

# WHY WAS THE FUR TRADE SIGNIFICANT?

Can an industry be historically significant? Consider four of Canada's current industries: forestry, mining, oil and gas, and manufacturing. Each of these has a positive impact. For example, people can earn an income that enables them to live more comfortably and the economy can prosper. Each of these industries also has a negative impact. For example, an industry can harm the environment, destroying animal habitats and ecosystems.

To determine historical significance, we look for evidence that the industry had a long-lasting impact on the lives of many people. Just as our current industries affect our lives today, the fur trade affected many people's lives 300 years ago. After 1713, expansion of the fur trade led to changes throughout North America.

## MOTIVATIONS IN THE FUR TRADE

In the early 1700s, both Britain and France were extending their power in Europe by developing colonies in North America. This strategy of taking over as many countries as possible was known as **imperialism**. The British colonies grew steadily along the eastern coast of North America. The settlers were mostly farmers, and the colonies supported themselves. New France did not grow as fast as the British colonies. The Canadiens needed more ways to sustain themselves, so they entered the fur trade. The French government helped to sponsor expeditions to find more First Nations fur trading partners because the fur trade was a large source of income for New France. Without a thriving colony, France's imperialist goal of ruling North America would fail.

Gaining wealth was a motivation for fur traders and explorers. French explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de La Vérendrye prospered from the fur trade during his expeditions in North America. Though the King of France did not profit much from the fur trade itself, he financed La Vérendrye's explorations. Examine **Figure 2.9**, an excerpt from a letter La Vérendrye wrote to the governor of New France. In it, he mentions that he is close to finding the Western Sea, known today as the Pacific Ocean. Why would finding a route to the Pacific Ocean benefit the King?

How can understanding the fur trade in the 1700s help us deal with economic issues today?

**imperialism** the policy of extending a country's power and influence by creating colonies or conquering other countries

"The colony will receive a new benefit independently of the discovery of the Western Sea through the quantity of furs that will be produced."

— Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de La Vérendrye, French explorer

**FIGURE 2.9** This excerpt is from a letter that La Vérendrye wrote to the governor of New France, Charles de Beauharnois de La Boische, in 1730. **Analyze:** Which two benefits does La Vérendrye identify?

## PARTNERING WITH FIRST NATIONS

For more than 200 years, the French and First Nations developed relationships that were useful to both groups. Realizing that First Nations had a much larger population, the French decided they could benefit from developing good business relationships with First Nations peoples. For example, they took part in gift-giving ceremonies during negotiations to demonstrate their respect. In **Figure 2.10**, Chief Luther Standing Bear identifies principles that many First Nations peoples live by. If the French were also able to demonstrate these principles, how might it have helped them build their relationships with First Nations and their fur trading business?

The French depended on First Nations to supply the furs that they sold in Europe. First Nations depended on Europeans to supply European-made goods. Many of these goods were tools, such as rifles, metal traps, sewing needles, and cooking pots.

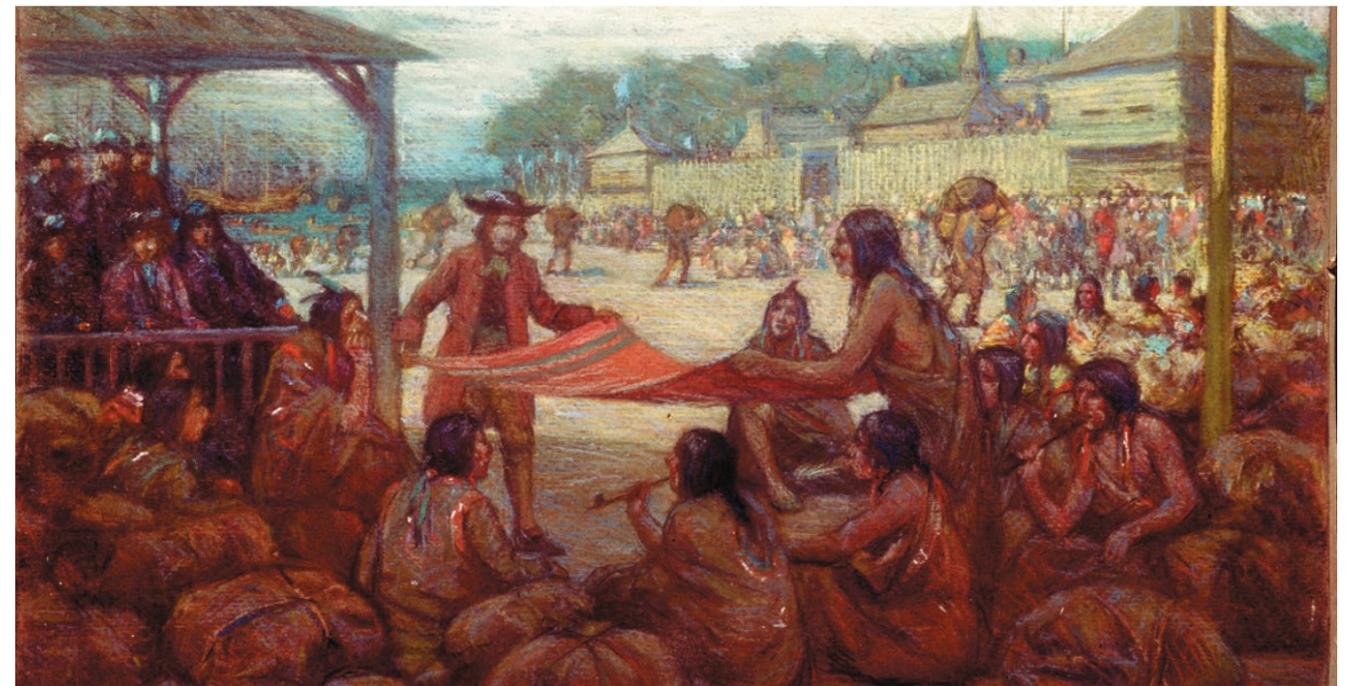
How does the artist who painted the scene in **Figure 2.11** depict a fur trading session between the French and First Nations representatives? The friendly relationships developed through the fur trade also helped the French in times of war. Their First Nations trading partners became their **military allies**. As well, Catholic missionaries tried hard to convince First Nations peoples to embrace Catholicism. When they were successful, the French–First Nations relationships were further strengthened.

**FIGURE 2.10** Chief Luther Standing Bear explains principles that guide many First Nations peoples in their everyday life. **Analyze:** How does the quotation help to explain why First Nations peoples regarded gift giving as an important part of negotiations?

"Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom, an intense and absorbing respect for life ... and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations."

— Chief Luther Standing Bear, Oglala Sioux First Nation

**military allies** two or more parties that agree to support one another in case of war



**FIGURE 2.11** This 1916 painting by Ontario artist George Reid is called *Traders at Montreal*. **Analyze:** How does the artist portray the relationship between the French and First Nations?

# READING TEXT SOURCES

Historians are like detectives: they look at sources for evidence that can help them answer questions about the past and create an argument or a narrative.

Historians often look at text sources for evidence. Text sources are written records that can be descriptions of events. They can also be transcriptions of speeches, remarks, or conversations. Text sources can be found as primary sources or secondary sources.

To begin a historical investigation, historians first read secondary sources to gain background knowledge of the event or time period they have a question about. Next, they select primary sources that they think may be helpful. Then, historians do a **close reading** of each source. They examine the source carefully, asking questions about the source and making observations about any patterns or trends. **Figure 2.12** below lists some of the questions that historians ask themselves when they are closely reading a text source.

Question Category	Sample Questions
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of document is it (a letter, diary, report, etc.)?</li> <li>• When and where was it created? Who wrote it? Who for? What for?</li> <li>• Is the author describing his or her own experiences, or those of others?</li> <li>• Was the information recorded when the events occurred, or later?</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What claims does the author make?</li> <li>• What evidence does the author give to support these claims?</li> <li>• What is the author's perspective on the topic? How can I tell?</li> <li>• What information or perspective does the author leave out?</li> </ul>
Writing style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What words or phrases does the author use to persuade the reader?</li> <li>• What else does the writer's choice of words or details tell me?</li> <li>• What feelings does the writer express, or hope to inspire in the reader?</li> </ul>
Audience response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What effect did this text likely have on its readers?</li> <li>• How might a different audience have responded to it?</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 2.12** When doing a close reading of a text, it is important to ask questions about the source and its content.

In this activity, you will do a close reading of the text in **Figure 2.13** to look for evidence that can help you answer the following inquiry question: What caused tensions in North America to rise from 1713 to 1755?



“For the future we will sell no Lands [to you, unless] we know beforehand the Quantity of Goods we are to receive. Besides, we are not well used with respect to the Lands still unsold by us. Your People daily settle on these Lands, and spoil our Hunting. We must insist on your Removing them, as you know they have no Right to settle to the Northward of *Kittochtinny-Hills*. In particular, we renew our Complaints against some People who are settled at *Juniata*, a Branch of *Sasquahannah*, and all along the Banks of that River, as far as *Mahaniay*; and desire they may be forthwith made to go off the Land; for they do great Damage to our Cousins the *Delawares*.... your Horses and Cows have eat the Grass our Deer used to feed on. This has made them scarce ... we are really poor ...”

— Chief Canasatego, *Onondaga Iroquois First Nation*

**FIGURE 2.13** Chief Canasatego from the Onondaga First Nation acted as a spokesperson for the Onondaga Iroquois First Nation. He spoke these words to the British during negotiations concerning Onondaga land in 1742. His words were recorded by a Pennsylvanian colonist in the minutes of the meeting.

## HOW TO CLOSELY READ A TEXT SOURCE

Consider **Figure 2.13**. Write down everything you know about the creation of the source.

- What type of source is it?
- When and where was it created?
- Is the author recording his or her own words or Chief Canasatego's words?
- Was the speech recorded during the meeting or later?

**STEP 1**

Read the text again. How is Chief Canasatego's message communicated?

- What words does he use to show his people's displeasure?
- What words does he use to try to inspire sympathy in his listeners?
- What impact do you think this speech may have had on the British audience? Why?

**STEP 3**

What does this text suggest are some possible reasons why tensions in North America rose during this period?

**STEP 5**

Read the text carefully to understand what it says.

- What is Chief Canasatego's main argument?
- Why is British settlement spoiling the Onondaga's hunting?
- Locate the Susquehanna and Juniata rivers on a map.
- Who were the Delaware people? Why would Chief Canasatego refer to them as "cousins"?

**STEP 2**

What inferences can you make? For example, what can you infer from the first sentence about the quantity of goods given by the British to the Onondaga in exchange for their land?

**STEP 4**

## EXPANSION OF THE FUR TRADE

In the early 1700s, the French received almost all furs in Montréal. Their First Nations trading partners brought furs to Montréal from what the Canadiens called *le pays d'en haut* (“the upper country”), a vast area north and west of the Great Lakes. In 1713, however, the Treaty of Utrecht gave a big piece of this area to the British, effectively cutting off the French from their source of furs. First Nations in the upper country paddled along the rivers to reach the British Hudson’s Bay Company trading posts. Examine **Figure 2.14** to see where French trading posts were established by La Vérendrye to recapture trade from the British.

## COMPETING TO TRADE WITH FIRST NATIONS

Competition in the fur trade was fierce.

In some ways, the British and the French transferred their rivalry on the battlefield to the fur trade. Near the Ohio River and around the Great Lakes, the British tried hard to take the business of the Huron (Wyandot), Delaware, and Shawnee First Nations away from the French. In turn, the French worked to capture the business of the Cree First Nations in what is now Manitoba and Saskatchewan. This competition put First Nations trappers in a good bargaining position. Some trading posts were so close together that First Nations trappers could check who was offering the best prices or the finest goods before selling their furs. Read **Figure 2.15** to see how a Hudson’s Bay Company employee described the reaction of First Nations trading partners to the goods the company was offering.

The competition for furs led to some harmful consequences. Over time, over-trapping brought the beaver to the brink of extinction. Another consequence was the spread of disease. Fur traders spread smallpox, which killed tens of thousands of First Nations people.

“Never was any man so upbraided [disgraced] with our powder, kettles and hatchets, than we have been this summer by all the natives, especially by those who border near the French ... For now is the time to oblige the natives before the French draws them to their settlement.”

— Thomas McCleish, Hudson’s Bay Company employee

**FIGURE 2.15** This is an excerpt from a 1728 letter McCleish wrote to his employer in Britain. **Analyze:** Why was McCleish worried about First Nations establishing trading relationships with the French?

British and French Trading Posts, 1741



**FIGURE 2.14** This map shows the established British trading posts and the French trading posts that were built by 1741 to compete with the British. **Analyze:** What do the years the forts were built tell you about French and British actions after 1713?

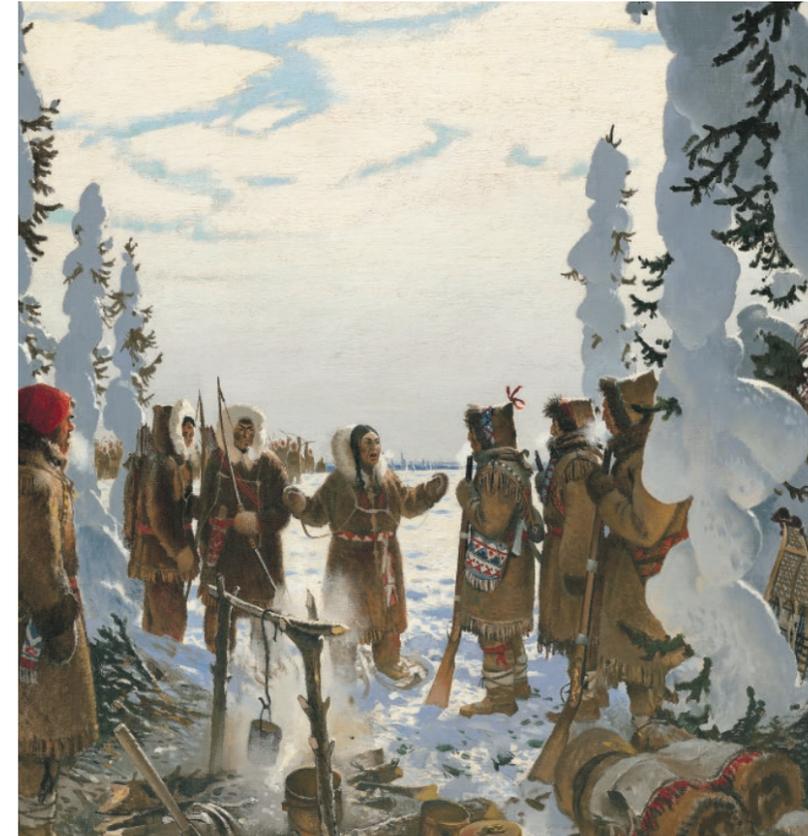
## THANADELTHUR: AMBASSADOR OF PEACE

The fur trade depended heavily on First Nations women. They prepared the furs, which involved skinning, cleaning, and tanning the hides. Skillful preparation always increased the value of fur. After learning English or French, some women acted as interpreters, advisors, and guides. Some of them played a role in making deals between different peoples.

In 1713, a young Dene woman named Thanadelthur was captured by the Cree Nation. Escaping the following year, Thanadelthur headed to a Hudson’s Bay Company outpost in York Factory. There she met James Knight, who was in charge of the post. Thanadelthur decided to help Knight establish trade in the region. In a year-long effort, she brought together the warring Dene and Cree First Nations and helped them make peace. Her efforts paved the way for years of peaceful trading with Hudson’s Bay Company.

In 1952, Hudson’s Bay Company commissioned a painting of Thanadelthur, who had lived more than two centuries earlier. Look at the painting in **Figure 2.16**. What does it tell you about why Hudson’s Bay Company felt that Thanadelthur was historically significant?

Why is it important to learn about the contributions made by women?



**FIGURE 2.16** This painting shows Thanadelthur (centre) in the early 1700s, promoting peace through trade. Hudson’s Bay Company commissioned Franklin Arbuttle to create this painting in 1952. He called it *Ambassadress of Peace*. **Analyze:** How does the artist depict the importance of Thanadelthur?

## CHECK-IN

- CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** What were the motivations behind the fur trade? Do you think similar motivations exist for trade in Canada today? Explain your reasoning.
- INTERPRET AND ANALYZE** Compare **Figures 2.13** and **2.15**. What does this comparison reveal about British and First Nations’ perspectives on the fur trade?
- EVALUATE AND DRAW CONCLUSIONS** Look at the quote from La Vérendrye in **Figure 2.9** and the map in **Figure 2.14**. What was the French strategy to expand the fur trade?
- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** What makes the fur trade historically significant? Consider how it affected the level of exploration, people’s lives, and the relationships among the French, the British, and First Nations.