

## CHAPTER 4

# The Fur Trade

## What's Chapter 4 About?

The economy of the fur trade brought the interests of First Nations peoples, the French and British together, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in harmony. The patterns it laid down — in relationships among peoples, in the movement of peoples — left a permanent mark on our society.

We have already talked a little about the fur trade in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, we described how a trade in furs developed between First Nations such as the Mi'kmaq and Europeans fishing cod off the east coast of North America. In Chapter 3, we discussed the fur trade as the economic engine of New France.

This chapter puts the fur trade at the centre of our inquiries. We will begin where it began — once again, on the east coast — and will follow it as it moved west across the continent.

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

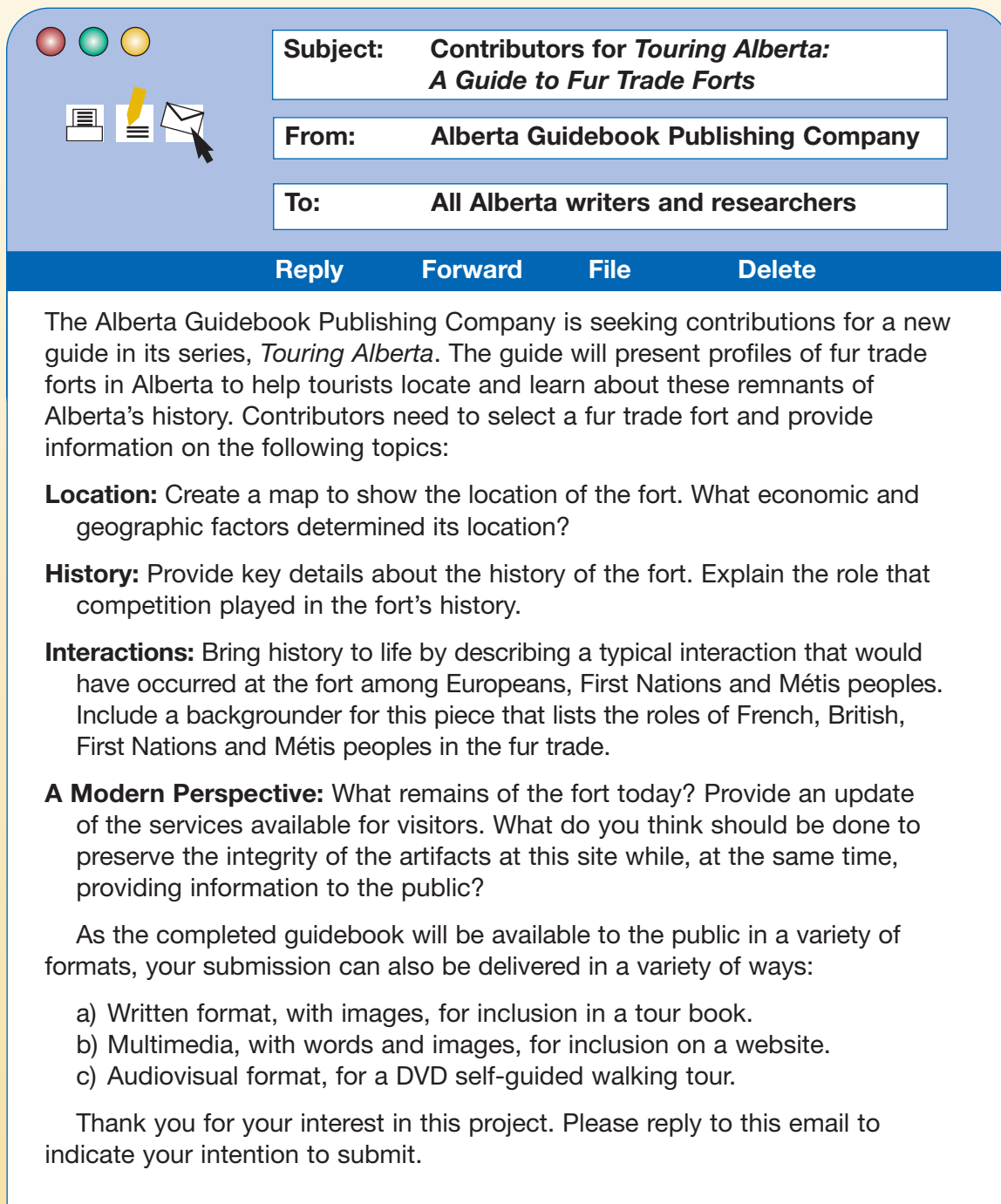
- How did economic competition shape the fur trade?
- What roles did French, British, First Nations and Métis peoples play in the fur trade?
- What impacts did the fur trade have on diverse peoples?

This trapper contemplates the goods of a Métis trader. The Métis emerged as a people from the cross-cultural economy of the fur trade.



## CHAPTER TASK

# Profile an Alberta Fur Trade Fort



**Subject:** Contributors for *Touring Alberta: A Guide to Fur Trade Forts*

**From:** Alberta Guidebook Publishing Company

**To:** All Alberta writers and researchers

Reply Forward File Delete

The Alberta Guidebook Publishing Company is seeking contributions for a new guide in its series, *Touring Alberta*. The guide will present profiles of fur trade forts in Alberta to help tourists locate and learn about these remnants of Alberta's history. Contributors need to select a fur trade fort and provide information on the following topics:

**Location:** Create a map to show the location of the fort. What economic and geographic factors determined its location?

**History:** Provide key details about the history of the fort. Explain the role that competition played in the fort's history.

**Interactions:** Bring history to life by describing a typical interaction that would have occurred at the fort among Europeans, First Nations and Métis peoples. Include a backgrounder for this piece that lists the roles of French, British, First Nations and Métis peoples in the fur trade.

**A Modern Perspective:** What remains of the fort today? Provide an update of the services available for visitors. What do you think should be done to preserve the integrity of the artifacts at this site while, at the same time, providing information to the public?

As the completed guidebook will be available to the public in a variety of formats, your submission can also be delivered in a variety of ways:

- Written format, with images, for inclusion in a tour book.
- Multimedia, with words and images, for inclusion on a website.
- Audiovisual format, for a DVD self-guided walking tour.

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please reply to this email to indicate your intention to submit.

# Economic Competition and the Fur Trade

## GET READY

This section presents information to help answer the first two focus questions of this chapter:

**How did economic competition shape the fur trade?**

**What roles did French, British, First Nations and Métis peoples play in the fur trade?**

**What impact did the fur trade have on diverse people?**

As you read this section, look for:

- Examples of developments shaped by economic competition.
- Examples of roles that French, British, First Nations and Métis peoples played in the fur trade.
- Examples of how the fur trade affected diverse societies.

What kind of graphic organizers would help you keep track of this information as you read? Consult pages 388 to 391 in the Skills Centre for options.

## What's Competition?

As you work through this chapter, you're going to come across the term *competition*. What personal experience do you have with competition? If you enjoy sports or play video games, you probably know what the urge to win feels like. Competition — *economic* competition — played a central role in the development of the fur trade. In economic competition, “winning” means controlling more wealth than other people.

By shaping the fur trade, economic competition also shaped the people involved in the fur trade — their relationships, their roles and their movements. This happened in phases, as the fur trade moved across Canada. We are going to look at each phase in turn.

### PHASE 1

The Early Fur Trade

### PHASE 2

Expansion Inland

### PHASE 3

Rival Networks

### PHASE 4

The Drive West

### PHASE 5

Monopoly in the West

## PHASE 1 The Early Fur Trade: 1500–1603

The cod fishery began the early fur trade.

First Nations such as the Mi'kmaq began to trade with Europeans coming to fish cod off the east coast. The British set up stations on shore to dry their catch, but didn't establish permanent settlements. Other Europeans, including the French, came to shore to refresh their water supplies.

### The Early Fur Trade



Fishers from France, England, Spain and Portugal traded with First Nations along the east coast of North America.

The British called the stations where they dried their catch flakes. French fishers preferred to use salt to preserve their catch, which didn't require stations on shore.



## A Glimpse of the Early Fur Trade

After a couple of false starts — attempts at trading that alarmed either Cartier’s crew, or the Mi’kmaq and Stadaconans they encountered along the east coast — Cartier recorded this successful meeting with a group from Stadacona. The First Nations of the east coast already had years of experience trading with Europeans who came to fish cod, and would continue to trade with them after Cartier’s voyages. This early trade benefited both sides. From the point of view of the First Nations involved, trade also built relationships of peace and friendship.

**Some people came in nine canoes to the mouth of the cove, where we lay anchored with our ships. They made signs that they wanted to barter with us, and held up some skins. We likewise made signs to them that we wished them no harm and sent two men on shore, to offer them some knives and other iron goods. Seeing this, they sent on shore part of their people with some of their skins, and the two parties traded together. They bartered all they had.**

— Adapted from Cartier’s journal of 1534 in H.P. Biggar, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*. Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1924 (Number 11), pages 52–53.

The Mi’kmaq acquired glass beads by trading with the French. They added glass-bead embroidery to their traditional embroidery, which used shell beads and dyed porcupine quills.



### RESPOND

Most historians agree that the early fur trade benefited both Europeans and First Nations. They also agree that, as the fur trade developed, it became less beneficial to First Nations.

As you will see, a fierce competition developed between France and Britain in the later phases of the fur trade. How might competition have changed the fur trade for First Nations?

List some ways that competition could affect:

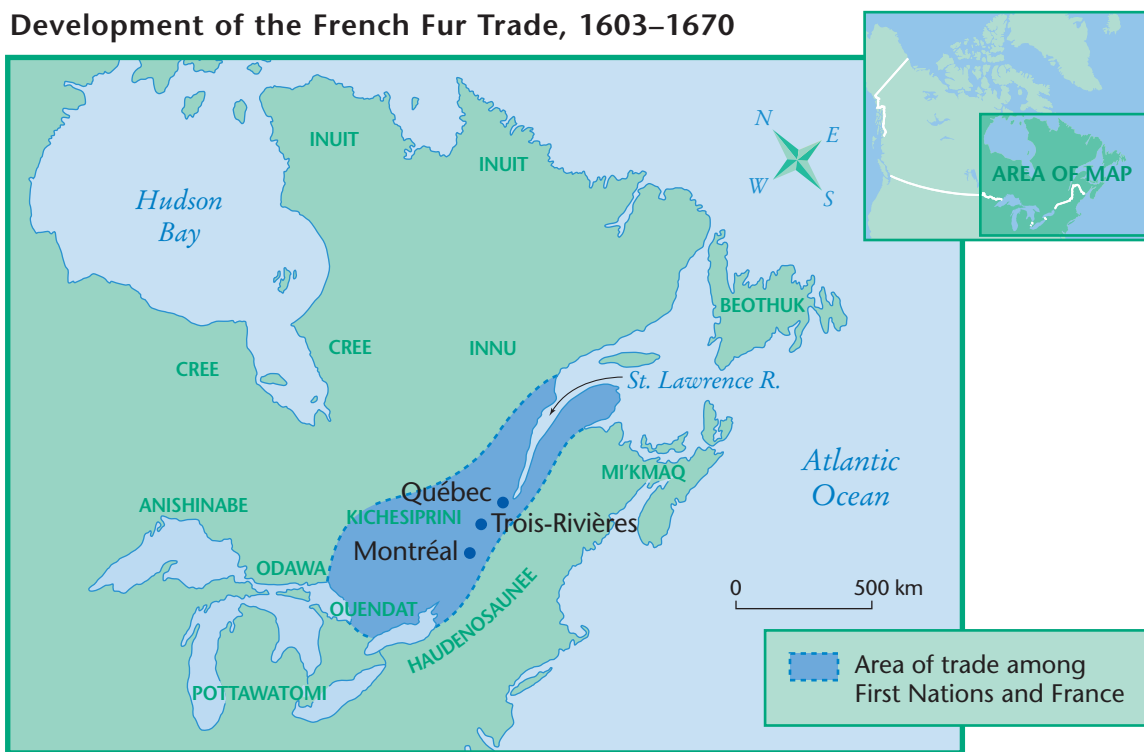
- The environment.
- The need for new technology.
- The way First Nations used the land.
- Family life.

## PHASE 2 Expansion Inland: 1603–1670

France dominated the fur trade during this phase. New France became permanently established.

You studied New France in the last chapter, Chapter 3. The fur trade was central to the economy of New France. Québec and Montréal became the shipping centres for a fur trade network running up the St. Lawrence and its tributaries to the Great Lakes. At Québec, ships unloaded trade goods from France and loaded furs bound for France. Smaller boats transported goods and furs between Québec and Montréal.

**Development of the French Fur Trade, 1603–1670**



Why do you think fur trade routes followed lake and river systems? What geographic challenges did this solve? To what extent did it make the best use of technology?


The French, Ouendat, Mi'kmaq, Innu and Kichesiprini became partners in the fur trade.

The **Ouendat** became middlemen between the French and First Nations established in the Great Lakes region, such as the Anishinabe.

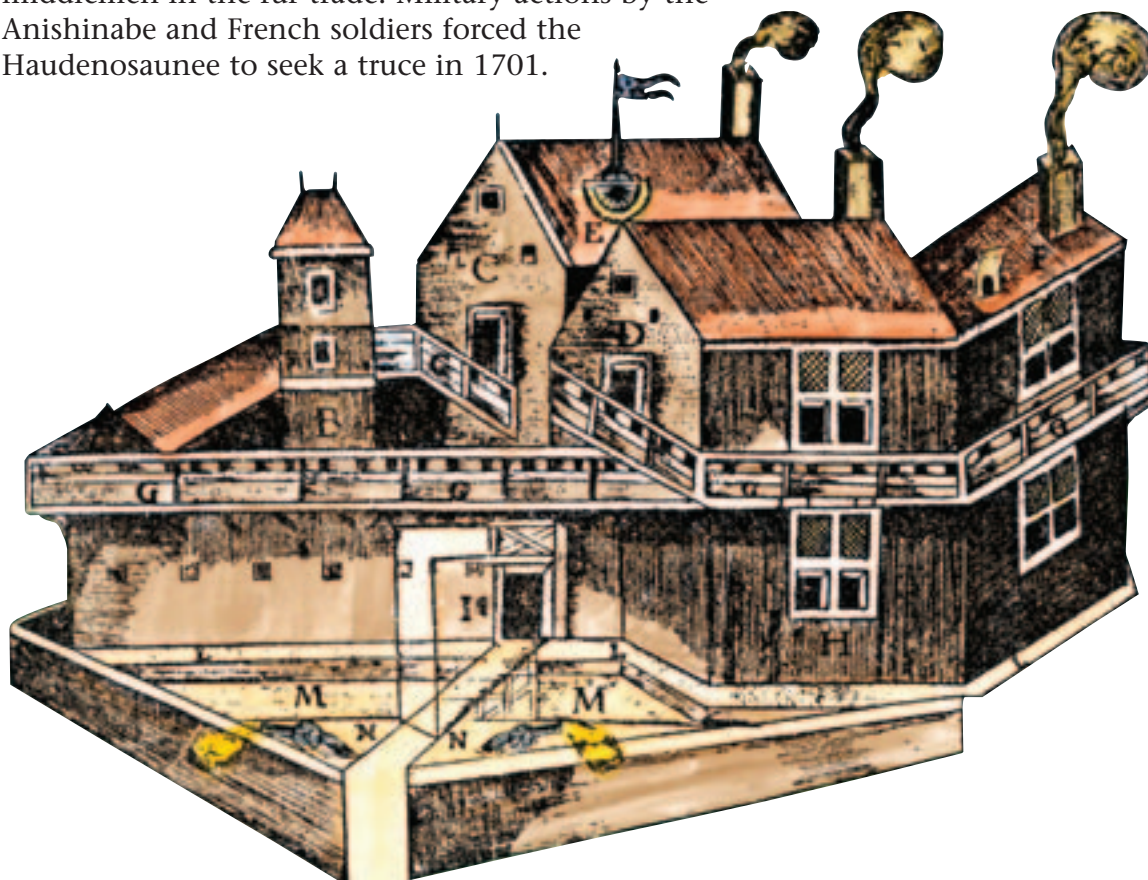
**The French-Haudenosaunee war began.**

Some scholars say this war started because of France and the fur trade. Others say that France became involved in a long-standing conflict between its fur trade allies and the Haudenosaunee. During this war, the Haudenosaunee gained support from first the Dutch and then the British, who used the conflict to challenge French domination of the fur trade. The Haudenosaunee defeated a key French ally, the Ouendat, in 1649. This removed the Ouendat as middlemen in the fur trade. Military actions by the Anishinabe and French soldiers forced the Haudenosaunee to seek a truce in 1701.

**Ouendat:**

 wen-dat

Champlain drew this illustration of the first *habitation* the French built at Québec. Québec had much more potential as a fur trade centre than France's original settlements in Acadia. Québec's location on the St. Lawrence River gave it access to the trading networks of the Innu, Ouendat and Kichesiprini, which penetrated deep into the prime fur country of North America.



**Catholic missionaries established missions among the Mi'kmaq, Ouendat, Innu, Kichesiprini and Anishinabe.**

Jesuit missionaries aimed to convert First Nations to Christianity. Many First Nations people showed little interest in becoming Christian. Some Anishinabe, for example, converted to solidify their military and trading alliance with the French. Some First Nations people who became Christian followed a blend of Christian and traditional practices. Others followed traditional practices when among their own people.

This drawing from around 1632 shows the French and Ouendat attacking a palisaded Onondaga village. The Onondaga are one of the six nations of the Haudenosaunee.



**Coueurs de bois emerged.**

The loss of the Ouendat as middlemen disrupted the fur trade in New France. It opened opportunities for independent traders — coureurs de bois — to trade directly with First Nations. At first, New France allowed this trade, but soon made it illegal as it established an official trade based on trading posts.

**Intense trapping and hunting began to reduce the population of beaver and game animals.**

As furs and food became scarce, traders and middlemen moved west, into new regions.

## What's a Middleman?

*Middleman* is a business term that applies to both women and men. We have many “middlemen” and “middlewomen” in today's business world. Take, for example, grocery-store owners. People who own grocery stores don't produce the food they sell. They buy food from producers and sell it to you. By working between you and the producers — in the “middle” — they connect producers with a market (you).



## A Glimpse of the Future

### *The Anishinabe Meet some Coureurs de Bois*

— This representation of historical events was written with the advice and assistance of Blake Debassige, M'Chigeeng First Nation.

As Winona dished out wild rice and fish to her husband and daughter, she looked downriver to see four canoes fast approaching her summer camp.

“Who invited them to dinner?” she wondered, as her husband, Mong, went to speak to the European leaders of the expedition. Pierre-Esprit Radisson and his brother-in-law are free-spirited, ambitious French traders looking to exchange European goods for prime beaver pelts.

“I’ll head back to the village tomorrow,” Mong told his wife later that evening. “The whitemen want to see our people prosper again with trade goods. I’m going ahead to speak to our *ogimauh*, who will want a council to consider this exchange.”

The *ogimauhs* debated the French traders’ proposal long and thoroughly.

“It is good the stream of metal goods will surge again,” said one *ogimauh*.

“And, given the defeat of our Ouendat allies by the Haudensosaunee, it is good to partner with the French and keep them on our side,” said another.

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*ogimauh*: a leader in Anishinabe society

## Backgrounder on the Anishinabe and the Fur Trade

This story happened as the fur trade expanded from the St. Lawrence into the region of the Great Lakes, and French traders came into direct contact with the Anishinabe people living north of Lake Superior. These people became allies of the French in the French-Haudensosaunee War and worked as trappers, guides and middlemen in the fur trade. The war and the trade disrupted their traditional economy and food supply, based on hunting and fishing. The Anishinabe, and other First Nations, came to depend on the trade for some of their food supply.

A group of women let the leaders know they thought their husbands should focus on hunting for meat, instead of trapping animals, and that the trade in European goods seemed to bring with it conflict and war. They were assured meat would be easier to obtain with the guns their men would receive in this French trade deal, but on the subject of avoiding war, the *ogimauhs* could make no promises.

Days later, with much ceremony and gift giving to show goodwill, the council presented its decision to the French traders.

“We have some concerns about this exchange, but many of our men wish to trap beaver to trade with you,” the French traders were told. “With good minds and hearts towards each other, we are confident we can arrive at a beneficial agreement.”

“So am I,” responded Radisson, visualizing the loads of prime fur he would deliver to France.

#### RESPOND

1. What is the difference between a need and a want?  
Use examples from your own life to clarify the difference.
2. How might needs and wants affect trading relationships? For example, prepare quick skits about two people making a trade when:
  - Both want something the other has.
  - Both need something the other has.
  - One needs something, and one wants something, the other has.
3. List some examples of needs and wants in the trading relationship between French and First Nations peoples during this phase of the fur trade.
4. How would you say these needs and wants affected their relationship?



American artist George Catlin did this painting of an Anishinabe woman and her child in 1835. Catlin painted many First Nations people during his career, and most of his work hangs in the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

### PHASE 3 Rival Networks: 1670–1760

Britain established the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in 1670. The HBC competed directly with France in the fur trade. To set up the company, Britain offered a group of merchants a monopoly on trade in an area it claimed as Rupert’s Land. The Hudson’s Bay Company still exists today as a department store chain: the Bay.

The geography of Hudson Bay influenced the Hudson’s Bay Company’s business strategy. The lands around Hudson Bay are not suited to agriculture. This meant, at first, the HBC did not seek to colonize its territory as part of establishing trade.

Development of French and British Competition in the Fur Trade, 1670–1760



! This map shows the boundaries of Canada’s provinces and territories today. These boundaries didn’t exist during the fur trade. We have included them to orient you.



**Dunne-za:** da-nay-za

**Dené Tha':** de-nay-thah

**Dene Sųline:**  
de-nay-soong-lin-ay

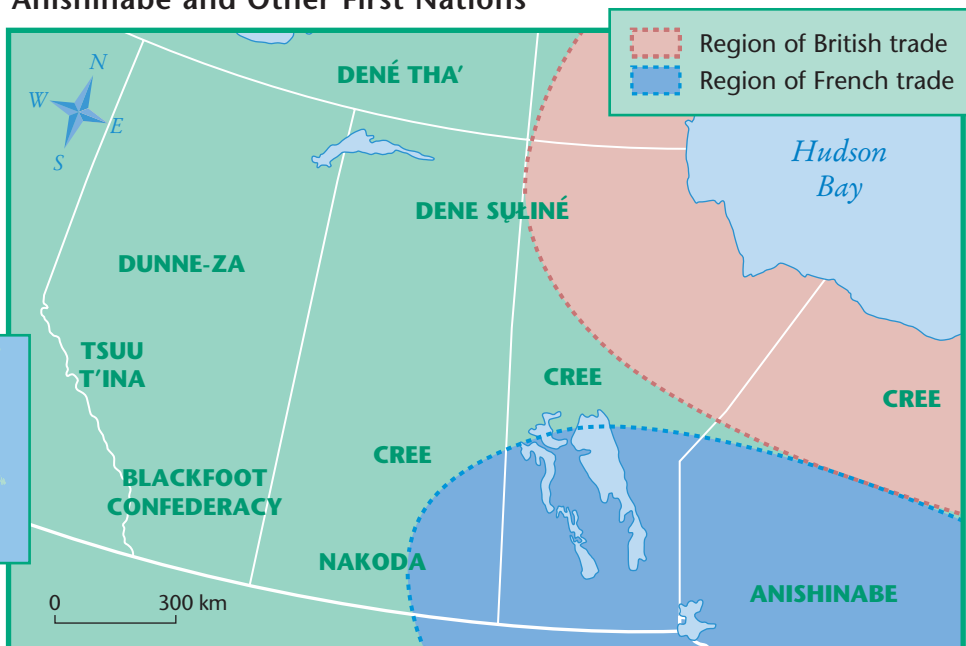
**Tsuu T'ina:** zoo-tee-na

### Cree and Nakoda middlemen emerged.

The HBC sought partners to work as middlemen between its forts along Hudson Bay and First Nations to the west, such as the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Dunne-za. First Nations centrally located between the British and the French trading networks — such as the Cree and Nakoda — took up this role for both. The Anishinabe became middlemen, along with Canadian coureurs de bois, between the French fur trade network and First Nations in the west.

### Traditional Lands of the Cree, Nakoda, Anishinabe and Other First Nations

How does this map help explain the role of Cree, Nakoda and Anishinabe peoples as middlemen in the fur trade?



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### Voyageurs emerged.

After the Haudenosaunee defeated the Ouendat, New France needed a new way to maintain trade with the First Nations of the Great Lakes and further west. New France established trading forts in the Great Lakes region and hired men to make the canoe trips between its settlements along the St. Lawrence, and the forts and points beyond. These men, known as voyageurs, became an essential link in the French fur trade.

### The **Francophone Métis** have their origins in this phase of the fur trade.

The French trading strategy — to develop direct contact and partnerships with First Nations — fostered cross-cultural marriages. The French called the children of these families *métis* or “mixed.”

### The **Scottish Métis** also have their origins in this phase of the fur trade.

The Hudson’s Bay Company recruited many of its men from Scotland’s Orkney Islands, whose harsh landscape resembles the lands around Hudson Bay. Although the company discouraged cross-cultural marriages, cross-cultural families emerged all the same.

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#### Métis:

 may-tee

**Francophone:** a person whose first language is French

The voyageurs became a crucial link in the French fur trade, freighting goods in and out of the west. This painting by Frances Anne Hopkins dates from 1879. She has included herself in the painting. Can you find her?



## A Glimpse of Voyageur Life in the 1690s

The trading party generally leaves Montréal at the beginning of spring. There are many rapids on the way. The men are generally bare-foot and bare-legged, wearing only their shirts. When their canoes cannot make headway against the rapids, they boldly jump into the water and by main strength, all helping one another, they manage to get the canoes along, but not without frequently skinning their feet and legs. The rocks are so cold that their skin sticks to them, and the men do not get free without leaving a piece behind them.

Nor is this all. The men frequently come to rapids or waterfalls where it is impossible to take their boats up or down. It is necessary to disembark at the foot of the rapids and carry the canoes on their shoulders through the woods, along with all the merchandise or beaver skins, around the falls before they can re-embark. This is called making a portage.

There was no easy way to make a portage. It involved carrying everything, including the canoes.




The **Canadiens** have to make a journey of three hundred leagues by this continual and labourious work before reaching **Michilimackinac**.

When they arrive there, they hasten to continue their journey, and go on as soon as possible. They generally re-equip themselves here with canoes and provisions, after which some go to the north coast of Lake Superior and others to the south, and they follow the rivers into the back country. The object of all alike is to get beaver skins.

When the voyageurs have sold their goods, they return to Michilimackinac, generally arriving at the beginning of July. Here they re-equip themselves and go down to Montréal in a convoy. They risk losing their lives at the hands of the Haudenosaunee, who are at war with France and sometimes attack the convoys along the route.

— Adapted from a memoir written around 1695 by Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac, commander at Michilimackinac, in M.M. Quaife (editor), *The Western Country in the Seventeenth Century*. Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1947, pages 16–18.

**Canadien:** a descendant of the settlers of New France

 ca-na-dee-eh

**Michilimackinac:**

 mi-shill-i-mak-in-ak

## RESPOND

- Economic competition became a central feature of the fur trade during this phase, from 1670 to 1760.
  - List some examples of how this competition built connections among diverse peoples.
  - List some examples of how it created conflict among diverse peoples.
  - Based on your lists, would you say economic competition made coexistence easier or harder to achieve among diverse peoples?
- How did geography affect Britain's choice of a fur trade territory for the Hudson's Bay Company? Consider that Britain defined Rupert's Land as the territory containing rivers that drained into Hudson Bay. Why was the connection between rivers and the bay important?

## FOCUS ON INQUIRY

**FOCUS SKILLS**  
Processing  
Information

Share and discuss your steps for processing information.

## What is the Hudson Bay Company today?

### The Topic

You have begun to learn about the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), a key player in Canada's fur trade past. Did you know that the company still exists today? In this inquiry, you will collect information on today's HBC and compare it with the HBC of the past.

### Getting Started

Work with other classmates to develop a plan for the inquiry and to retrieve information.

Here's a list of questions to get you started:

- What does the HBC buy and sell today?
- Who owns the HBC?
- To what extent are furs part of the company's business today?
- What jobs does the company's business generate?

### Your Goal

On your own, **track your experience with processing information** from your research. Be sure to take the following steps and answer these questions:

- Make connections within your information. What comparisons can you make, based on what you know about the past and present of the HBC? What techniques will help you organize your information?
- Develop a focus. To what extent are these comparisons important or interesting? Would other comparisons be better? Why?
- Ask new questions. What information do you need to make the best comparisons?
- Revisit the process of retrieving information. What steps will allow you to retrieve new information?

### Finishing Up

Based on your research, identify one good comparison you can make between the HBC of the past and today. Be prepared to discuss your comparison, and defend your choice, in class.



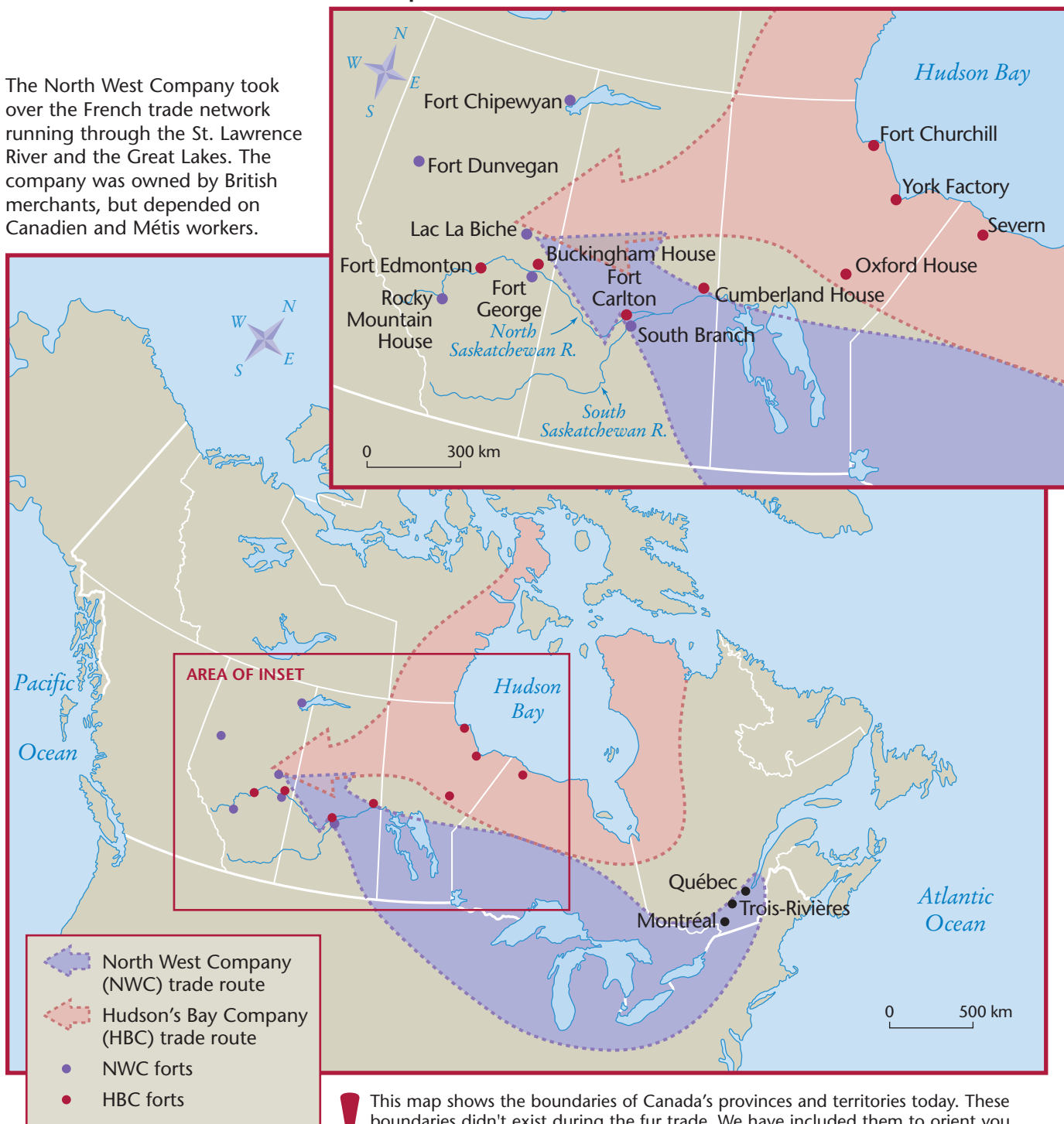
"Point blankets" emerged as an HBC product during the fur trade, and remained a company product for many years. What are point blankets? Does the HBC sell them today?



## PHASE 4 The Drive West: 1760–1821

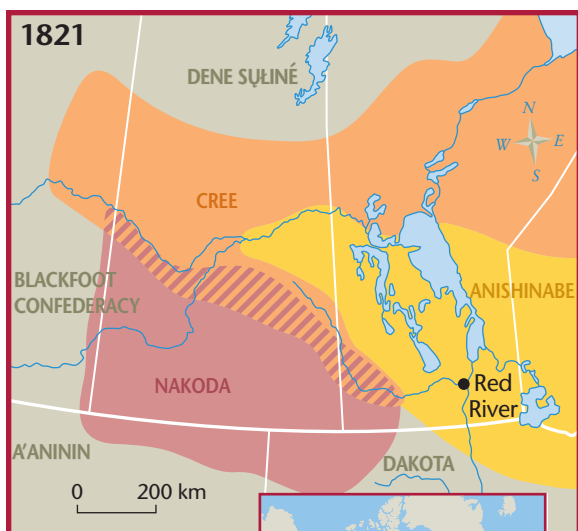
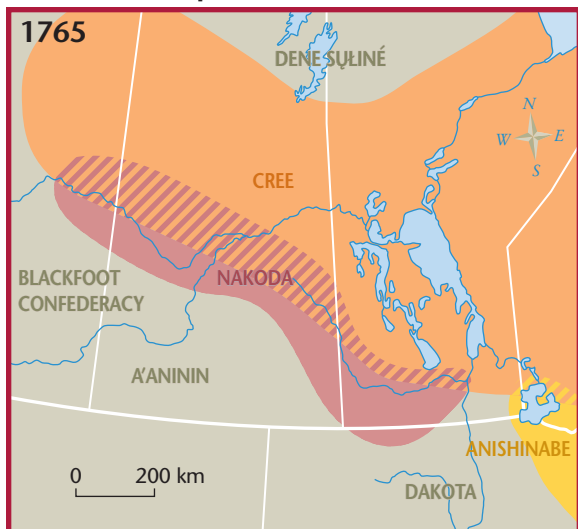
Development of the Western Fur Trade, 1760–1821

The North West Company took over the French trade network running through the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. The company was owned by British merchants, but depended on Canadien and Métis workers.



! This map shows the boundaries of Canada's provinces and territories today. These boundaries didn't exist during the fur trade. We have included them to orient you.

### Territorial Expansions, 1765–1860



! These maps show modern boundaries. We have included them to orient you.



To what extent did economic competition cause these territorial shifts? What challenges to the coexistence of peoples did they pose?

expanding business and territory — at Red River.

#### The Métis people developed a distinct culture at Red River.

The Métis became key to the fur trade as interpreters, guides, traders, provisioners and carters.

#### Missionaries established contact with First Nations in the west.

They began to convert First Nations in the west to Christianity.

#### New France became a British colony in 1763.

The entire fur trade — the Montréal trade and Hudson Bay trade — came under the British mercantile system. This marked the start of a big economic shift. The French system had focused on resources — especially furs — but the British system was land hungry. Britain wanted farm products. Eventually, farming pushed the fur trade, and the peoples who made their living from it, off the land.

#### The North West Company (NWC) formed.

After New France became a British colony, British merchants took control of the fur trade network out of Montréal. The merchants competed as “independents” against the monopoly of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). In 1779, to improve their odds, they united as the North West Company (NWC). Competition between the NWC and the HBC drove the fur trade west, as both companies sought new supplies of furs and new First Nations contacts.

#### A trade in pemmican developed.

As the fur trade pushed west, trade routes and supply lines — connecting forts in the west with shipping point in the east — became longer and longer. Voyageurs, traders and freighters needed food that travelled well. Métis people, and First Nations such as the Cree, the Nakoda and the Blackfoot Confederacy supplied it — pemmican.

#### Territorial expansions occurred.

As the fur trade moved west, so did the peoples who worked in the trade, including the Cree, Nakoda and Anishinabe. The Francophone Métis working for the NWC took up a central position in the trade’s

## Meet the Métis

The first Métis families had First Nations mothers and French fathers. The children grew up speaking at least two languages, in a rich cultural mix that drew from the traditions of both cultures. After the HBC moved into Hudson's Bay in 1670, Scottish Métis families added new elements to the Métis identity. By the 1800s, a distinct Métis culture had emerged with Canadian, First Nations and Scottish roots.

As the fur trade moved west, the Métis became established at Red River, a central location for working in the trade. First Nations and Europeans valued the skills of the Métis as interpreters and traders, and Métis people took pride in their role and their identity.

The Métis Nation emerged as a distinct cultural group by blending elements of European and First Nations cultures in creative ways.



Métis women incorporated European designs, such as floral patterns, into their distinctive embroidery and beadwork.



The Red River cart is one of the best-known symbols of Métis culture. It was used to haul belongings, or meat and hides, back to Red River from buffalo hunts in the west, and to deliver trade goods and pemmican from Red River to fur trade forts in the west. The design resembled carts used in Québec and on the Scottish highlands. The carts were light but strong, and were built without nails.

The distinctive Métis sash had many practical uses: a sling to lift heavy objects, a key holder, an emergency first-aid kit or a towel. Voyageurs used their sashes to keep their backs warm while travelling in their canoes. You could use the sash as a rope, and pull out a Red River cart stuck in the mud. Some Métis people still wear a sash on ceremonial occasions.



### Métis Farms along the Red River



The Métis established long, narrow farms along the Red River. What similarities do you see between these farms and the seigneuries of New France? Check page 94.



A fiddler plays a Métis jig during a celebration at Métis Crossing, Alberta in 2005. The Red River jig combines the footwork of the First Nations powwow step with the music of Scottish reels and Canadian jigs.

#### RESPOND

The fur trade established an economy that had impacts on many peoples.

1. Give some examples of how the fur trade influenced the identity of Métis people.
2. In what ways might economic factors affect the identity of peoples in Canada today?

## IDENTITY THEN AND NOW

## Scottish Ghosts and Grandfathers

## An Interview with Members of Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Saskatchewan

In 2004, Cree dancer Cayla Longjohn, 11, flew across the Atlantic Ocean to visit the land of her Scottish grandfather Magnus Twatt. It still strikes her as funny that her cousins drive on the “wrong side” of the road.

“I never did get to know why their steering wheels are on the right,” Cayla puzzles.

Cayla and her mother, Christine, were part of a group of twenty-five people from Sturgeon Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan who travelled to the Orkney Islands to meet their Scottish cousins. They shared dancing, singing, drumming and storytelling.

Many men from Scotland’s Orkney Islands came to Canada in the late 1700s to work for the Hudson’s Bay Company. Many married Cree women. More than two centuries later, their Canadian families came to see the homeland of their forefathers.

The trip was about the past, but it was also about celebrating traditions each nationality holds sacred in the present.

“One night on the trip, in the five-hundred-year-old St. Magnus Cathedral, we spent hours sharing Cree and Scottish stories and songs,” recalls Christine. “Another time, Joseph from our group played his wooden flute in an old castle that was kind of spooky at first. After he finished, it was amazing — his music had calmed the place.”

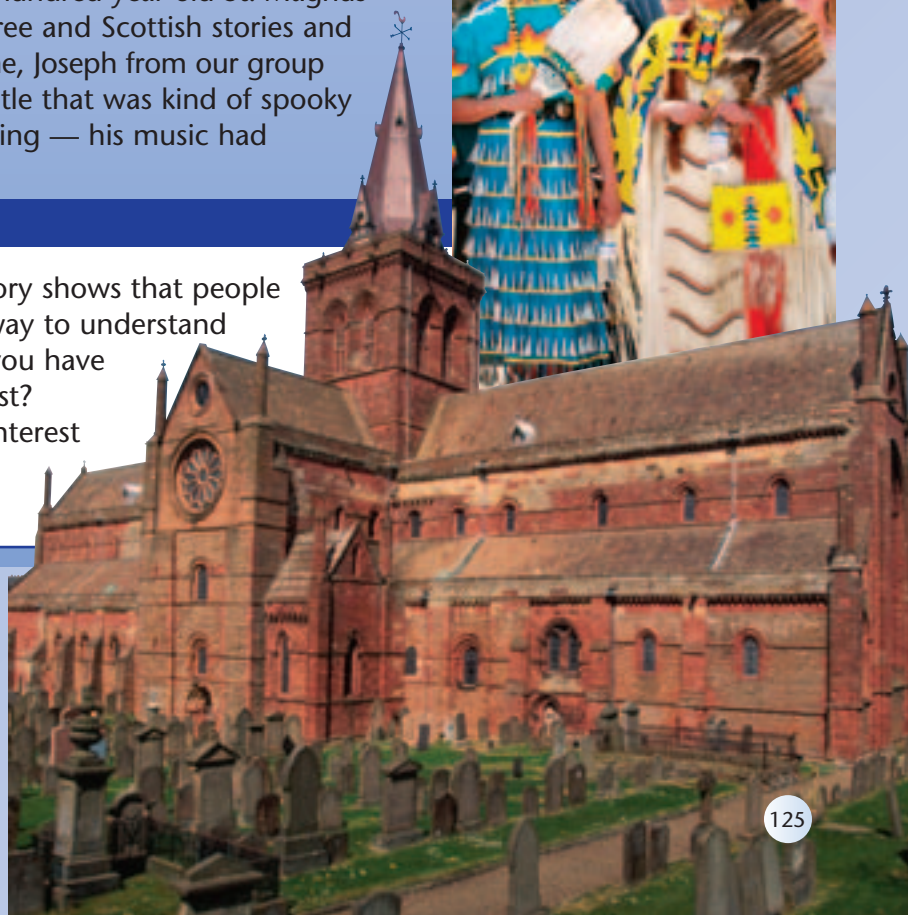
## RESPOND

Cayla and Christine Longjohn’s story shows that people sometimes explore the past as a way to understand themselves. What experience do you have with this kind of interest in the past? What, in your opinion, does this interest in knowing the past tell us about ourselves as humans?

These photos show a cultural contrast and a connection: the powwow regalia of two Cree women from Regina, and St. Magnus Cathedral in Scotland’s Orkney Islands.

“When we danced for the people in our powwow regalia, all of a sudden there was so much colour in one place, they were just amazed.”

— Christine Longjohn



## A Glimpse of Métis Women in the Fur Trade

— This representation of historical events was prepared by Métis author Dianne Meili.

**factor:** the person in charge of a fort and its business for the Hudson’s Bay Company or the North West Company

**castor:** a gland at the base of a beaver’s tail

**cheskwa:**

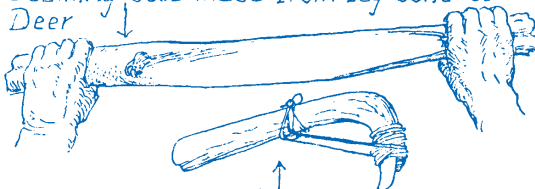
☞ chee-skawah

Women’s work, such as preparing hides, was essential to the fur trade. What other essential work does the woman in this story perform?

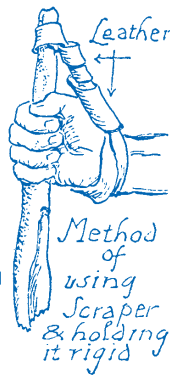
### SKIN DRESSING AND MEAT DRYING



Scraping flesh from Moose Hide with Beaming Tool made from leg bone of Deer



Bone-handled Scraper with stone blade



Method of using Scraper & holding it rigid



Rubbing fat into the skin

“Aaaaaargh!” A cry of helpless pain ripped through the frosty air over Rocky Mountain House, causing its inhabitants to look up from their chores and gaze towards the **factor’s** house, from where the yell had come.

“The boss has a toothache,” explained Ignace, who was cleaning his rifle beside his wife, Loons Feet. He watched her slim fingers separate tendons from the meat of a moose leg. These she would dry and use later to string snowshoes for trappers who could not walk in the deep winter snow without them.

Though she still had moose meat to dry for pemmican, which would fuel the canoe brigades, and rabbit fur to weave into a warm coat she had promised the factor, Loons Feet interrupted her work.

“Get me a fresh beaver body,” she told her husband. When he brought it, she carefully slit the body with her sharp knife and expertly extracted its **castor** — a gland at the base of the beaver’s tail. She slit the castor, removed a small black cake of gum from inside it, and wrapped this in her neck scarf.

“I’ll be right back,” she told her husband, heading for the factor’s house.

Inside the fading light of the winter afternoon, the factor was kneeling, head back, before an employee who was about to delve into his mouth again with a pair of clumsy iron tongs.

“**Cheskwa,**” both men heard a woman’s voice say softly in Cree, asking them to ‘wait a bit.’

The factor smiled through his pain, for he had always liked Loons Feet, the hard-working wife of his best trader. Indeed, how would he and his men have survived this bitter winter without her knowledge of cooking and drying wild meat and fish, weaving rabbitskin coats, sewing thick moosehide moccasins, stringing snowshoes, and doctoring the sick?

“What have you got there?” he asked Loons Feet.

“Something to help you,” she answered.

Knowing better than to question her, he allowed her to place the medicine on his bloody tooth.

The taste made him want to vomit, but within moments he felt the fiery pain start to lessen. After five minutes he was having trouble remembering which of his molars had brought him to his knees that day.

**Aboriginal peoples:** First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, as defined by Canada’s constitution

## Background on Women in the Fur Trade

This story illustrates the importance of cross-cultural marriages in the fur trade, and of the work of women. The fur trade depended on the contributions of Métis women, and Cree, Anishinabe, Nakoda and other First Nations women.

In the story, Loons Feet is a Métis woman married to a Canadien trader. Many Canadien and Scottish men married Métis or First Nations women during the fur trade. Through these marriages, the traders cemented trading alliances, and gained a companion, a skilled interpreter, and a business partner. The women performed many day-to-day tasks essential to the trade, such as preparing hides, and making snowshoes and clothing.

### RESPOND

For many years, histories written in English skipped over the contributions of women, **Canadiens** and **Aboriginal peoples** to the development of Canada.

1. In what way did these histories reflect an idea of citizenship — of who belonged and didn’t belong to society?
2. How does including information about the roles of women, Canadiens and Aboriginal peoples in history reflect a different idea of citizenship?



# HISTORY HAPPENS

Twentieth Century Edition

The “newspaper” from the past for today’s reader.

## A Tale of Two Forts

— by Beatrix Chronos, your time-roving reporter

ELK POINT, ALBERTA — Along the North Saskatchewan River near Elk Point, Alberta, sit the ruins of two forts, side by side: Fort George and Buckingham House. The forts’ employees shared a water well, but that was all they had in common. They were fierce rivals. They spied on each other, and tried to lure away each other’s business. Fights sometimes broke out.

Fort George was a North West Company post, and Buckingham House belonged to the Hudson’s Bay Company. Both forts date from 1792.

Judging from the garbage they left behind — “garbage” that has become a source of valuable historical artifacts — the forts took in enormous amounts of game and fur-bearing animals. Only three years after Fort George opened, the country was “entirely ruined,” as NWC clerk Duncan McGillivray noted in his diary. Fort George closed after only eight years. But, at the height of its operations, it housed eighty men, and eighty women and children.

With that many people, and the intense competition, life at the fort wasn’t pretty. “In fact, the forts must have been a mess,” says archeologist Heinz Pyszczyk of the Alberta Government’s Heritage Resource Branch. He knows because he helped excavate Fort George.

“We found tens of thousands of animal bones and artifacts, evidence that the fort was a food-processing plant as



Today, Fort George is an historic site. Excavations at the fort have told us much about the fur trade in Canada’s west — but some details you might prefer not to know!

well as a fur depot,” he explains. The fort prepared fresh meat from bison and other game such as ducks and beaver. It also preserved meat, and probably sent some to feed other forts in the form of **pemmican**. With so much butchering going on, there must have been dogs and flies, bones and blood everywhere.

**pemmican:** a food made from dried meat, pounded and mixed with berries and fat

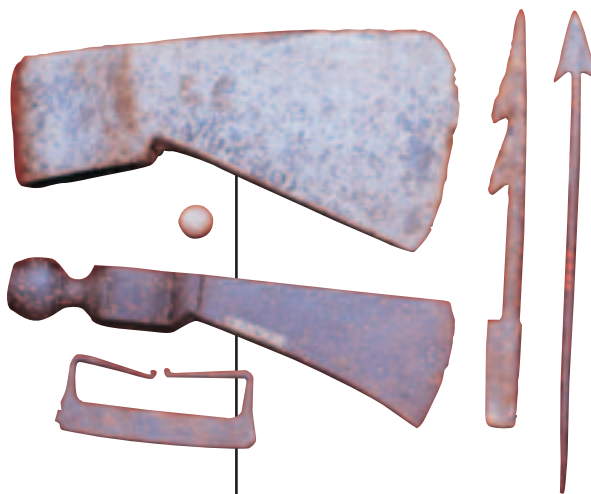


Even though fort life was rugged, the type of trade goods changing hands reflected the more refined side of the 1790s. “We found broken crockery, porcelain china, and filigreed knives,” says Pyszczyk. “Shoes we excavated were made of leather and decorated with fashionable metal buckles.”

**Status** was important and the higher your position at the fort, the more likely you would dress well and dine in style.

“If your rank was high, you would not even think of drinking from a tin cup,” Pyszczyk says. In fact, chief HBC trader William Tomison tried to smuggle in his own china, jealous of the fine tableware owned by his rival at Fort George. His superiors disapproved.

The forts offered goods manufactured in Europe in exchange for furs trapped and prepared by First Nations such as the Blackfoot Confederacy, Nakoda and Cree. Company traders carried the usual, functional goods such as guns, axes, and pots and pans, but they also traded fancy goods designed to entice business.



Metal goods were valued trade items because they could be recycled into a variety of other useful tools. “When old kettles wore thin and developed holes, they were made into metal arrowheads. Barrel hoops were converted into spearheads. Blacksmiths were important people back then,” Pyszczyk says.

Pyszczyk says Alberta has more than 150 old fur trade posts, but only about ten percent of them have been excavated. How many more secrets about Alberta lie buried at these old sites, waiting to be discovered? ■

## RESPOND

Suppose, through careful research and good maps, you located the site of a fur trade fort in Alberta that no one has excavated. Suppose you visited the site and found an interesting artifact. (What sort of artifact do you think you might find?) What should you do with the artifact? Why?

Take a position and defend it in class. Should you:

- Take the artifact and keep it safe?
- Leave the artifact where it is?
- Take some other action?

**status:** a person’s rank, or importance, in society

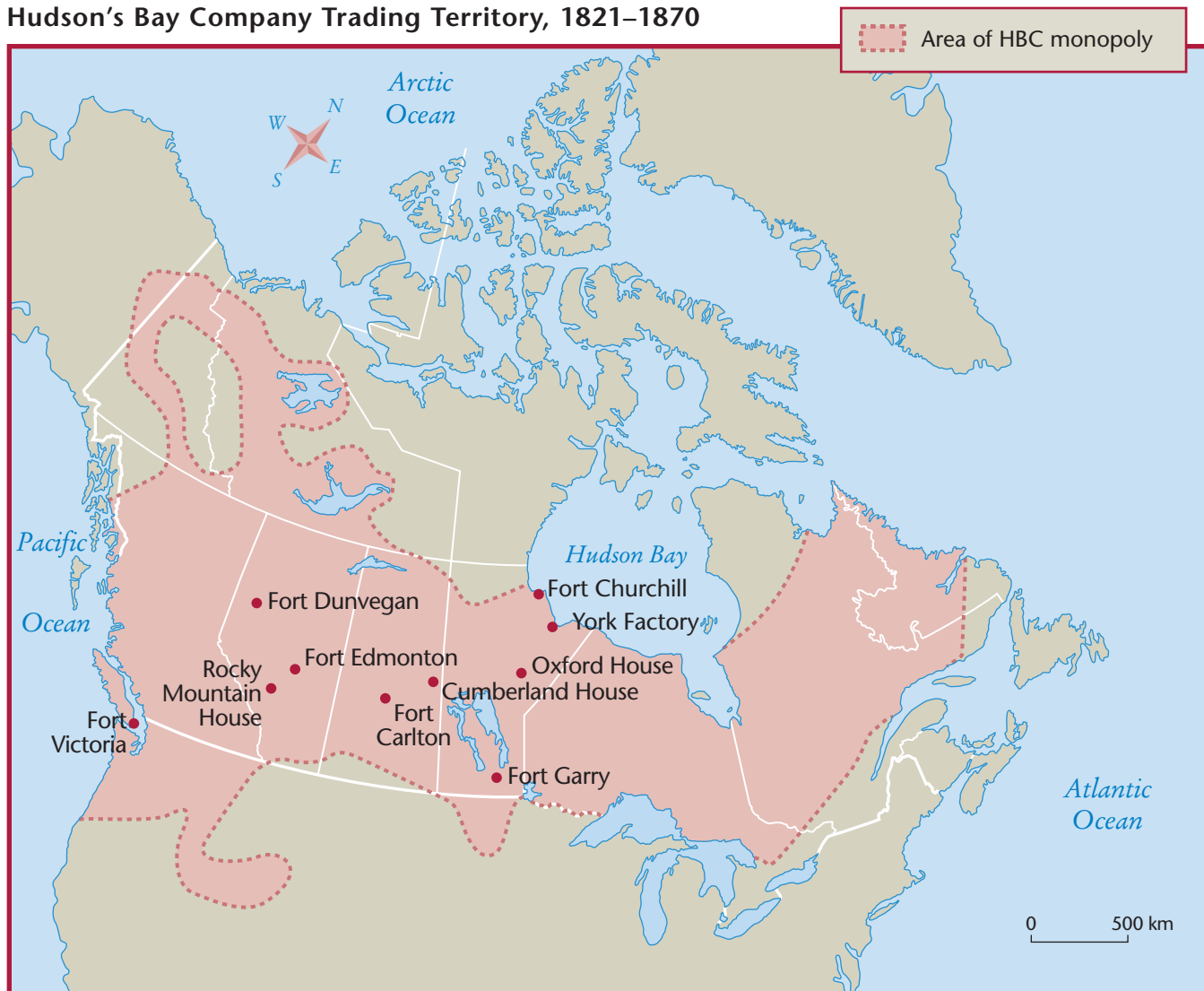
## PHASE 5 Monopoly in the West: 1821–1870

The HBC and NWC merged.

The furious competition between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company led to shootings, fights and hostage-takings. Britain ended the conflict in 1821, by encouraging the companies to merge under the name of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

This map shows some of the major HBC forts.

Hudson’s Bay Company Trading Territory, 1821–1870



! This map shows the boundaries of Canada’s provinces and territories today. These boundaries didn’t exist during the fur trade. We have included them to orient you.

### The HBC began to lose control of its monopoly.

The HBC lost a court case against independent Métis traders supplying pemmican and furs to Americans. Britain began to worry that Americans might use these economic connections to gain control of Rupert's Land.

### The trade began to decline in the west.

The buffalo began to disappear, beaver became scarce, and European demand for furs began to fall. In 1869, Britain helped the Hudson's Bay Company negotiate the sale of its founding territory — Rupert's Land — to Canada.

**Indian:** Many First Nations people prefer not to use the word *Indian* to describe themselves, except to identify those people recognized by Canada's Indian Act. We include the word here because Hargrave used it.

## A Glimpse of York Factory, Hudson Bay

York Factory, September 1840

My dear Mama,

We arrived here on Monday the 10th of August after an unusually short passage. The mosquitoes were nearly over, but Mrs. Finlayson and Miss Allan suffered a good deal. Indeed, Miss Allan had to get Dr. Gillespie, as her face and eyes swelled as if she had been stung by bees.

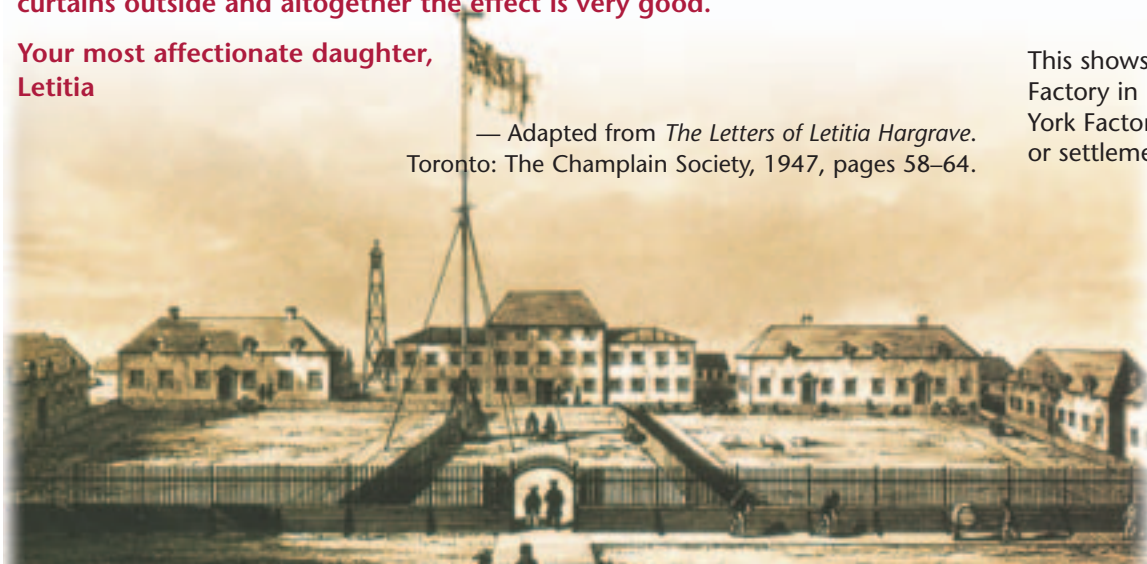
At the fort, the **Indians** stalk around so slowly and so stately that they remind me of people on the stage. The **Indian** women always have their blanket, which they fold like a scarf — common, coarse affairs. They laugh aloud when I give them peppermint drops. They don't know a word of English or French. When I want flowers or berries, I show them a specimen and give them a shove, and off they go. They always return with what I want.

I was much surprised with the "great swell" the Factory is. It looks beautiful. The houses are painted pale yellow. The windows and some particular parts are white. Some houses have green gauze mosquito curtains outside and altogether the effect is very good.

Your most affectionate daughter,  
Letitia

— Adapted from *The Letters of Letitia Hargrave*.  
Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1947, pages 58–64.

This shows the HBC fort York Factory in 1853. Where was York Factory? Does a town or settlement still exist there?



## A Glimpse of Life at a Prairie Fort

**Indian:** Europeans used the word *Indian* to describe the First Nations peoples of North America, although these peoples were diverse and had names for themselves.

**heathenish:** non-Christian

The life of the fort begins at the breakfast hour. The factor, his family and everyone entitled to the name of “company’s gentlemen” assemble at the officers’ mess. The conversation hinges on subjects connected to the trade. The success of someone’s last venture with an outfit of goods traded at an **Indian** camp; the quality of fish or pemmican procured by someone else.

During the hours of business at the fort, there is much to be looked after, especially in the summer season. When the bell announces the opening of the fort gates, the enclosure soon fills with **Indians** and traders. The few clerks in charge are busily engaged in measuring tea, sugar, ammunition; in examining furs and paying for them; in measuring off yards of blue cotton prints; or causing delight by the exhibition of gilt jewelry to be sold at ten times its original cost.

Outside the stockade, the voyageurs are loading boats with bales of fur for transportation to depot forts, or discharging cargoes of merchandise destined for widespread distribution.

As the day advances, the arrivals at the fort increase. Ofttimes, a large band of **Indians\*** ride rapidly up and enter to barter a few furs to supply their immediate needs. Bands will encamp about the fort, trading the results of a long and successful hunt, and making the days and nights hideous with their **heathenish** festivities.

— Adapted from Henry Robinson, *Sketches of Life in the Hudson’s Bay Territory*. New York: Punam, 1879, pages 89–98.

### RESPOND

The accounts of Letitia Hargrave and Henry Robinson describe a kind of society that existed in Canada’s past.

1. Find examples of words, phrases or situations in these accounts that convey Hargrave’s and Robinson’s idea of citizenship. Who belongs and who doesn’t belong to this society?
2. In what way might this idea of citizenship echo ideas from earlier in Canada’s history?

This illustration of a Hudson’s Bay trading fort, by Frederic Remington, dates from 1889. What details of fort life does this image show?



## Summing Up: Impacts of the Fur Trade

### GET READY

This section sums up information about this chapter-focus question:

#### What impacts did the fur trade have on diverse peoples?

As you read, keep track of:

- Examples of changes that peoples experienced because of the fur trade.
- Whether these changes were positive or negative.

### How Did the Fur Trade Influence the Migration of Peoples?

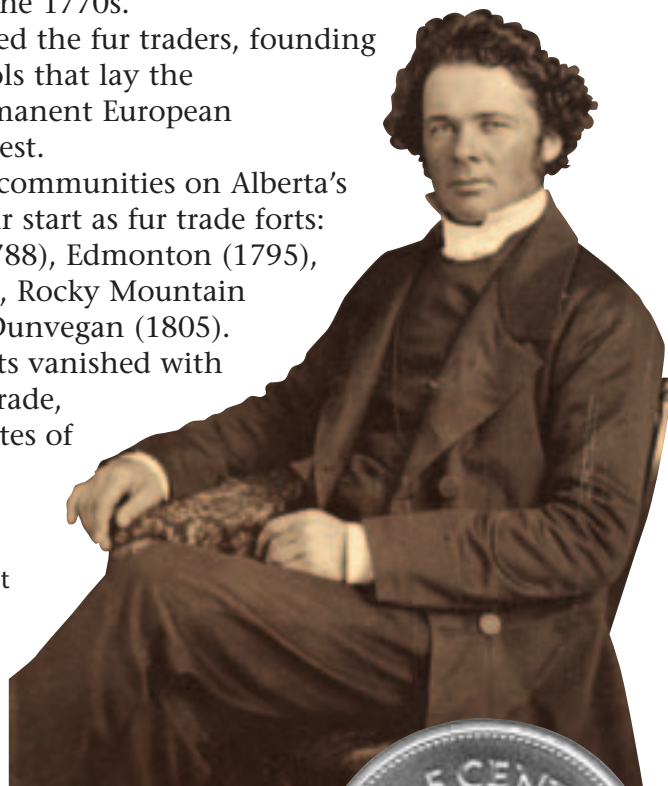
Because of the fur trade, people moved to new locations.

- Samuel de Champlain established Québec because it had better possibilities as a fur trade centre than Acadia on the east coast. Québec became a focus of settlement in New France, along with Montréal and Trois-Rivières, as colonists arrived to support and participate in the fur trade.
- The Métis put themselves in the centre of the trade, both professionally and geographically. They became guides, interpreters, freighters, provisioners and traders. Beginning in the early 1800s, they settled at Red River, which lay between the commercial and shipping centre of Montréal, and the trading posts in the west. Because of this, many Métis people live in Manitoba today.

Father Albert Lacombe, a Canadian Oblate priest, arrived in Alberta in 1852. His work converted many First Nations people to Catholicism and introduced them to farming. He established a mission at St. Albert in 1861. He became a negotiator between the Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy, as the disappearing buffalo brought them into conflict over territory.



- The Cree and Anishinabe expanded west with the fur trade. They now form two of the most geographically extensive First Nations in North America. The Cree moved west partly to compensate for failing food resources as the buffalo began to disappear, starting in the mid-1800s. This brought the Cree into conflict with the Blackfoot Confederacy in southern Alberta.
- The fur trade brought the first Europeans into the west. Canadian fur trader and explorer Pierre Gaultier de La Vérendrye established the first fur trade fort in what became Manitoba in 1734. British trader Peter Pond established the first fur trade fort in what became Alberta in the 1770s.
- Missionaries followed the fur traders, founding churches and schools that lay the foundations of permanent European settlement in the west.
- Some of the oldest communities on Alberta's map today had their start as fur trade forts: Fort Chipewyan (1788), Edmonton (1795), Lac La Biche (1798), Rocky Mountain House (1799) and Dunvegan (1805). Although many forts vanished with the end of the fur trade, some became the sites of permanent settlements.



George McDougall, a Scottish-Canadian Protestant Methodist missionary, established missions, in what became Alberta, at Fort Edmonton and Morley during the 1870s. He, his wife and eight children faced the task of clearing land so they could farm, and endured other hardships such as smallpox epidemics. George McDougall died north of Calgary in a January blizzard in 1876.

#### RESPOND

Events in history, such as the fur trade, can have both short-term and long-term impacts.

1. What would you identify as a short-term impact of the migrations that resulted from the fur trade?
2. What would you identify as long-term impacts?
3. What other traces of the fur trade can you find in Canadian society today?

Why does the nickel have a beaver on it?

## PERSPECTIVES ON

### The Fur Trade

Suppose a group of historians created a website where they could collect and exchange observations on the impacts of the fur trade. Here are some of the entries you might see.

#### Historian #1

The fur trade reduced the population of beaver and other fur-bearing animals, and of game. As resources became depleted in one area, the trade moved on to the next. This disrupted societies that traditionally lived on the land.

#### Historian #2

In many ways, the fur trade was a win-win situation. Europeans got access to resources they could sell at a profit — beaver pelts — and First Nations got access to goods they valued and could not make for themselves.

#### Historian #3

The trade established a rich cross-cultural environment that allowed a new culture — the Métis culture — to flourish. The Métis people sometimes call themselves “the children of the fur trade.”

#### Historian #4

Because of the fur trade, First Nations began to see European goods as essential. Guns, for example, changed the way First Nations hunted, and also made them more dependent on trade for ammunition. This placed First Nations at a disadvantage in their relations with Europeans, who became more dominant and powerful.

#### Historian #5

The trade opened the west to missionaries. As Europeans became dominant in the fur trade, missionaries delivered the message that First Nations had incorrect beliefs and values. Missionaries also delivered services, such as health care, and became peacemakers in conflicts that developed as the fur trade declined.

### RESPOND

1. Read the opinions of the five historians and, for each, decide whether it is positive or negative.
2. Write a title, or create an illustration, for each opinion that captures its main point.

## Chapter 4 Review

### WHAT DID CHAPTER 4 EXPLORE?

- How competition affected the development of the fur trade.
- What roles diverse peoples had in the fur trade, including French, British, Canadien, Métis, and First Nations peoples.
- How the fur trade affected diverse peoples.

### Check for Understanding

1. Identify an event that resulted from economic competition during the fur trade. What groups involved in the fur trade did this event affect (e.g., British people, French people, the Haudenosaunee, Canadiens, the Anishinabe or the Métis)? Choose one group from this list and describe in what way this event affected this group.
2. Describe an example of a migration of people that resulted from the fur trade. List some reasons why this migration took place.

### Demonstrate your Knowledge

3. Write a “want ad” from either the HBC or the NWC — whichever is most appropriate — for one of the key actors in the western fur trade. In point form, specify the company issuing the ad, and the services it is seeking from one of these groups:
  - Scottish people from the Orkney Islands.
  - Canadiens.
  - Métis people.
  - Members of the Cree or Anishinabe First Nations.

### Apply your Skills

4. A community group near a newly excavated fur trade fort in Alberta has asked you to research the history the fort. Create a plan for inquiry. Use the model for inquiry in the Skills Centre (pages 380 and 381) for guidelines on planning steps.

In your plan, be sure to consider these questions:

- What perspectives on history do you need to consider?
- How might the oral history of a First Nation assist you in your research?

### Take Stock

5. In this chapter, you used critical-thinking skills to evaluate writings of Letitia Hargrave and Henry Robinson. What aspects of that activity did you find most challenging? What steps could you take to make critical thinking work better for you?

Create a journal entry to record your thoughts.