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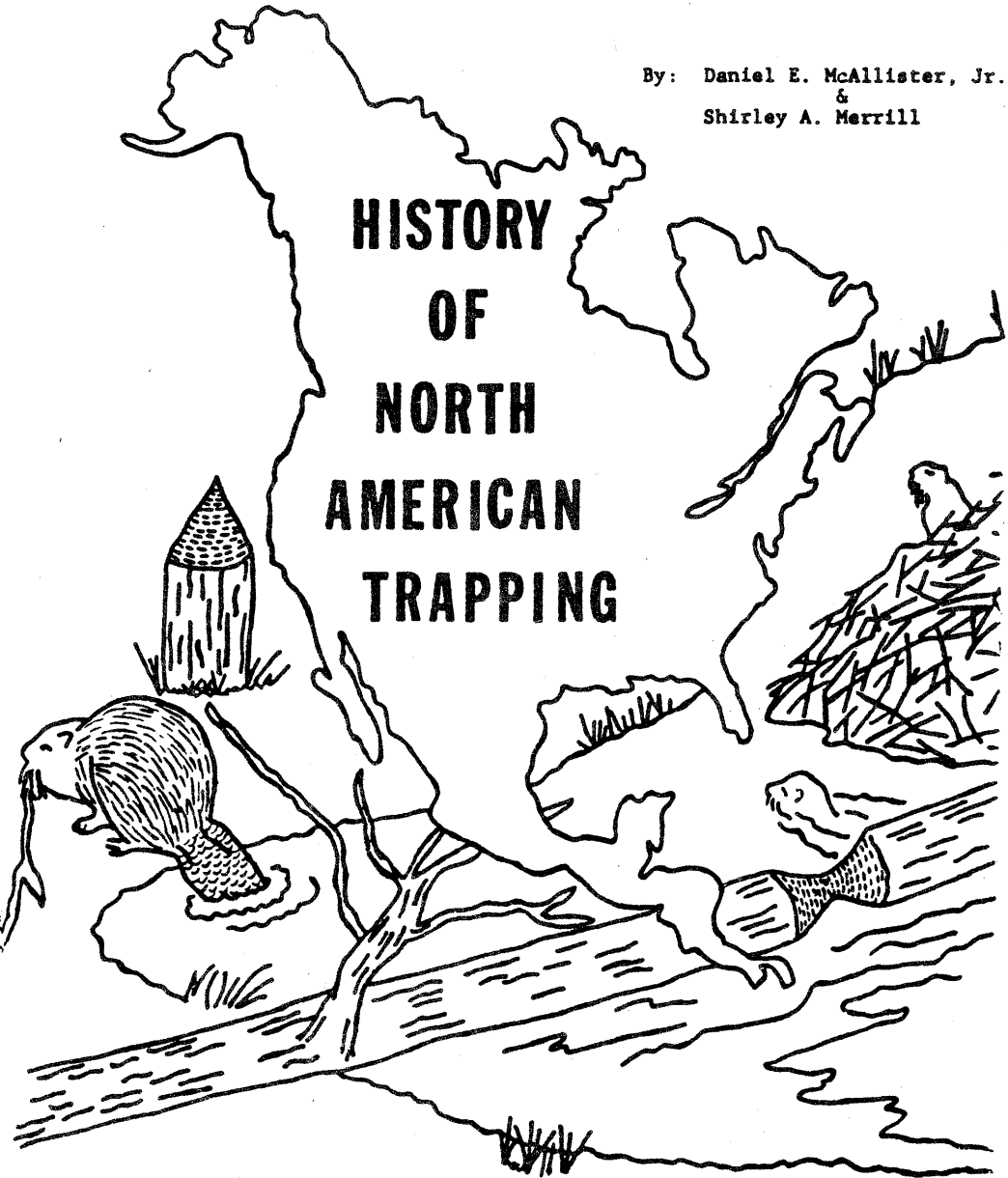
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OUR CONTINENT

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# HISTORY OF NORTH AMERICAN TRAPPING





## HISTORY OF NORTH AMERICAN TRAPPING

### THE INDIANS

The hunting and trapping of animals was a necessary activity of the native Americans. These peoples were highly dependent on wild creatures for their survival. Throughout the vast continent of North America first Americans scouted lakes and rivers, the coastlands, the woodlands and mountains, and the plains to locate animals that would share such an important role in Indian life.

The wilderness areas of our continent held an abundance of terrestrial and aquatic creatures including buffalo, beaver and other fur bearers which inhabited the lakes, streams and rivers. These the Indians caught and used.

The Indians used their natural resources well. Nearly every part of a harvested animal was of value in the Indian culture. Animals served as a primary source of food and many parts including skins, meat, bones, tissues, and oil of the animals were used to build their shelters, covered their bodies, make tools and utensils, fertilize their crops and prepare medicines.

The Indian played a key role in the development of our continent. It was with his knowledge, friendship and teaching in the skills of capturing animals that the white man learned the secrets of North America and developed this continent through the proceeds gained from trapping and trading furs.

### THE EUROPEAN EXPLORERS

The North American Indians had all this natural paradise to themselves until European explorers landed on the shores of the continent. Investigating the coasts and traveling the rivers to the continent's interior these first explorers thought they had reached the Orient - - that distant eastern land of gold, silks and spices.

From Scandinavia, Spain, Portugal, England, France, Holland and Germany came these daring explorers to investigate this new, unknown, mysterious place. Those filled with curiosity and adventure welcomed the opportunity to learn more about this region by making friends with the Indians. This friendship led to trading opportunities which helped develop white settlements. Indians were very willing to exchange furs for metal tools and jewelry. Other explorers greedily set on finding riches and claiming more territory often treated the Indians cruelly, taking their possessions, ruining their villages and killing their families. This caused the Indians' fear and distrust of white men.

Exploration of North America started as early as 874 when the Norsemen or Vikings settled in Greenland and Iceland. Leif Ericson spent a winter on the coast of the continent (some say in Nova Scotia or Massachusetts) in the year 1000.

In the fifteenth century man's knowledge of geography greatly increased due to the compass, the astrolable (astronomical instrument), sailing charts and maps. If the world was round, explorers reasoned, they could find a northern or southern passage to China or India.

In 1492 Columbus, sailing from Spain, landed in the West Indies sure he had found the Orient. The island natives he called "Indians".

In 1497 English explorer, John Cabot, reached the coast of North America (somewhere near Labrador) and brought back news of the great fishing wealth of this region.

In the next few years explorers Corte-Real, Vespucci, Ponce de Leon, Verrizano and others explored the northern and southern sections of our continent. Around 1519 Spaniards like Cortes were taking over lands in Mexico and South America. The Indians did not stand a chance against the powerful Spanish armies.

In 1527 some Spaniards were shipwrecked off what is now Texas. They were made slaves by the Indians. One of the Spaniards, De Vaca, was allowed to go free so he could go on trips to obtain items the Indians wanted. He became a trader, bringing shells to plains Indians who lived far from the sea, and taking back hides, flint and red dye to the Indians who lived near the ocean. Little by little, De Vaca worked his way westward. Nine years later he reached the Gulf of California - - the first white man to have crossed North America.

In 1534 the French explorer, Cartier, discovered a great stretch of land across the Atlantic. He gave the land the name of New France and came back to his homeland with a shipload of valuable furs. Cartier had no idea that instead of finding the Northwest Passage to the Orient, he had discovered the St. Lawrence River and gone inland from the eastern shore of North America. After Cartier's voyage, other explorers sailed to New France where they discovered that this was a land of fur.

One of the most famous Spanish explorers of America was De Soto who conquered the Indians of Florida in 1539, then traveled westward looking for the "cities of gold". In 1541 he reached the Mississippi River.

Another Spanish explorer, Coronado, saw strange "crook-backed cows" (buffalo) on a trip north from Mexico in 1540. He wrote about these strange creatures in his journal.

Despite the many Spanish expeditions, there were no single permanent settlements in what now is the United States until 1565 when explorer Menendez founded the Town of St. Augustine, Florida, our country's oldest town. Another Spaniard founded Santa Fe, New Mexico around 1605, the country's second oldest town.

British explorers, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh, landed in Newfoundland in 1583. In a second expedition the next year Sir Walter claimed territory near North Carolina for England under the name of Virginia.

The most important of all the French explorers was De Champlain. He fell in love with Cartier's New France and on his third expedition to the area in 1608 he founded the City of Quebec. He also explored the country north of the St. Lawrence River and helped to build up the fur trade, which later brought in so much money to the French. At Champlain's urging, countrymen came and settled in this paradise of fur in northern Canada.

In 1609 an Englishman, Henry Hudson, employed by a Dutch trading company, reached the harbor of present day New York City in search of a northern passage to India. The river that he entered tasted salty so he followed it thinking it must have come from the Pacific. He went up the river as far as where Albany now stands, but could go no further because the stream grew narrow. Along the way Indians stood on the bank watching this "big bird with white wings" (ship) move along. Hudson traded with the friendly natives, and returned to Holland happy with a load of valuable furs, but disappointed that he had not found the way to India.

The Dutch after hearing Hudson's stories about this land of willing Indian traders and their many valuable furs, soon sent out trading ships and established a trading post in the harbor. Because furs were in such a high demand in the luxurious European fashion and the North American Indians had such a great and rich supply, it was not long before the Dutch trading post grew into a thriving settlement named New Amsterdam. This tiny Dutch trading settlement has grown into our present New York City, one of the biggest trading centers of the world. The abundant supply of fur and the deep, safe harbor of New York Bay made trade so easy for the Dutch that they made an agreement with the Indians to buy all of Manhattan Island for just \$24.00. Fur trading built one of the biggest cities in the world!

In 1610 Hudson crossed the Atlantic again, still intent on finding the route to India. He found his way through Hudson Strait into the great sea that also has been named for him, Hudson Bay. This immense, abundant trapping region of northern Canada was claimed by the British due to Hudson's exploration.

One more French explorer, LaSalle, paddled down the Mississippi River from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico in 1682. He claimed all the country through which the river ran for his country of France.

Once the European explorers reported their fantastic findings to the peoples of their homelands, interest grew rapidly in this new world across the ocean. Families left their native lands and came across the ocean to start a new, and hopefully, more prosperous life in this land of rich resources and opportunities. Many white settlements grew up on the eastern coasts and interiors of North America.

### THE FRONTIERSMEN

The frontier territory that the Europeans made their new homes in was filled with danger. Not only did they have to suffer hardships in getting their basic needs, they also were faced with the dangers from hostile Indians and from European powers who claimed ownership over the same regions.

England and France were in constant dispute over land ownership in Canada and northern America. Usually the land was good trapping country, so the disputes led to battles with each other and with certain tribes of Indians. Fur companies were set up in both regions and the company who was able to get the biggest supply of furs (whether by honest or dishonest means) safely to Europe was the company who made the most money and the one in control of the competition. The company in the lead was changing often.

These fur companies employed groups of adventuresome men who were hired to go into new territory, where they built forts for trading posts, and carried on trapping and trading activities with Indians in the region. Often these forts were situated near rivers and eventually grew into early settlements. The fur companies depended greatly on the Indians and their catch (especially beaver) for the furs that they would trade for guns, tools, jewelry and liquor.

The most successful fur company was the Hudson Bay Company whose headquarters was in London. The company had many financial ups and downs and changed ownership between England and France many times in its history. Despite its hard times it still exists today and has a chain of stores throughout Canada.

Once the wars were over and each European country had agreed on what colonies they governed, the North American continent became a somewhat safer place to live. Trapping, hunting and farming continued to be very important and necessary occupations for the settlers.

When the new country, the United States of America, was begun, men had mapped the shape of North America. They had been all around the edges, except in the frozen Arctic region of the north. They knew how large the continent was, but there were great parts of the West where no white man had traveled.

Not long after winning independence from England, our country grew to almost twice its size after buying the Louisiana Purchase from France. People wondered what the land was like.

In 1804 President Jefferson sent explorers Lewis and Clark up the Missouri River. These explorers went on to find the Columbia River and followed it to the Pacific. Their 8000 mile journey opened up the West for hundreds of adventurers who heard Lewis and Clark's stories of wonderful hunting and trapping and longed to see for themselves this new territory.

More stories came back with the men who had been sent west with Zebulon Pike to where Colorado is now. Pike had been sent by the Government to explore south of the Missouri River.

As had been the case with all of the adventuresome souls who excitedly headed out into new country, it did not matter to the hundreds of trappers who went west that the frontier was filled with hardships, enemy Indians, and lots of danger that could lead to sudden death. These "mountain men" as they came to be called, followed the rivers seeking adventure and furs for trading. They were fearless, daring men who are greatly responsible for our country's expansion to the Pacific coast. These hunters, trappers and fur traders contributed knowledge of the trails and mountain passes in the frontier land. They built the trading posts that grew into thriving settlements, some of which have turned into our big cities of today. New York, St. Louis, New Orleans, Quebec and Montreal are just a few of the many places on our continent that all owe their beginnings to trappers and Indians who met at the trading posts and exchanged furs for other goods. These furs were sold and their sales encouraged and financed the westward expansion of North America.

History has written down the bold, exciting, dangerous ventures of these brave, daring men who broke and blazed the trails of opportunity and expansion of the North American frontier with hard work, sacrifice, hardships and bloodshed. Men with strong, courageous faith and a determined, free spirit to overcome any danger for the sake of satisfying their deep curiosity and interest in trying the impossible or making the unknown known - - these were the pioneers of our continent whose love of adventure, fearless will and undying persistence set them apart from the rest of mankind.

Kit Carson, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Lewis and Clark, Pike, William Ashley, Jim Bridger, John Fremont, Jedediah Smith, and John Astor are just a few of the many North American frontiersmen who deserve the same recognition as the early European explorers got. For both groups dared to attempt that which had not been done before, and in surviving all the dangers and uncertainties they opened up the doors of North America to the rest of the world.

Credit, and lots of it, must also go to our first Americans, for without their cooperation and participation in the fur trading business, the white man would not have had the incentive or prosperity that the trapping and trading of furs brought to the growth of North America.

For years the North American bounty of fur was trapped. This precious natural resource - - the fur-bearing animal - - held great value in the Indian life as well as the life of the pioneer. Pelts were the money of those days, and men who needed or wanted the money learned how to be a good, successful trapper. Profit derived from pelts made many a man a trapper, and the North American trapper made a trading industry that changed a wilderness continent into a home for the many bold, daring individuals who traveled its waters and land in search of adventure, freedom and a chance to build a new life of happiness and prosperity.

#### HISTORY OF THE STEEL TRAP

Who invented the first steel trap is unknown; however, they were used in England to catch poachers on the King's land. The first American efforts to produce traps commercially was accomplished by Sewell Newhouse in 1823. He started producing small Number One traps in Oneida Castle, a village in Central New York.



Sewell was the son of a blacksmith and possessed significant mechanical talents. He was also an outdoorsman and this combination led to the natural talent of trap making.

The first traps were hand forged from old scraps, discarded scythes, old axe blades and files. Sewell, also a yankee trader at heart, swapped these traps with local Indians for valuable furs.

When the religious organization "Oneida Community" purchased part of the Oneida Indian Reservation Sewell became a convert and the entire community began to manufacture traps. When trade was slow in the Central New York area one of the community members took a trunk full of traps to Chicago.

Thus starting a network of trap distribution which has expanded to the whole world.

In 1854 a machine shop was moved from Newark, New Jersey to the Oneida Community and mass production of traps began.

After being joined by John Hutchins, Sewell Newhouse designed and manufactured larger traps including the 1-1/2 for Mink, 2 for Fox, 3 for Otter, 4 for Beaver and the 5 for Bear.

Sewell Newhouse's small beginning has, of course, developed into a major company today known as Animal Trap Company of America owned by todays Woodstream Corporation.

### THE MODERN TRAPPERS

Before the white settlers came to North America, this continent had more variety and greater numbers of wildlife than most other continents. The Indians, dependent on wildlife for the essentials of life captured only what they had use for.

When European explorers came to North America and found an abundance of wildlife (especially fur bearing animals) they eagerly traded goods to the Indians in return for valuable furs. The demand and price for furs was high in Europe and the Indians trapped more animals to meet the wanted supplies of the fur traders.

As word spread of the great fur wealth in the New World, Europeans migrated here to join in the fur trade. The new fur trade meant that more animals were taken for basic needs and to use as trading material. Wildlife made a tremendous contribution to the economy and development of the New World.

The trappers and hunters who settled here could harvest game all year round as no game laws existed and game management was nonexistent. As settlements grew and fur supplies diminished in a region, trappers and hunters set out westward into new territory to keep their trading operations in business. This method of harvest went on for years and animal numbers decreased as civilization went forward.

Some people realized the problems that could occur if certain species became extinct. By the end of the Colonial period, twelve of the original colonies had enacted at least a few game laws.

The concern for conservation of wildlife in our country in the nineteenth century brought about the creation of laws by state and federal governments which put limits on the quantity of animals harvested, the territory that could be hunted or trapped and the length and time of open seasons. Agencies, departments and societies of wildlife were created to enforce the laws, to learn more about animal habits and to improve the scientific approach to management of all wildlife.

These conservation efforts differentiate between the early trapper of the 1500's and the modern trapper of today. Today's trapper carries on his trade in a complex arena of laws and a keen balance between consumption and aesthetic use of wildlife species. Some uniformed environmental groups give the trapper a bad name today, stereo-typing him as a destroyer of wildlife. The trapper must constantly defend his occupation by improving the knowledge of environmental groups through public education to prevent changes in the laws that permit trapping.

Other differences in modern trapping include the place and value trapped animals have in our society. People who trap today do not depend as much on the animal and their parts for sustaining life as did the Indians and early white settlers. In addition to trapping furbearers for profit, trapping today is essential to keep the numbers of animals within the limits of their habitat and to protect crops and livestock.

The modern trapper has improved and more humane implements available for his use today. These new types of

traps, improved ways to set them and easier and quicker ways to check traps and sell furs are added advantages to the fur trapper and the fur industry.

A major difference between the old and the new is the more scientific approach to the management of wildlife. Through improved knowledge of animal biology, including distribution patterns, population cycles and interactions with man and the environment, sustainable harvests of most species is possible.

Despite the differences that exist when comparing the ancient trapper to the modern one, there are some characteristics which have remained consistent with this occupation for hundreds of years. Today's trappers still have that pioneering spirit and enjoy the adventure that going out into the wilderness gives them. Like their ancestors they enjoy the feeling that game sports bring them when they take to the woods - man against nature, conquering the difficult, attempting the impossible, anticipating the catch and overcoming the frustrations and worries of the society they live in by freeing themselves of it, in the peacefulness and beauty of the wild lands. This challenging sport provides recreation and relaxation for many individuals.

Even though trapping methods have improved and the wilderness areas are not as many, or as large, the dangers which face a trapper have not completely disappeared over the years. Trapping has always included risks and today's trapper faces dangers that could cause sudden death just as his historic ancestors did. Freezing weather, icy water, injuries received from equipment and threat of wild animals and the contracting of communicable diseases are constant companions of the trapper.

Trapping has always been hard work. Even with our more convenient ways to handle certain aspects of the sport, there still is much energy expended in carrying out the activity. The preparation of traps and scents prior to the season, the scouting of areas for animal signs, the trudging through woods and streams setting and checking traps, the bringing home of the catch for skinning and drying and finally, finding a buyer for the furs - consumes much time and energy. A person trapping all day may come back tired, but will likely look forward to going right back out the next day with refreshed body and soul.

The trapping of furs has had an extraordinary history, and the effect and importance it has brought to the development of North America has been immense. Without these animal resources and without the brave and daring men who



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built a trading business by risking their lives to obtain the valuable furs, our world may have been altogether different for us. For hundreds of years trapping has existed, and all those individuals who love the adventure and challenge and reward of getting out and being a part of the natural world as trapping allows, hope that this beautiful sport will still be a part of their lives for many, many more years.