

Appendix B. Glossary

Main Actors

Native Americans: in Minnesota and Canada, Indians were an essential part of the fur trade; the Ojibwe, Cree and others gathered furs to trade for goods and they taught the traders how to live on the land.

Hudson Bay Company: formed in 1670 the HBC is granted exclusive trading rights in the watershed of the Hudson Bay; initially Indians brought furs to posts along the Bay; competition from the North West Company forced them to extend trading posts into the interior.

North West Company: formed by independent "master pedlars" in 1784, the NWC was based on direct trading with Indians in the North Country; partners were intimately involved with the trade and nearly all had spent time in the country; merged with the HBC in 1821 after several decades of bitter and often murderous competition.

XY Company: formed in 1798 by disgruntled Nor'Westers to compete directly against the NWC; located small posts adjacent to NWC posts including Grand Portage; upon the death of Simon McTavish, head of the NWCo, in 1804 it merged with the Northwest Company.

American Fur Company: formed in 1808 by John Jacob Astor, the firm comes to dominate the US industry

Southwest Company: John Jacob Astor and partners of the NWCo formed this firm in 1811 to allow joint operations in what is now the United States (operated former NWCo posts in Minnesota); Astor bought out the NWCo partners in 1817 and then merged company with the American Fur Company.

A Few Terms

Avant: bowsman and lead voyageur of the canoe

Bourgeois: Partner of the Northwest Company;

Brigade: fleet of canoes

Canot du Maître: Montreal canoe, up to 36 feet long, capable of carrying 4 tons of goods plus 7-12 men with gear and provisions; hauled goods from Montreal to Lake Superior

Canot du Nord: North canoe, 24-27 feet long, carries 1½ tons plus up to 6 men with gear and provisions; used from Lake Superior into the North Country

Capot: hooded blanket coat

Coureur de bois ("woods runner"): traders, explorers, adventurers who lived in the North West before the trading companies or, later independent traders who lived with the Indians

Department: A sub-area of a district. The Departments of the Fond du Lac District were Montreal River, La Court Orielle, Folle Avoine, and Fond du Lac (only one in MN).

District: an area that encompasses several departments.

Engagé: employee of the North West Company

Free Canadian: an ex-voyageur or engagé who remains in the north west doing occasional contract work for the Company.

Gouvernail: steersman and second ranking voyageur in the canoe

Hivernant (winterer): voyageur or bourgeois who stayed in the North Country over the winter

Metis: people of mixed French Canadian-Indian heritage

Milieux: the middlemen voyageurs in the canoe

Outfit: fiscal year of the fur trade (i.e., July 1798 to June 1799 is referred to as the outfit of 1798).

Pays d'en haut: the Up Country, north and west of Lake Superior

Piece: one pack of approximately 90 pounds

Porkeater: Montreal canoeman who never went beyond Rainy Lake

Rendezvous: annual event in mid-summer at Grand Portage and later Fort William, where wintering traders exchanged their furs for trading goods and supplies brought from Montreal

Voyageur: canoeman, usually but not always, French-Canadian