

THE FUR TRADE IN NEW FRANCE

Descriptions
1685, 1697



1685 Fur Trading with the Indians at Fort Chambly near Montreal

In Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce, Baron de Lahontan, *Nouveaux voyages dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (*New Voyages to North-America*), 1703

[The Ottawas and Hurons] come down every Year to the Colony in order to make a better Market than they can do in their own Country of Michilimackinac, which lies on the Banks of the Lake of Hurons, at the Mouth of the Lake of the Illinese [Lake Michigan]. Their way of Trading is as follows:

Upon their first Arrival, they encamp at the distance of five or six hundred Paces from the Town. The next day is spent in [ar]ranging their Canoes, unloading their Goods and pitching their Tents, which are made of Birch Bark. The next day after, they demand Audience of the Governor General, which is granted 'em that same day in a public place. Upon this Occasion, each Nation makes a Ring for itself; the Savages sit upon the Ground with their Pipes in their Mouths, and the Governor is seated in an armed Chair; after which, there starts up an Orator or Speaker from one of these Nations, who makes an Harangue, importing,

“That his ‘Brethren are come to visit the Governor general, and to renew with him their wonted Friendship: That their chief View is to promote the Interest of the French, some of whom being unacquainted with the way of Traffic, and being too weak for the transporting of Goods from the [Great] Lakes, would be unable to deal in Beaver-skins, if his Brethren did not come in person to deal with 'em in their own Colonies: That they know very well how acceptable their Arrival is to the Inhabitants of Montreal, in regard of the Advantage they reap by it: That in regard the Beaver-skins are much valued in France, and the French Goods given in exchange are of an inconsiderable Value, they mean to give the French sufficient proof of their readiness to furnish 'em with what they desire so earnestly. That by way of preparation for another Year's Cargo, they are come to take in Exchange, Fusees,¹ Powder, and Ball, in order to hunt great numbers of beavers, or to gall the Iroquois, in case they offer to disturb the French Settlements: And, in fine, That in confirmation of their Words, they throw a Porcelain

Excerpted, some spelling and punctuation modernized, and images added by the National Humanities Center, 2006: www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm. 1685 selection: Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North-America*, reprint from the English edition of 1703, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1905), Vol. I, 92-95, 376-380. 1697 selection: *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America*, reprint from the second English edition of 1698, ed. R. G. Thwaites (McClurg & Co., 1903), 557-558. Complete image credits at www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/amerbegin/imagecredits.htm.

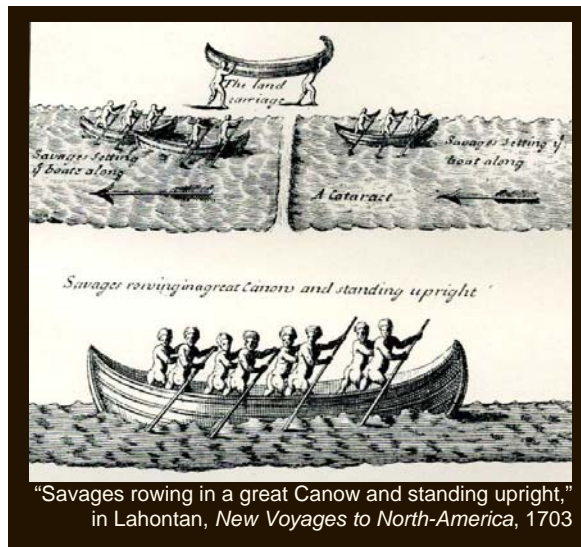
¹ Fusee: A type of flintlock similar to a musket, introduced about 1635. Also called a fusil.

Colier [necklace] with some Beaver-skins to the Kitchi-Okima (so they call the Governor-General) whose Protection they lay claim to in case of any Robbery or Abuse committed upon 'em in the Town."

The Spokesman having made an end of his Speech, returns to his Place, and takes up his Pipe; and then the Interpreter explains the Substance of the Harangue to the Governor, who commonly gives a very civil Answer, especially if the Present be valuable: in consideration of which he likewise makes a present of some trifling things. This done, the Savages rise up, and return to their Huts to make suitable Preparations for the ensuing Truck [trade].

The next day the Savages make their Slaves carry the Skins to the Houses of the Merchants, who bargain with 'em for such Clothes as they want. All the Inhabitants of Montreal are allowed to traffic with 'em in any Commodity but Wine and Brandy; these two being excepted upon the account that when the Savages have got what they wanted, and have any Skins left, they drink to excess, and then kill their Slaves; for when they are in drink, they quarrel and fight; and if they were not held by those who are sober, would certainly make Havoc one of another. . . .

As soon as the Savages have made an end of the Truck, they take leave of the Governor, and so return home by the River of Ottawa. To conclude, they did a great deal of good both to the Poor and Rich; for you will readily apprehend, that everybody turns Merchant upon such occasions. . . .



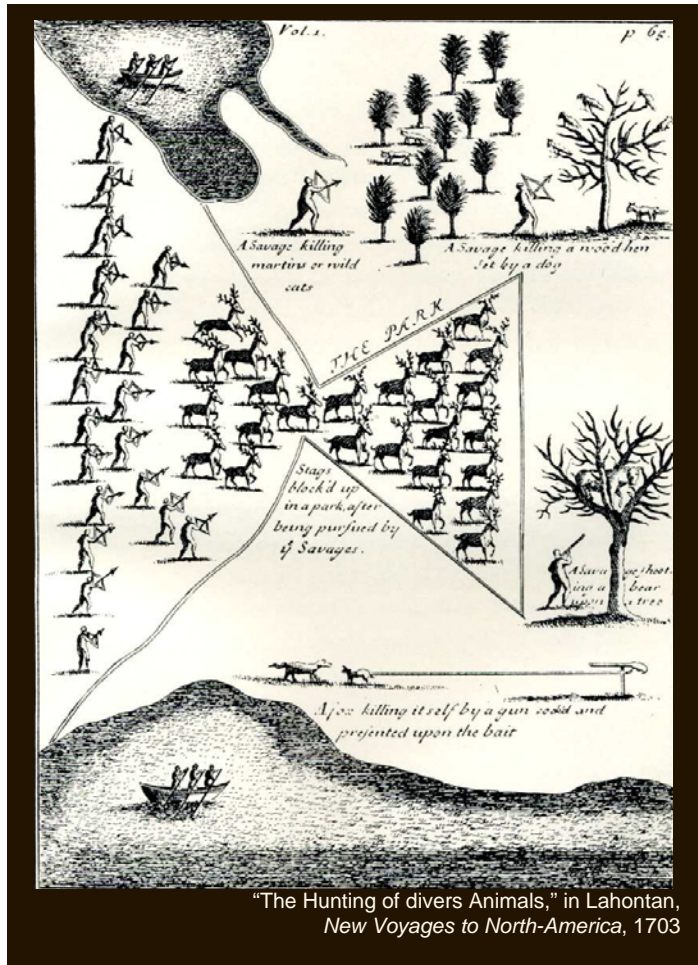
Now, you must take notice that all these Skins are brought up [to Quebec by] the Inhabitants, or from the Savages, upon which the Merchants are considerable Gainers. To give you an instance of this matter. A Person that lives in the Neighborhood of Quebec carries a dozen of Martins' Skins, five or six Foxes' Skins, and as many Skins of wild Cats to a Merchant's House in order to sell 'em for Woolen Cloth, Linen, Arms, Ammunition, etc. In the Truck of these Skins, the Merchant draws a double profit, one upon the score of his paying no more for the Skins than one half of what he afterwards sells 'em for in the lump to the Factors for the Rochelle [French seaport] Ships; and the other by the exorbitant rate he puts upon the Goods that the poor Planter takes in exchange for his Skins. If this be duly weighed we will not think it strange that these Merchants have a more beneficial Trade than a great many other Tradesmen in the World. . . . [N]ow it remains only to give you an inventory of the Goods that are proper for the Savages, and of the Skins which they give in exchange, together with their net Prices.

Short and light Fusees
 Powder
 Ball and cut Lead, or Small-shot
 Knives with their Sheaths
 Sword-blades to make Darts of
 Kettles of all sizes
 Shoemakers' Awls
 Fish-hooks, of all sizes
 Flint Stones
 Caps of blue Serge
 Shirts made of the common Brittany Linen
 Worsted Stockings, short and coarse

Brazil Tobacco
 Coarse white Thread for Nets
 Sewing thread of several colors
 Pack-thread
 Vermillion
 Needles, both large and small
 Venice beads
 Some Iron Heads for Arrows, but few of 'em
 A small quantity of Soap
 A few Sabers or Cutlasses
 Brandy goes off incomparably well.

The Names of the Skins given in exchange, with their Rates.

	<i>Livres</i>	<i>Sous</i>
The Skins of Winter Beavers, alias Muscovy Beavers, are worth <i>per pound</i> in the Farmer General's Warehouse	4	10
The Skins of fat Beavers, the Hair of which falls off, while the Savages make use of 'em, <i>per pound</i>	5	0
Of Beavers taken in Autumn, <i>per pound</i>	3	10
Of dry or common Beavers, <i>per pound</i>	3	0
Of Summer Beavers, <i>per pound</i>	3	0
The Skin of a white Beaver is not to be valued, no more than that of a Fox that's quite black		
The Skins of Silver-colored Foxes a piece	4	0
Of common Foxes, in good order	2	0
Of the common Martins	1	0
Of the prettiest sort of Martins	4	0
Of red and smooth Otters	2	0
Of the Winter and brown Otters or more	4	0
Of the finest black Bears	7	0
The Skins of Elks before they're dressed, are worth <i>per pound</i> about	0	12
The Skins of Stags are worth <i>per pound</i> about	0	8
The wild Cats or Enfants de Diable, a piece	1	15
Sea Wolves—apiece or more	1	15
Pole-Cats, and Weasels	0	10
Musk Rats	0	6
Their Testicles	0	5
Wolves	2	10
The white Elk-skins, i.e., those dressed by the Savages apiece	8	or m.
A dressed Hart's [stag] Skin is worth	5	or m.
A Caribou's [skin]	6	
A Roe-buck's [skin]	3	



"The Hunting of divers Animals," in Lahontan, *New Voyages to North-America, 1703*

To conclude, you must take notice that these Skins are upon some particular occasions dearer [costlier] than I rate 'em, but the difference is but very small, whether under or over.

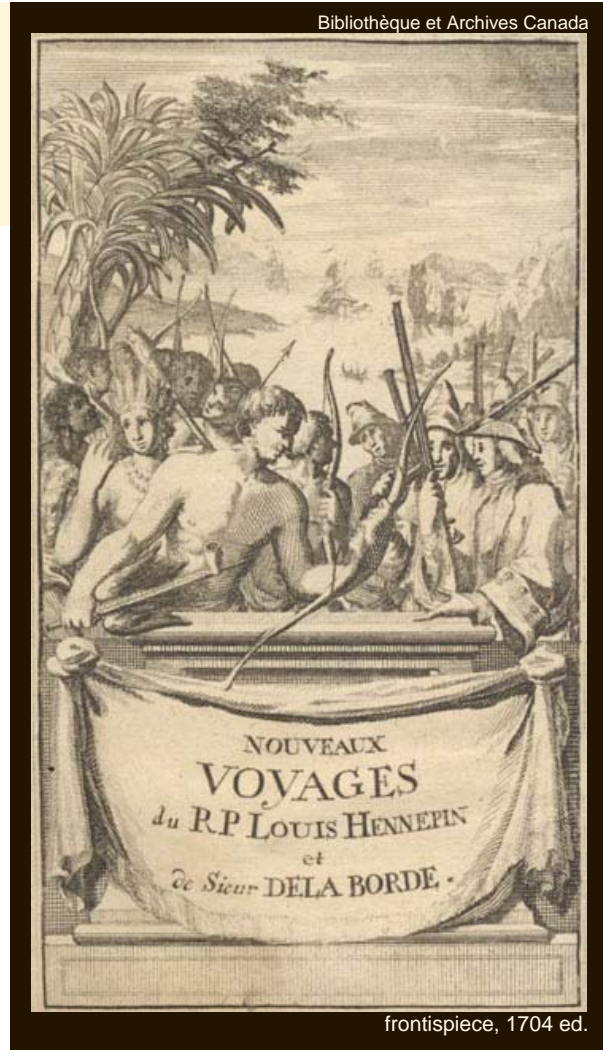
“An inexhaustible Commerce”: 1697 The Fur Trade in Canada

In Father Louis Hennepin, *Nouvelle Découverte d'un tres grand Pays, situé dans l'Amerique (A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America)*, 1697

At the first beginning of the Establishment of the Colony in Canada, the Community gain'd every Year a hundred thousand Crowns, besides the Gains of private Persons. In the Year 1687, this Sum was tripled and above, by the Furs which were sent to France: And though the Merchants are forc'd to advance further into the Country than at first, it's notwithstanding an inexhaustible Commerce, as we have observed, by the great Discoveries we have made.

It must be granted that there are no Nations in Europe that have such an Inclination for Colonies as the English and the Hollanders: The Genius of those People will not permit them to be idle at home. So the vast Countries of America which I have described, may be made the Soul of their Commerce. Private Persons who shall undertake it, without interesting [involving] their own Country, may bring it to a happy issue: They may easily contract Alliances with the Savages and civilize them. The Colonies which they shall establish there will quickly be peopled, and they may fortify themselves there at a very small Expense: They may content themselves at first with a moderate Gain, but in a short time it will be extremely considerable. . . .

It's certain . . . that the Trade of Furs in the North is of infinite Profit and Advantage. There are to be had Skins of Elks or Originals [moose], as they are called in Canada, of Bears, Beavers, of the white Wolf or Lynx, of black Foxes, which are wonderfully beautiful, which were sometimes valued at five or six hundred Francs; of common Foxes, Otters, Martins, wild Cats, wild Goats, Harts [stags], Porcupines; of Turkeys, which are of an extraordinary bigness, Bustards, and an infinity of other Animals, whose Names I know not.



frontispiece, 1704 ed.