

PART 2

By the late 1400's, true "first contact" with Europeans (explorers and fishers off the east coast of Canada) had occurred, starting a change in First Nations' history forever. The lands that are now Canada, for thousands of years inhabited by hundreds of First Nations tribes, had been discovered by the rest of the world. (21).

A massive land acquisition, of huge consequence to the country as a whole, was legislated by England in 1670. "*The Governor and 'Company of Adventurers' of England trading into Hudson Bay Royal Charter*" was created by King Charles II, as a consequence of an exploratory expedition to what is now northern Canada's Hudson Bay.

That 1669 undertaking proved it was possible to sail the Atlantic Ocean to Hudson Bay, spend the winter, trade with indigenous people, and return with a lucrative cargo of beaver pelts the next year. The charter, written on animal skin parchment, served as the articles of incorporation for the Hudson's Bay Company.

This private domain stretched from the Atlantic to the Rockies to the Arctic Circle, comprising over 40% of Canada's boundaries today and almost a quarter of the continent. A portion of land to the north west of Rupert's land, called the North-Western Territory was also put under the control of the HBC.

Until 1870, for 200 years, these lands were the exclusive commercial property of the Hudson's Bay Company and the primary trapping grounds for the fur trade. (110)

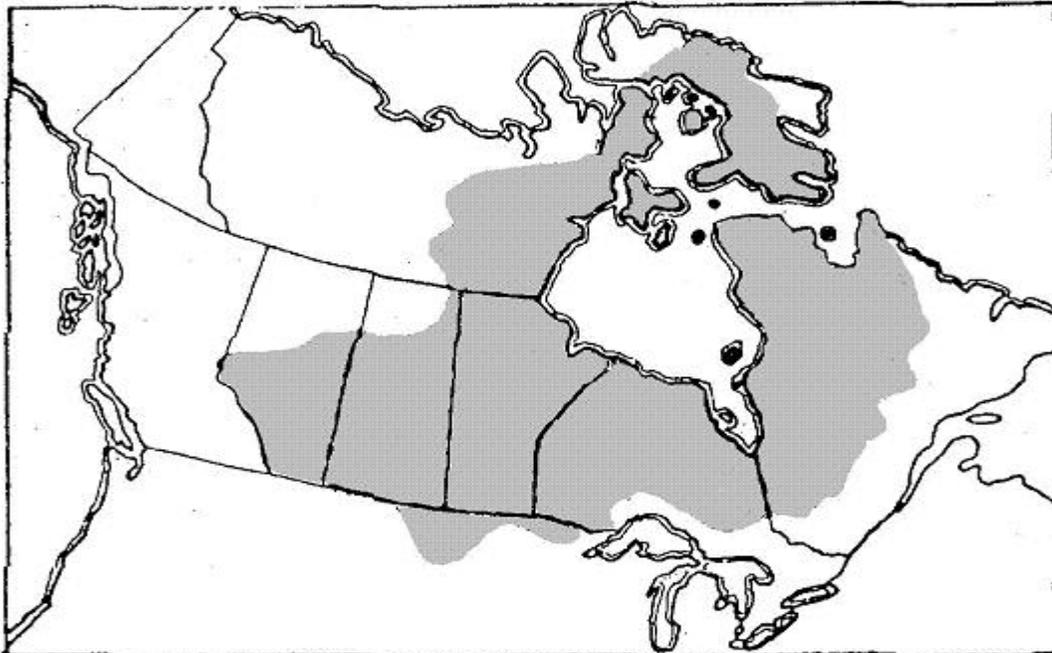


Figure 48: Rupert's Land in shaded grey. (92)

Within King Charles' charter, he named his "dear and entirely beloved cousin" Prince Rupert as first Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Prince Rupert served in that capacity for 12 years. Thus, the entire Hudson Bay watershed was named Rupert's Land. (110)



Figure 49: Prince Rupert circa 1641-42 NPG 4519 (112)

This 3.9 million square mile expanse created untold wealth for the company and continued to thrive through an 1821 merger with the North West Company, virtually its only trading rival. (110)

Opening such an immense tract of land to trade introduced the Euro-Canadian world to indigenous peoples across the prairies, quickly and in great numbers. The interaction was mostly peaceful, in contrast to western expansion in the USA.

Three years after Confederation, the Dominion of Canada bought Rupert's Land for \$1.5 million. Canadian legislators feared the USA was interested in Rupert's Land. And that country had \$40 million that the land was worth – Canada did not. But the British government would not allow a USA sale. It was wary of American expansionism (the USA have already purchased Alaska from Russia 3 years earlier).



The HBC signed the deed of transfer to the British crown in 1869. And the crown in turn ceded the land to Canada under Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald, coming into effect the following year. (109)

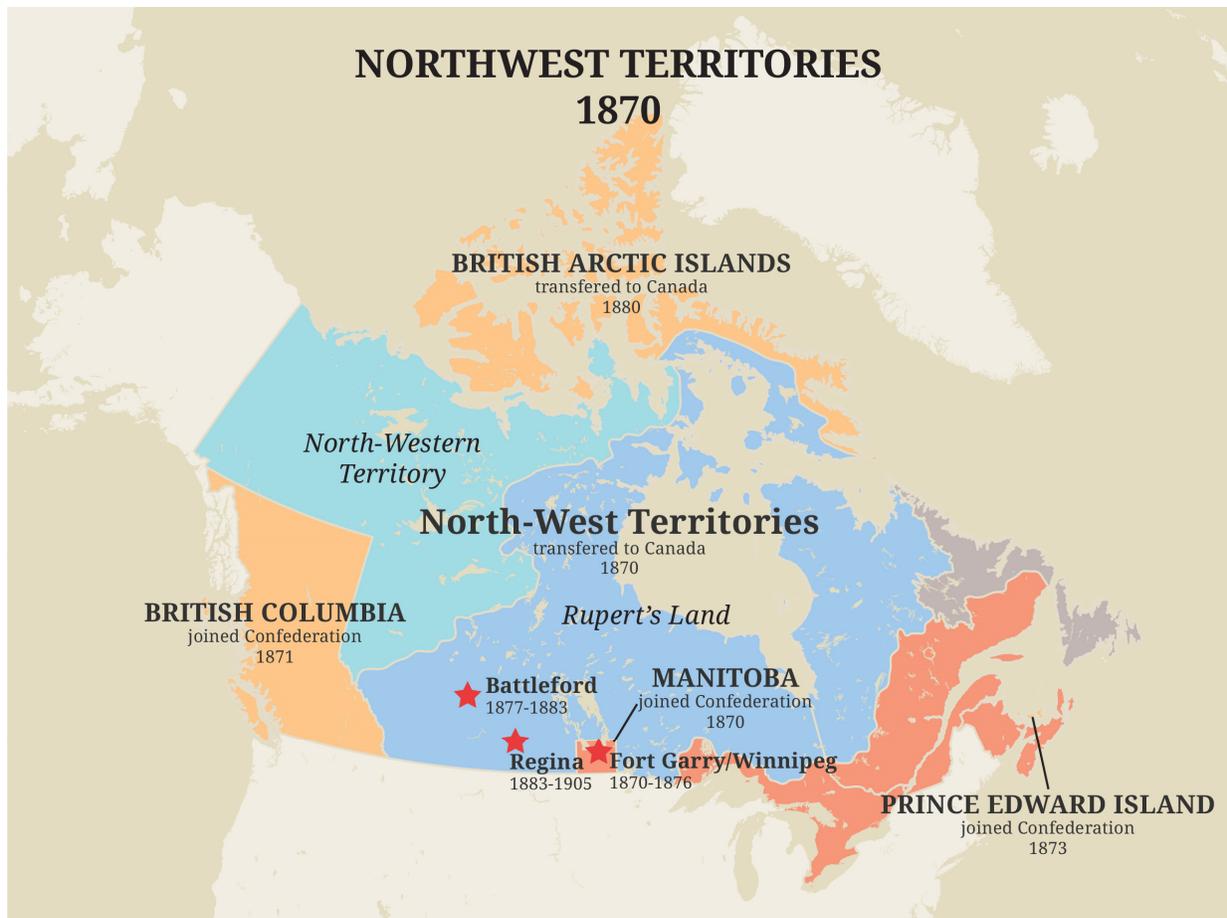
The purchase transformed Canada geographically, changing it from a modest country in the northeast of the continent to an expansive one, reaching across North America.

And MacDonald's political, social, and racial views would shape the future of indigenous peoples throughout the west.

Figure 50: Prime Minister John A. MacDonald 1883 LAC (111)

Credit Harold M. Daly/Library and Archives Canada C-002079

Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory, together renamed the North-West Territories, was eventually divided into Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, present day North-West Territories and a much larger province of Manitoba. (109)



Courtesy Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre

Figure 51: Map of the Dominion of Canada after the purchase of Rupert's Land, together with the North-Western Territory, from the HBC. The entirety was renamed the North-West Territories. Note the tiny province of Manitoba, also created in 1870. (31)

From 300 and 200 BP (Before Present) European goods (for example metal tools and ceramics) began appearing in the possession of indigenous prairie peoples. However, that appears to be the result of trade and not actual contact. Likely native peoples traded with bands or individuals who traded further east, as part of the fur trade chain. (179)

Those making European contact journeyed east as far as Hudson Bay, making travel to the west unnecessary. Eventually explorers did begin venturing west. Henry Kelsey, a Hudson's Bay Company employee, arrived in the western plains in 1691 and is credited as the first European to see the Saskatchewan River.

Anthony Henday made a 1754-1755 expedition. Those early travelers have provided us with the first written descriptions of the cultures they found. Many explorers relied heavily on indigenous guides, for, of course, the land was well known to those having lived on the plains for such a significant amount of time. (87)

Alberta historian Hugh Dempsey writes about Henday's 1754 travels on the western plains in search of Blackfoot fur trading partners. Cultural differences came to light as Henday learned that the Cree and Blackfoot were mortal enemies at that time, leaving his Cree guides in fear for their lives. (95)

For more than a century, the fur trade was the sole reason for contact between European and plains peoples. By the early 1600s, a market for North American beaver fur developed in Europe. The booming demand for pelts to further a men's hat craze would set in motion major forces for cultural change in Canada's west.



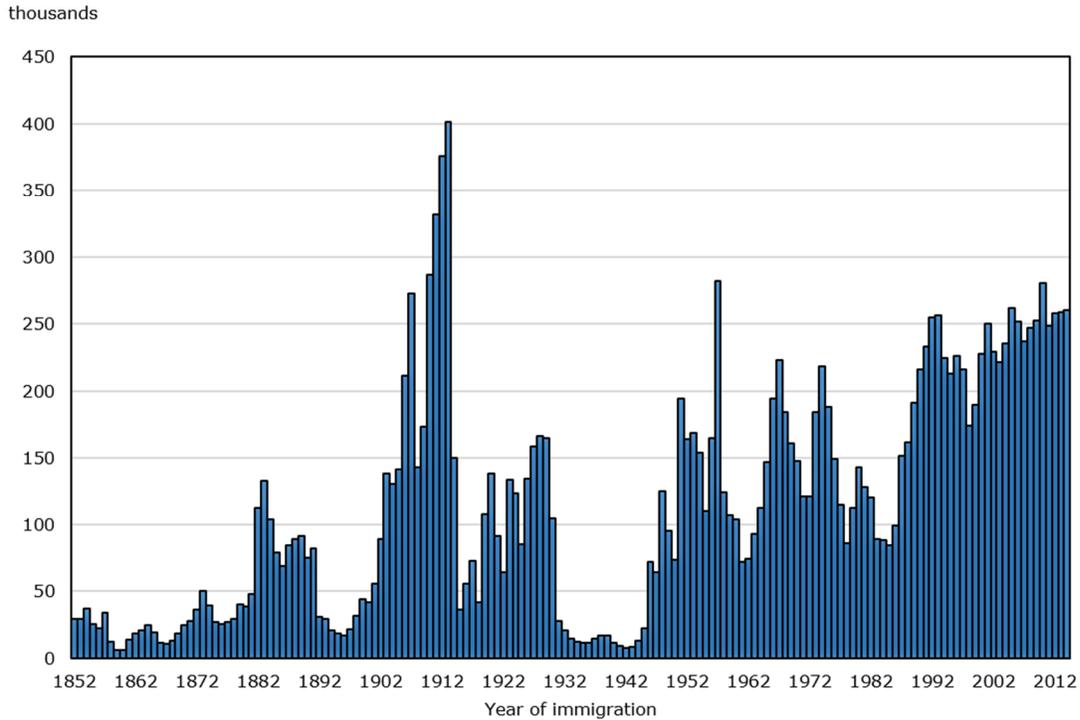
Figure 52: Cartoon spoof on the felted beaver fur hat fashion. (122)

But the numbers attracted to trade and early exploration were not indicative of the overwhelming European migration to Canada's west that was yet to come.

Between 1640 and 1840, several thousand European and Canadian fur traders, followed by several hundred, mostly British immigrants, created dozens of small outposts across the prairies. The largest wave of immigration, drawn from many nations, occurred between the end of the 1800s and 1920s. These were the homesteaders who sought land, not resources such as depleted animal populations.

By that time, the bison were gone, through over-hunting to meet overseas demand, and possibly disease, and now the land itself became the commodity in demand. (31)

Chart 1
Number of immigrants who landed annually in Canada, 1852 to 2014



Sources: From 1852 to 1979—Employment and Immigration Canada, 1982. For 1980—Immigration Statistics, Immigration and Demographic Policy Group, Catalogue no. MP22-1/1980. From 1980 to 2014—Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada.

(180)

Fort Edmonton was nominally established as a small outpost in 1795, during the fur trade era (1795-1859). It sat right beside its rival, the NWC at the junction of the North Saskatchewan and Sturgeon Rivers. Both companies enjoyed a booming fur trade business. The HBC alone traded well over 12,000 beaver pelts in the year 1797 alone. Thereafter, there were relocations, each to position the fort to better advantage, first 30 km upstream to what is now known as the Rosedale Flats and again in 1830 a little upstream and higher up the riverbank to escape flooding. That site is now the Alberta Legislative grounds. (181)



Photograph of a painting by John David Kelly 1953 (123) Figure 53: Fort Edmonton 1825. Boat brigades leaving this now active trade centre.

By this time, the HBC was capitalizing on its stronghold on the north-west fur trade. The fort depended on First Nations hunters to provide profitable furs and essential food supplies which were bartered for European goods.

City of Edmonton Archives EA-10-94

It served as an administrative centre, warehouse and storage facility and a place where goods were manufactured by tradesmen. Fort Edmonton was a “meat” post, with much of the pemmican and fresh buffalo meat for traders coming from here.

It grew into one of the largest and most important posts in what would become Alberta. (181) Edmonton thrived as a trading post partly due to its key location. (181) Transportation relied heavily on water travel, the North Saskatchewan River, and other waterways. Canoes were soon replaced by York boats, capable of transporting heavier and heavier shipments. (75)

Many different indigenous peoples lived in proximity: Plains Cree, Plains Nakoda (Assiniboine or Stoney) and the powerful Blackfoot Confederacy. Trading for European goods became more and more a part of everyday life. And as time passed, indigenous people became more and more dependent on the fur trade.

This prompted trapping and hunting to be done with the objective of *trade*, rather than for the traditional goal of fulfilling their community needs. (31) And disease and alcohol added additional, serious problems.

A newcomer to the fur trade, the relatively short-lived XY Company (formed in 1797 as a disgruntled off-shoot of the North West Company) was particularly aggressive in promoting alcohol in its trading strategy.

Within 7 years they re-amalgamated back into what was called the New North West Company, a more powerful trading competitor to the Hudson’s Bay Company. (162)

Henday was one explorer who documented evidence of both the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company’s policy to make the Blackfoot dependent on liquor (an unknown drink in tradition cultures) in order to bind traders to whichever company could provide the most. (95)

Jean L’Heureux, a census taker in 1871, reported 221 Blackfoot Confederacy deaths that year, 133 to disease and 88 due to alcohol-fueled violence. He found a similar story among the Peigans – 34 deaths due to illness, 27 related to alcohol. (157)

According to the records of western explorers such as David Thompson, travelling up the North Saskatchewan River and across the Rockies around the turn of the 19th century, the Blackfoot, known as bison hunters and warriors, moved south from the river, possibly following diminished bison herds. And Cree peoples moved in to occupy the area around Edmonton. (63)



Figure 54: Blackfoot traditional territory prior to 1600. (124)

Many peoples inhabited the lands of the North Saskatchewan River, with its headwaters coming from the Saskatchewan Glacier in the Columbia Icefields, flowing across Alberta and Saskatchewan into Lake Winnipeg, then via the Nelson River into Hudson Bay.

Livelihoods were interconnected with the river and the river valley. First Nations peoples fished in the “swift flowing river”, hunted on the plains and foraged for berries and plants in the valley.



Photograph by Oliver B. Buell Courtesy Library and Archives Canada e011367816
 Figure 55: Siksika (Blackfoot) family on reserve No 146 about 1885. (163)



A. Ross 1886 (151)

Figure 56: Chief Bobtail of the Siksika (Blackfoot Confederacy) Alberta. He was born Kiskiyew (aka Alexis Piche) along the North Saskatchewan River in 1826. (38)

As the renowned leader of the Bear Hills Mountain Cree, Chief Bobtail chose reserve land in the Pigeon Lake area, now called Maskwacis – the Cree word for “Bear Hills.” (38)

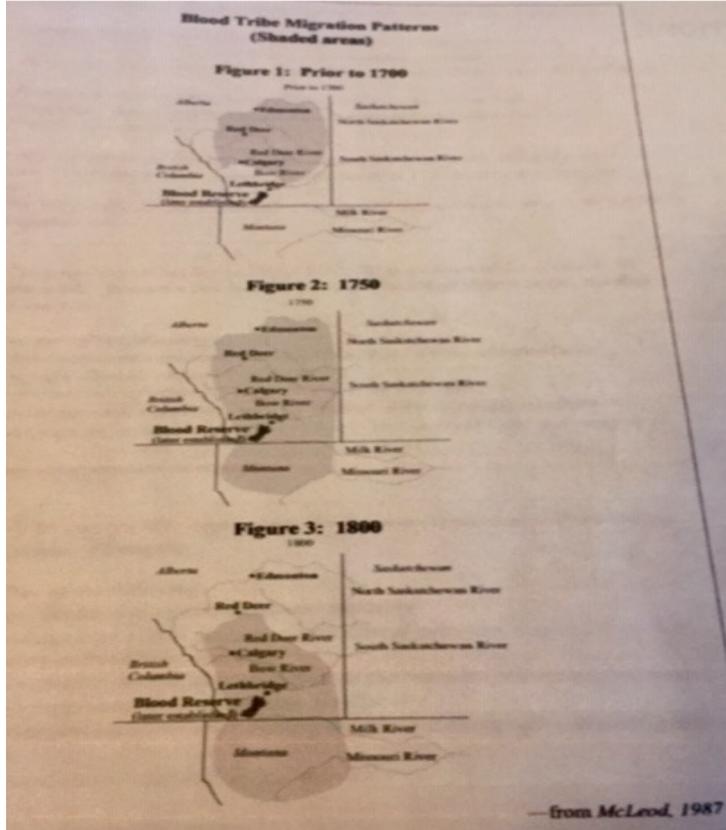


Figure 57: Illustrates the plight of another Blackfoot Confederacy peoples, the Blood (or Kainai). Their migration south out of the Edmonton area may well be attributable to diminishing bison herds. Nomadic peoples followed their livelihood.

By the mid-19th century, the worlds of the Cree and Europeans were deeply entwined. Mixed blood was common. Identity was determined more by how one lived than from whom one descended. (106)

There was fluidity to band membership: smaller groups merging with larger, individuals left to align themselves with a new band or advantageous amalgamations for a perceived advantage. (158)

1837 was a devastating time for indigenous prairie peoples. Smallpox raced through First Nations, around Fort Edmonton and elsewhere, killing thousands across the prairies. Estimates of the Blackfoot Confederation's population of 20,000 in 1833 plummeted to 6,350 after just one epidemic. (105) Previous and future epidemics were equally calamitous.

A future Cree leader by the name of Papaschase, (also bearing the Christian name John Gladieu-Quinn) was born in central Alberta. One document states he was born at Beaver Hills (80). However, his scrip application at the Library and Archives Canada reads born at Lesser Slave Lake (81) in 1838 to parents, father Kwenis (Jean Baptiste Quinn) and mother Lizette (Elizabeth) Gladu. They lived in a Cree manner and so were considered Cree. (106)

As a young man, Papaschase was said to have been an accomplished warrior in the conflict between the Cree (Nehiyawak) and the Blackfoot Confederacy (Nitsitapii). (106)

At the age of 20, in 1858, he married Julia Batoche. In ensuing years, he also married Peggy Bruneau dit Brucan. (81) Wives Marguerite (no known surname) and Isabelle Dumont have also been identified in other sources, and that he had many children. (80)



Figure 58: Chief Papaschase
(meaning Woodpecker in Cree) (93)

A great-granddaughter remembers growing up with the knowledge that her father's grandfather, Papaschase, had five wives. These others do not appear in any documents. (135) The extended family travelled and hunted in the Fort Edmonton, Fort Assiniboine, and Lesser Slave Lake areas.

In the 1840's, Papaschase, six brothers and their families, moved from the Lesser Slave Lake area to Lac St. Anne.

A decade later they relocated to the Fort Edmonton Rossdale site (via Beaver Hills), to continue trading with the HBC and to act in their employ from time to time. Their hunting territory then ranged into the Beaver Hills and Vermillion River areas. (106)

This Glenbow Museum and Archives collection photograph is one of only two pictures known that are identified as Chief Papaschase. This one has been disputed as misidentified. (105 p 103)



Figure 59: Indigenous encampment on the Rossdale Flats circa 1915 (125)