens for some years past, in all parts of the Indian Country, and the general decline which we notice with regret -- this year, at all the Marten Posts in this District it is feared that we are on the eve of one of those fluctuations to which the Marten trade independently of hunting is almost periodically subject, and if so there will be a further decline in the returns of that fur next year and for some years after, until from some unknown cause they again multiply and reappear in their native forests in the utmost abundance.[79]

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78 James Douglas and John Work to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 6 November 1847, Para. 12. Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-1851. Bowsfield, Hartwell, Editor. Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1979. pp. 13-14.

79 Board of Management to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 6 November 1847, Para 4. Fort Victoria Letters., p. 23.

80 James Douglas and John Work to the Governor, Deputy Governor and

Douglas states that the Natives acceded to the 30% reduction "with a good grace".[80] However, the 1849 returns at Fort Simpson showed a 30% reduction in beaver and river otter, 40% in marten and 20% in sea otter.[81] Clearly this is evidence of at least a passive resistance to change. Nevertheless, the tariff was implemented without any major confrontation being recorded in the managerial correspondence. The decline in martens, which was continent wide, was not serious enough to create problems for the Company. Douglas noted that martens would probably rebound at the end of three years in the same manner as the muskrat.[82]

The market and the post had shifted from the traditional staple fur to the marten and other small furs, such as the mink, a marten substitute.[83] After being forced to intrude into their system of business at all levels in order to survive the crisis the Committee returned to its traditional role in the daily routine of directing the system of trade. Reprimands were issued to those districts which over-trapped or had too many staged and damaged martens in their returns. The posts were educated to the demands of the buyers of the new staple: the practise of cutting paws from marten pelts which caused a shilling depreciation in the value of the skin, was stopped; and pale martens were not to be classed as

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Committee, 5 December 1848, Para 2. Fort Victoria Letters., p. 22.

81 James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 September 1849, Para 23. Fort Victoria Letters., p. 61.

82 James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 22 July 1851. Fort Victoria Letters., pp. 200-201.

83 "Mink and Musquash will no doubt rise. . .as those who cannot afford to pay a high price for Martens will content themselves with inferior furs of the same class". Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 28 December 1849, A.6/28, Series I, H.B.C.A.

damaged but as high quality because of their end purpose as trimming and collars. Native trappers did respond to the price incentives for small furs and to the dis-incentives for beaver, and the Committee remarked on the Columbia Department that: "from the abundance of small furs and the increased industry of the natives, we are inclined to look with greater hope to the future."[84] Daily operations of the Company continued much as they had when the product was beaver. An early naval visitor to Fort Victoria in 1848 commented in a letter to the Times that the beaver had "hardly any value now".[85] But a fundamental change had taken place in the upper levels of the Company and the balanced symbiotic relationships of Company and trapper, and Company and European buyer had been disturbed, in the favour of the marketplace.

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84 Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee to Chief Factors Peter Skene Ogden, James Douglas, & John Work, Fort Vancouver, 8 September 1848, Para. 3. A.6/27, Series I, H.B.C.A.

85 [North West Coast -- Visit of H.M.S. Constance], The Times, 4 May 1849, p. 7.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

In this exploration of the harvesting system which existed in the Columbia Department several themes have been uncovered. From the investigation of the model discussed in the first chapter it has become clear that while Arthur Ray's model is useful and a strong advance on previous attempts at viewing the trade, it does not adequately portray the dynamics of the model's functioning. The movement and speed of communications and business information is the most difficult aspect of fur trade operations to deduce. The movement of trade goods, furs and price information are all dependent on this flow. In any examination of the impact of the fur trade on Native communities any changes which decrease this 'lag' deserve further study. The evidence appears to show that the changes in the Hudson's Bay Company during this period are as much the result of the direction of the London Committee as they are those of George Simpson. Perhaps that is too strong a statement given the enormous energy of Simpson, nevertheless it is important not to let the attraction of biography obscure the fact that the H.B.Co. was only one of many import/export companies in Europe and that the nature of business was undergoing changes in communications, marketing and transportation during this time period. Simpson had in fact come to the Company from another commodity importer, although little is known of his early training.[1]

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[1] He worked for the sugar brokers Graham and Simpson, who merged with Wedderbarn and Company in 1812.

But in general, the Company succeeded in establishing a degree of system to the fur trade, smoothing demographic bumps, improving quality and shipping methods, and in establishing recognizable products.

As a business the Hudson's Bay Company had also survived the unexpected, the collapse of its historic and traditional market, the felt hat industry. It achieved this within the biological and ecological diversity of the wildlife harvest gathered by its network of posts. Marketing wildlife as a product, while attempting to control supply in the face of sometimes helpful, sometimes harmful demographic swings, had given the Company the maturity to resist the market temporarily until alternatives could be found. In Europe, the Company was, like the society around it, evolving quickly. In contrast, by 1849 the Traders and Factors were becoming the 'relics' of the merger, a Council in name only. With the exception of 'Managers' such as Douglas, they no longer had control over policy or business strategy except at the basic level of the post. Their lack of support for the Company's conservation plans illustrated that the new monopsony required employees, not partners. Market information, not pelts, was becoming the predominant feature of Company operations. The decision-making process, to restrict imports or to redirect trappers, was by necessity centralized as the new Hudson's Bay Company, relatively freed of competition, found that a monopsony was not freedom, but a growing subservience to the marketplace. Also, accurate and rapid communications became an increasing part of the Company's operations. Having achieved an empire they now faced the problem of organizing a system with which to run it, and the hinterland of the post was to come more and more under the influence of that control. The H.B.Co. was evolving into a modern

corporate structure. New possibilities were opening, for if one product, the beaver, could be abandoned after such a long tradition of specialization then the adoption of an entirely new group of products became conceivable.[2]

The Company used its network of posts to explore its territories and provide samples of possible products to be tested in the marketplace and reported on. This knowledge of its inventory of products was provided by the species mix of the post and gave the Company the tools to defend itself against market instability and allowed it to explore possible alternate products before deciding on a harvest direction for its posts and trappers. This push for market and resource information systems grew in importance through the 1830's as the details of the Company's operations received more and more attention and were adapted to serve the requirements of the central authority that the co-ordination of so many issues and products required. Information was the key to establishing the degree of ordinary system that the Company required.

Flexibility was important in responding to a more fluid market, but distance and communication lags made it difficult to co-ordinate the export of the posts' harvest. Only in the case of large over-supply did the Committee intercede to instruct the depot to hold back some of the export in order to minimize the disruption that biological demographics such as those of the muskrat and lynx had on the market. This was in part a combination of the Company's knowledge of the nature of these fluctuations, but more importantly it was a restriction imposed by the information lag in its communications system. It was, however, the beginning of the end of the old tariff system, as faster communications throughout the

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[2] For a discussion of the non-fur trade economic activities see: Mackie, Richard S. "Colonial Land, Indian Labour and Company Capital: The Economy of Vancouver Island, 1849-1858." M.A.thesis, University of Victoria, 1984.

century would increasingly remove the Company's buffering price effect which insulated trappers and trading post communities from market forces. This intrusion occured for the first time when the unimaginable happened and the Company's traditional staple ceased to be saleable. The 'ordinary degree of system' that the Company had established in the Columbia and throughout its operations allowed it to survive this disaster and, like the northern posts, adapt quickly to a changing world.

There is no real direct evidence that the Company deliberately encouraged the diversification of the species mix at the post, but the actions of John McLoughlin and George Simpson in sending back samples can and should be read as a response to an implicit policy. The posts of the 1820's Columbia Department were very much specialist producers, but it was the posts of the northern coast that provided many of the new furs after the collapse of the beaver market. These posts, perhaps because of the region's maritime and middleman trade, adapted quickly, and continued to do so throughout the nineteenth century, whether the new product was sea otter, beaver, mink, marten, or whale and fur seal. The entrenchment of ownership in the older posts of New Caledonia reveals a stronger dependence on the trade and raises the hypothesis that the shift to marten from beaver had social costs which would appear most strongly at these posts. The heavy dependence of the region's economy on the fur trade, coupled with the flexibility of its species mix, allowed the region to adapt because it had no options, while the Columbia basin trade showed a rigidity in its harvest that foretold its abandonment as a counter in a political settlement.

For the Native trappers of the Columbia Department the shift in the market meant an increasing dependence on the Company for information. This period appears to offer opportunities for historical and anthropological comparative studies, to use this transitional crisis as a means of testing the depth of social and economic relationships between the post and the people living in the hinterland. The collapse of the beaver market, together with epidemics, the Company's close relations with the Russian American Company and its strategic network of posts on the major river systems combined to destroy the lucrative nature of inter-Native commerce of the northern coast. For the people of New Caledonia the changes meant the devaluation of their beaver ponds and removed the economic necessity for social strictures concerning ownership and rights. Their future was a growing dependence on marten, mink and lynx, animals which, like the salmon, were subject to uncertain fluctuations -- demographic, migratory, and economic.

For wildlife the implications are difficult to assess. The emphasis on smaller furs meant a wider incursion into the ecology of the river system and the forests. There is evidence of the existence of complex interactions between species and within specific populations which even now are only vaguely understood. How then to assess impact? On the crudest level there is one measure. None of the sixty-odd forms of wildlife recorded in the business ledgers and auction catalogues is extinct within the region. Most have suffered attrition through loss of habitat, but that loss is not directly attributable to the fur trade. The troubling question remains, is wildlife reduceable to a harvest and ecology to no more than a collection of potential products? Modern societies are still trying to deal with the

implications of what is at core a philosophical and not an economic question. It is a question which will continue to be with us.

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APPENDIX A

PROVENANCE: THE DOCUMENT AS AN OBJECT

The purpose of this appendix is to outline the work done in preparation for the analysis of the primary business ledger which was the source for the statistics on which the body of this thesis is based. A business ledger is similar to an unsigned letter and has no authority unless its origins can be authenticated. To base a statistical analysis upon such an object is unwise. The issue here is provenance, a term used in archival fields to refer to the origin, source, or derivation of a fact or document. This particular business ledger, Fur Trade Returns for Columbia and New Caledonia Districts, 1825-1857[1], presented several interesting problems. Business ledgers unlike more traditional sources, are often unsigned and undated, their provenance being in part their existence within a group of company records -- a provenance by association. In the case of this document this authority was missing because an equivalent document is not to be found in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg.

The first step was to establish when, how, and from whom the ledger was acquired by the Archives. P.A.B.C. had accumulated a large body of material before modern accessioning techniques came into use, therefore the date of cataloguing is unknown. It cannot be traced to any known collector of fur trade

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[1] A/B/20/V3, Provincial Archives of British Columbia

documents and there is no known reference to it in either the Bancroft Collection or the Company's records.

Within the P.A.B.C. collections the ledger exists in three forms: a conserved original which is in protective storage; a 35 mm. microfilmed copy; and a photocopy for daily usage. Initially a photocopy was used as a source for the data base. Later examination of the microfilm copy revealed that not all of the information on the microfilm was contained in the photocopy file. The microfilm copy also contained a reproduction of the cover of the ledger, Uplands Farm wool production records for the years 1852-1856, and promotion information involving Chief Factors, Chief Traders, and clerks, as well as retirement information about Hudson's Bay Company employees for 1856. Examination of the conserved original revealed further physical information that the nature of microfilm was incapable of revealing. Each new method of copying removed from the document a further layer of information. This is an area for concern, especially in light of the arrival of new storage media.

The ledger was used by Ian McTaggart Cowan in 1938 as a basis for his article 'The Fur Trade and the Fur Cycle: 1825-1857.'[2], but other than this usage there exists little information as to how or when the archives acquired it. An answer to the archival provenance was suggested in the subsequent investigation of the document itself.

This lack of archival information led to an examination of the document as an object. Its style of construction is consistent with Hudson's Bay Company bookkeeping procedures. With the exception of an incomplete listing of Northern Department returns excluding the Columbia for 1836-1838, each entry is for a

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2 British Columbia Historical Quarterly, v. II, 1938, pp.19-30.

Columbia or New Caledonia post. No entry is later than 1857 and the style of the handwriting is consistent for each year recorded. A person's handwriting changes with time, but there is very little change in the penmanship found in the document. It is therefore feasible that one person was responsible for penning the ledger and that it was compiled during a relatively short period of time, perhaps during a winter after the post returns were in and the indents dispatched, rather than filled in annually as the returns were tallied.

This leads to the hypothesis that the ledger was compiled by one person during the winter of 1857-1858. If the document was compiled at any later date it would be reasonable to expect entries for that year. The preoccupation of the clerk with the western-most posts of the Hudson's Bay Company leads to the conclusion that the document was compiled within that region. The incomplete entry for the Northern Department makes it unlikely that the ledger had been compiled at York Factory. [3] The outlying posts of the Columbia Department would not have the information needed to compile such a central register of returns, which narrows the 'where' down to Fort Victoria, the administrative headquarters of the region. This was supported by evidence found in the physical construction of the ledger.

The original document was examined with the aid of P.A.B.C.'s Conservation Division. The microfilm had distorted the scale of the document. What was assumed to be a large business ledger was in fact a small hand-made notebook, 7 1/6" by 4 3/8". The cover was a single piece of leather, dyed reddish brown on the back and faded to yellowish-red on the front. The book contains 92 pages of pale

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[3] A hypothesis that the ledger was produced as part of the preparation of the Company's case during the 1857 Select Committee inquiry into lands managed by the H.B.Co. was suggested, but an examination of the testimony and submissions to the Committee revealed no evidence of any use of the sort of returns information contained in the ledger.

blue rag paper, sewn in three places with an unbleached piece of twine. The pages appear to have been cut in as a group to fit the cover. Several pages display truncated watermarks, the most important feature being the letters 'R' [or B] Munn & Co.' and the letters 'MORB' and the fragments 'EY&' and 'N & Co.'. In some instances there occurred sections of a pattern around the letters. Reference to W.A. Churchill's Watermarks in Paper [4] identified the watermarks as probably those of two English papermakers of the nineteenth century: G.R. Munn (founded 1818) or more likely, R. Munn & Co., Kent Mill (1838) and Moreby & Co. (1837). Unfortunately Churchill's book does not contain examples of these watermarks so the pattern could not be checked for a match. However, both brands of paper were of a British manufacture similar to that preferred by the H.B.Co., the dates of both papermakers are appropriate to the time period, and as the pages were cut down from larger pieces of paper, it would not be surprising if there was a mixture of brands of paper used to construct the book. A further step which later became unnecessary would have been to examine the stationery orders from Fort Victoria, as the H.B.Co. was very specific when placing stationery orders.

The original document contained further information which came to light through an examination of its structure. The middle of an open book is referred to as the gutter, the area in which the page is sewn. In this particular case the pages were lined by hand and information entered right up to the gutter, with no change in penmanship. This lack of cramped style in the gutter area, coupled with the rough hand made quality of the book meant that the pages were written out before being bound. The cover is in good condition, the pages are not dog-eared, and the style of penmanship is clear, neat, and small. All of these facts argue against the

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[4] Amsterdam: Menno Hertzberger & Co., 1935

ledger being written in the field or used as a travelling or daily reference book in the field or a clerical office. What is unusual is the lack of wear and tear.

In the period prior to the 1858 gold rush, the most likely possibility is that the ledger may have been the work of Richard Golledge, who worked as a clerk and secretary for James Douglas from 1851-1858.[5]

Douglas was of too high a rank to have involved himself in the time consuming task of bookkeeping or transcription, but he would require the information as an aid in making decisions. A comparison of the handwriting styles of Golledge and Roderick Finlayson, who was in charge of Fort Victoria and therefore could have written the ledger, revealed Finlayson's 'hand' was ornamented by sweeping flourishes which are absent from the document. In the ledger the number '8' is begun from the right hand side, leaving a small gap in the upper right-hand corner of the top loop. Roderick Finlayson begins his '8' from the upper left-hand corner of the top loop.[6] Samples of Richard Golledge's handwriting are harder to find precisely because he was so prolific as the pen of James Douglas, making it

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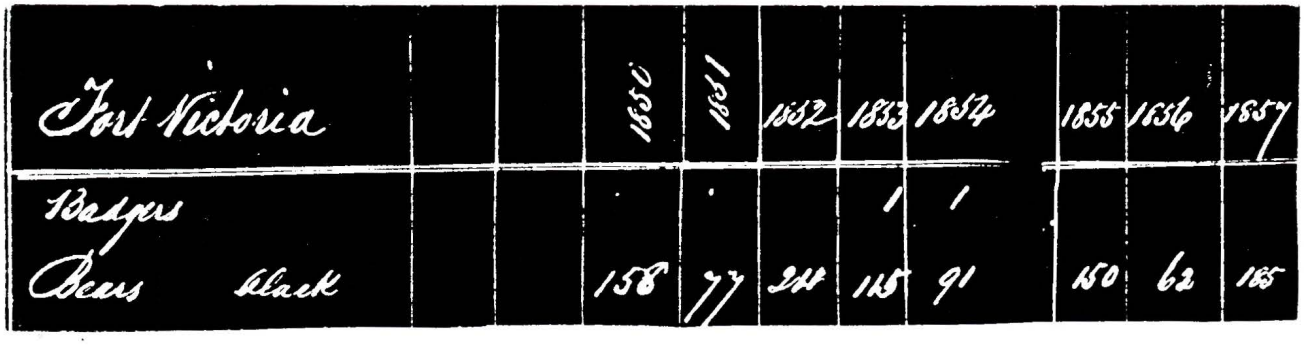
5 He was born in West Ham, Essex. At the age of twenty one Golledge arrived at Fort Victoria on the brig Tory in 1851 as an apprentice clerk . Until 1858 he worked as clerk and secretary to James Douglas. The later period of his life was marked by allegations of conduct unbecoming his station: drinking, gambling and playing euchre with a prostitute while acting as Gold Commissioner for Sooke. He married Juliana Charbonneau on September 26, 1871. He died in Victoria at the age of 55 and was buried September 8, 1887.

See Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-1851, Hartwell Bowsfield, Editor. Winnipeg: H.B.R.S., 1979, p.182n; Richard Golledge to his Father, 5 March 1854, B.226/2/2, fos. 254- 255, Series I, H.B.C.A.; Journals of the Colonial Legislatures of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, 1851- 1871. James E. Hendrickson, Editor. Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1980. v. I, pp. 152-164, and 180; P.A.B.C. Vertical File: "Golledge, Richard"; and also the Colonist newspaper (Victoria, B.C.), 'Municipal Police Court', 24 May 1879, p.3, and 'Fallen So Low', 31 July 1884, p.3.

6 See Roderick Finlayson to Alexander Caufield Anderson, 23 December 1860, F14/21, GR 1372, P.A.B.C.

difficult to distinguish between the two. Golledge did write a number of reports as Acting Gold Commissioner for Sooke mining district in 1864, and there also exists a letter written from Victoria in November, 1858.[7] The letter was compared with a ledger entry for Victoria.



Fort Victoria			1850	1851	1852	1853	1854	1855	1856	1857
Badgers						1	1			
Bears Black			158	77	244	115	91	150	62	185

Top: Fur Returns Ledger, A/B/20/V3, P.A.B.C.

Bottom: Richard Golledge to William Bevis, 24 November 1858, P.A.B.C.

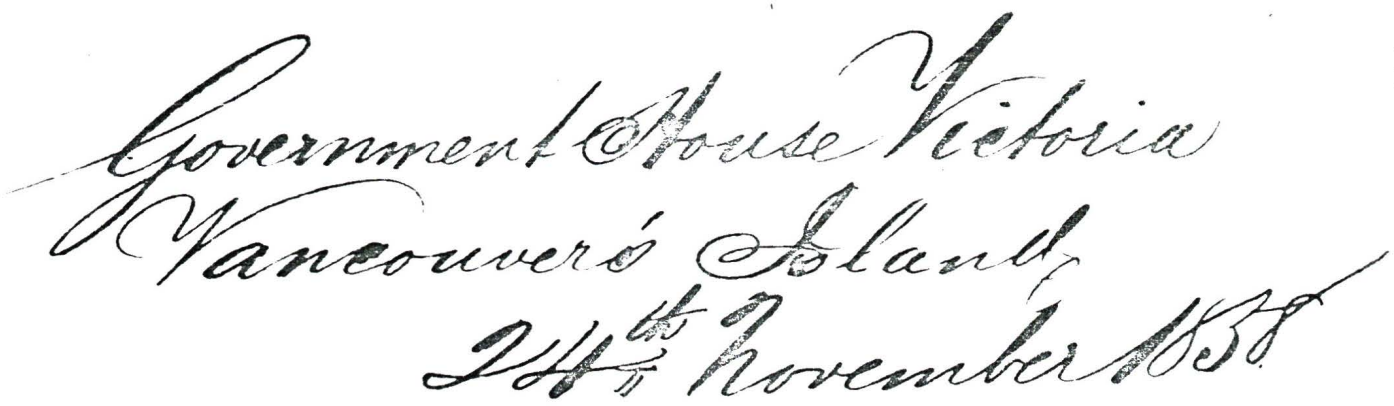


Figure 16: Handwriting Comparison.

[7] Richard Golledge to William H. Bevis, 24 November 1858, F149/23, GR 1372, P.A.B.C.

In Figure 16 the slope of the letters, the number '24' in both examples, and the similarity between the two versions of the word Victoria all support the argument that the same hand wrote both documents. Allowances must be made for the different natures of the documents from which the samples were taken. The letter is a formal communication, as opposed to the more utilitarian nature of a small ledger, therefore the 'V' in Victoria is written with a flourish. These are conventions related to the form of the documents rather than variations in the clerk's style or hand. This is further reinforced by the change that is found in Golledge's handwritten dispatches from Sooke. These reports reflect conditions similar to those found in many of the isolated fur posts. Compared to the 1858 sample of his handwriting, the 1864 dispatch is slightly jagged, wider in line with more pronounced blots and stains. Golledge is known to have begun drinking heavily after 1858 and there is a noticeable change in the style of his hand.[8] At this point in the investigation a number of pieces were beginning to fit, but not completely. Evidence points to the ledger being assembled by Golledge for James Douglas in Victoria during the winter of 1857-58. The staff of the Manuscripts Division made a search of the archive's holdings for notebooks of a similar size or utilizing similar paper. A journal of Thomas Lowe's from 1840 was found to be of a similar size and design, but the paper was completely different. A matching book was then located among a collection of James Douglas' private papers. The book, catalogued as 'Diary of a Trip to Sitka, Oct. 6-21, 1841'[9] was constructed in the same manner as the fur trade ledger, including the twine sewing. The physical

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8 For example see Richard Golledge to Colonial Secretary, 3 August 1864, F647/3A, GR 1372, P.A.B.C.

9 A/B/40/D75.4, P.A.B.C.

dimensions of the book were an exact match, as were the leather covers and the faded dye on the front cover. The final test was to search for watermarks on the pages which were also pale blue rag paper. Both the lettering and the truncated pattern matched.

The dovetailing of so many details points towards the probability that the ledger formed part of James Douglas' private papers, which explains the absence of such a document in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. With this information the archival provenance was re-examined through the annual reports of the Legislative Library, the precursor of the Provincial Archives. It was learned that in 1910 some of Sir James Douglas' private papers, including the Sitka diary were acquired.[10] This may have been when the account ledger was acquired or it may have been part of a number of unidentified fur trade journals acquired in 1939.

At this point there appears to be sufficient evidence to justify the acceptance of the document's provenance, given that its nature as an account book differentiates it from the more easily verifiable manuscripts such as letters, journals and diaries. The contents of the ledger were compared with a random sample of journals and letters describing the state of trade during various years and at a number of posts. The ledger was found to be generally reliable. When correspondence referred to several hundred beaver the ledger was found to either match the figure quoted or was within 10-15 skins of the quantity cited. Some inconsistency has been accepted because furs are often damaged in transit or discarded in the sorting process, which would result in discrepancies, and human error in transcription of figures is also possible. In the later stages of archival

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10 Report of the Provincial Archivist, 1910. [E.O.S. Scholefield] B.C. Sessional Papers. Victoria: King's Printer, 1911, pp. N1-N19.

research the ledger's veracity was confirmed after the discovery of a series of abstracts for the disposal of the returns for the Columbia Outfits of 1847-1850 in the York Factory accounts.[11]

By calling on the expertise of a number of archival specialists and by making use of several narrowly focused reference works the document's 'authority' was established. As well, a number of other things were learned which are useful to the researcher: that the transcription of a document through various media such as microfilm and photocopying can filter out useful information, that by viewing a business ledger as an object, 'hidden' information can come to light concerning its origins and office practises; and that the use of isolated business records is possible, although it entails a number of problems that differ from more traditional sources such as letters, journal, and diaries. For the historian embarking on a quantitative analysis, the establishment of provenance is a critical preliminary step.

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11 B.239/h/1, Series I, H.B.C.A.

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January 28, 1988