

THE Goldfinch

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The Fur Trade



Trading: furs, axes . . .

THOUSANDS of years before Europeans ever stumbled on this continent in their search for a trade route to China, Indians here in North America were trading with each other. (That's why "Native Americans" is really a better name than "Indians." They were native to this continent before anyone else.) The artifacts on these pages were all trade items, dug up by archaeologists in Iowa. Trading 3,000 years ago or 200 years ago was a lot like trading today. Trading can make your life easier (with better tools or weapons), or more pleasant (with decorations or art). People also

trade ideas (like religion) or skills (how to survive in cold climates).

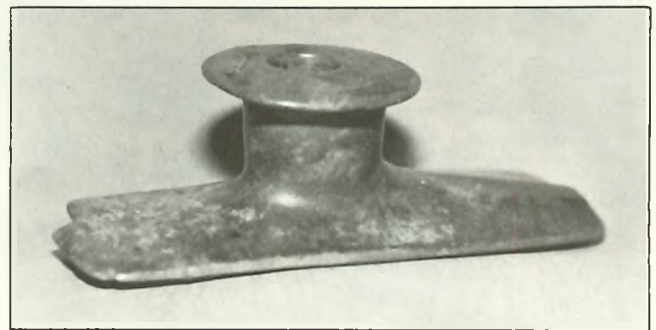
When Europeans and Native Americans first met, they had very different ways of life. Europeans saw nature as something to conquer and control. Natural resources were meant to be used to improve people's lives: trees were meant for building, animals for food and clothing, and mines for coal and iron. Luxurious houses and elegant clothing were considered signs of success. Wealth and possessions were admired.

Native Americans, on the other hand, lived as part of

THESE ARTIFACTS are all trade items. Some are thousands of years old, and are evidence that Indians from other parts of the continent traded materials and ideas with the Indians in this area. The more recent artifacts came from Europe in the 1700s as part of the fur trade. (Note the estimated age, and the counties where the artifacts were found.)



Clam shells were common along the Mississippi. But the carving of a rattlesnake body with a cat head on this shell "gorget" (or neck ornament) shows the influence of cultures in the southeastern United States (3,000 years old, Hadfields Cave in Jones County).



This ceremonial pipe was made from stone called "catlinite" found north of present-day Iowa (2,000 years old, Allamakee County).



Spear points were made from nuggets of copper, which came from the area around Lake Superior (5,000 years old, Allamakee and Boone counties).

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canoes, kettles . . .

nature, not as owners in control of it. Everything in nature had a soul or spirit within it. Native Americans respected and cooperated with those spirits because everything they needed came from nature. When they took something from nature, they always thanked the spirit behind it, never took more than was needed, and always shared it with others. Giving and sharing were admired.

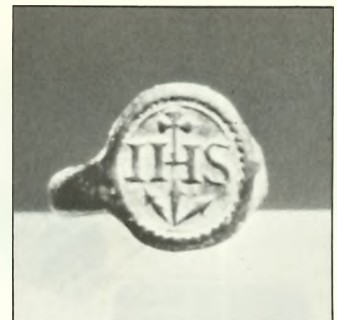
When Europeans first came to America in the early seventeenth century, they thought the furs worn by the Indians were very valuable. People back in Europe

were eager to buy furs. The Indians were glad to trade the furs because they had plenty of them. In return, the Indians received metal tools and kettles that they couldn't make, and beads they thought were beautiful. Everyone was pleased. Each side traded something they had plenty of for something they considered valuable or necessary.

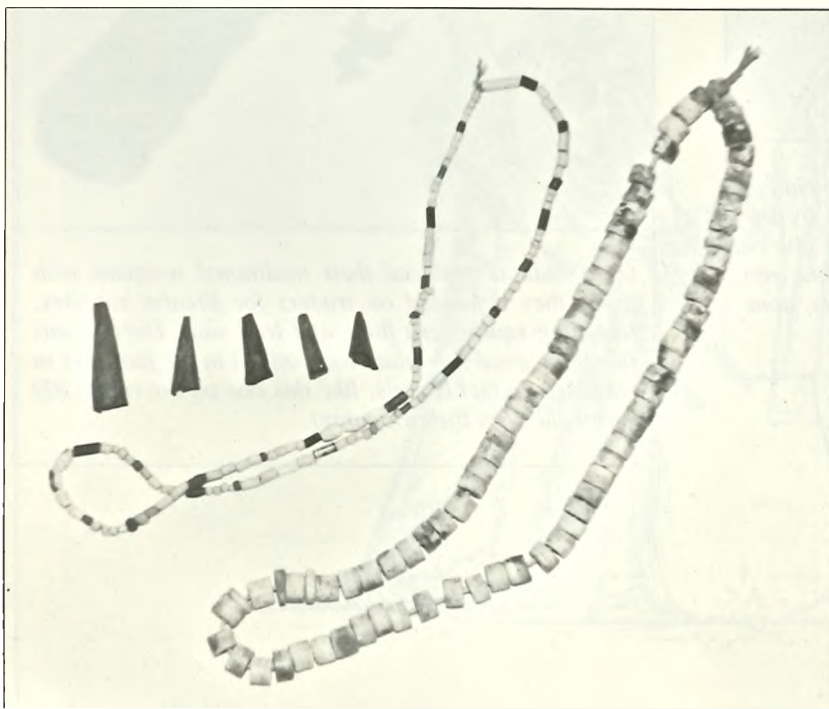
Because at first they couldn't communicate with words, exchanging objects was a way for both sides to understand each other. The Indians could understand what life was like in Europe through the objects used



Bear teeth were valued as ornaments because they were rare. The left tooth was probably traded from the Rocky Mountains (2,000 years old, Allamakee County). The two on the right are imitation bear teeth, made from seashell. In the center of the continent seashells were also highly prized because they were rare (1,000 years old, Plymouth County).



Tiny silver rings were brought by French missionaries and traders. The letters IHS mean "Jesus, Savior of Men." This ring is really half the size shown here (300 years old, Dickinson County).



The beads on the left were made from whelk shells from the Gulf of Mexico (1,000 years old, Plymouth County). A few hundred years ago, when traders learned that Indians valued beads, they stocked quantities of glass beads, like these in the middle (300 years old, Van Buren County). The small cones, called "tinklers," were attached to clothes and bags as decorations. A worn-out kettle would be cut into tinklers or small tools (300 years old, Dickinson and Van Buren counties).

IPTV

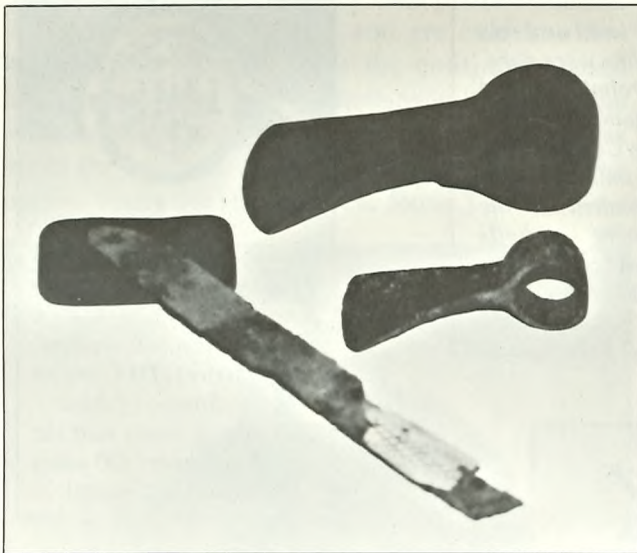
. . . and a whole lot more

daily by Europeans—knives, kettles, and guns. And Europeans learned from the Indian lifestyle that living simply and sharing food were necessary for survival in the wilderness.

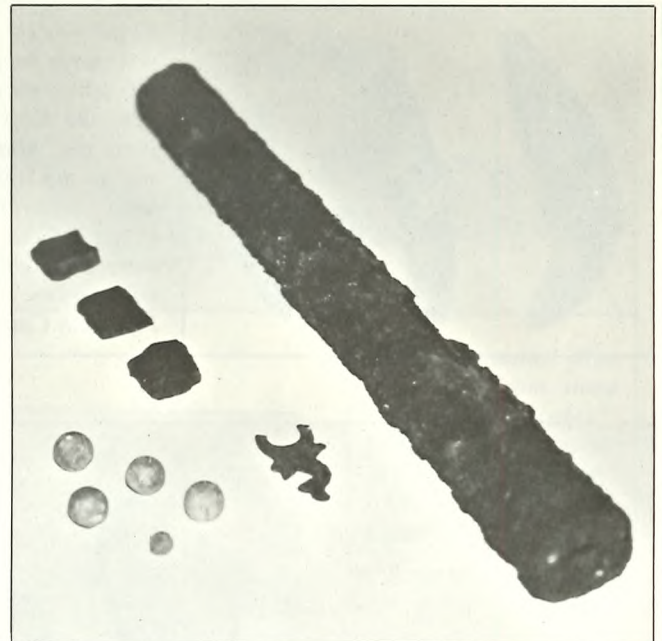
The exchange between Indians and Europeans became known as **the fur trade** because the Europeans thought the furs were the most important part of the trade and because Europeans wrote history. (The Indians' languages were spoken, not written.) The land that would later be called Iowa provided many furs for the trade. The Missouri and Mississippi rivers served as major transportation routes for the Indian and European traders. And when European nations fought each other

for control of the central part of the continent, they used the fur trade and their trading relationships with the Indians (called alliances) to gain power over each other.

The fur trade lasted about two centuries. Thousands of bales of furs were sent to Europe. But as the demand for furs slowed down, the traders lowered the prices they paid the Indians for pelts. Then the Indians had to bring in *more* furs to equal the value of things they needed. As they became accustomed to the new goods, they gave up some of their old ways. The fur trade was a lot more complex than trading a beaver pelt for a string of beads or a new copper kettle. □



The iron knife on the whetstone is shown with the kind of decorated bone handle that was often added by the Indians (300 years old, Allamakee and Van Buren counties). Axes were popular trade items because the iron ax heads (shown here) were more efficient than stone tools (300 years old, Iowa County).



Once Indians replaced their traditional weapons with guns, they depended on traders for firearm supplies, including square gun flints and lead shot. Decorations like the curved side plate were added in the factories to standard musket barrels, like this one on the right (300 years old, Van Buren County).

It all depends on how you look at things

Why does he ask where my land ends?

These people are foolish. They give everything away. No wonder they are poor.

Hunting would be easier with a gun. There would be more food to share with my people.

Our factories can make thousands of axes, but they can't manufacture furs.

What if the Great Spirit takes all the beaver away?

What if beaver hats go out of style?

Why does he want so many furs? Is it colder in his country? Don't the people have warm clothes?

What does he mean—that I must thank the spirit of the beaver and the spirit of the stream?

I would give many furs for one strong ax.

Why does he laugh at my hat? Now I'd never wear feathers!

We should learn to make canoes like his. Ours don't work as well.



How the fur trade worked

A trader bargains with an Indian family. What trade items do you see? What things might the trader and the Indians need for their different lifestyles?



John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

TRADING sometimes can be very simple. If you like your friend's radio, and she likes your bike, you both agree that it's a fair trade, and that's it. But let's say you live on a farm 30 miles from Des Moines and raise gerbils for pets. You know there are probably a lot of people in Des Moines who would like a gerbil. But first you have to decide what a gerbil is worth, transport the gerbils to town, discover your customers, find out what they have to trade, and decide if you will trade or accept money. There's a lot more work involved. It's much more complex.

The fur trade was complex because Europeans and Native Americans had different cultural values (about what was important in life and what was valuable) and because they spoke different languages. And think of the distance! How far did a beaver pelt travel, from the northern woods to Paris shops? About as far as the iron ax traveled, from a factory in England to a tribe along the Mississippi. Many people, jobs, and systems were needed. And the systems changed as the years went by.

Trappers

Indians hunted and trapped animals for the furs most in demand in Europe. Beaver was the most popular, used for making tall hats for gentlemen. But Indians also traded the pelts of marten, mink, and otter, and the hides of deer and buffalo. Sometimes Europeans did the trapping themselves, often using Indian techniques.

The Indian trappers might take their furs to a trading post to receive goods in exchange. Or they might trade to another Indian, who would then go to the post. Or they might wait until a trader's representative came to them to collect the furs.

Traders

Indians would receive many different items for their furs. Traders stocked blankets, axes and knives, guns,

kettles, cloth, and liquor. Sometimes the Indians would change the manufactured objects to suit their needs or values. For instance, a European-made blanket might be unraveled and rewoven in a traditional tribal pattern. Metal objects had many uses: after a kettle wore out, it might be cut up for a scraper for furs, or into small pieces to decorate clothing (called "tinklers").

When Indians and traders exchanged goods, they also exchanged loyalty. Indians believed that trading with someone meant they were committed to defend that person or that person's country—in wars with Europeans or with other tribes. Traders also gave their loyalties to the Indians. Some tried to help Indians maintain their traditional ways of life and their land rights when the Europeans began to settle close by.

Sometimes European traders married Indian women—often women from powerful families. To the trader, the marriage meant he would receive all furs trapped by his wife's tribe. To the tribe, the marriage meant that the trader would continue to supply his wife's people with the goods they required. The Indian wife could teach the trader her language and customs so that he could better understand the people he traded with.

When traders had enough extra goods on hand, they often let Indians take them on credit. Credit meant that the Indians could receive the goods, even though they didn't have enough furs yet to pay for them. But then the Indians were in debt until they brought in furs the next trapping season. If they only trapped enough furs to pay off last year's debt, they would have to go into debt again to get what they needed from the trader.

The credit and debt system strengthened the link between Europeans and Indians. A trader knew that his debtors owed their furs to him, and wouldn't take them to another trader. He knew that some Indians would

bring him food or do work to pay their debts. Indians knew that if they owed a trader furs, the trader would probably not move away, and they could count on him as a source of the goods they needed. They also knew that the trader would not let them starve or die of illness, because then the debt would never be paid.

The debts turned out to be a bad thing for the Indians, however, when the American government wanted to buy their land. The traders said they should receive the money from the government, since the Indians were in debt to them. Sometimes the traders claimed larger debts than the Indians really owed. Much of the government's payments for land went directly to the traders to settle the debts, instead of to the Indians.

Voyageurs

Voyageurs (*voy-ah-zhurs*) were the semi-truck drivers of the fur trade. After the traders had collected furs from trappers, the furs still had to be taken to large cities on the rivers or the coast—like Montreal in Canada. There they were loaded onto ships headed for Europe. And the manufactured goods from Europe had to be transported to the frontier trading posts. The voyageurs provided the transportation between seaports and the trading posts.

In the late spring the voyageurs headed west from eastern Canada. They had learned from the Indians how to travel in canoes and how to survive in the woods during their trips. Most voyageurs canoed the tricky rivers and treacherous lakes of the Great Lakes waterways. Between lakes they carried their canoes

and the furs or trade goods. They called these crossings “portages.”

Usually the trip from eastern Canada would take around two months unless storms or river rapids delayed them. By midsummer they reached the meeting place, called the rendezvous (*ron'-day-voo*).

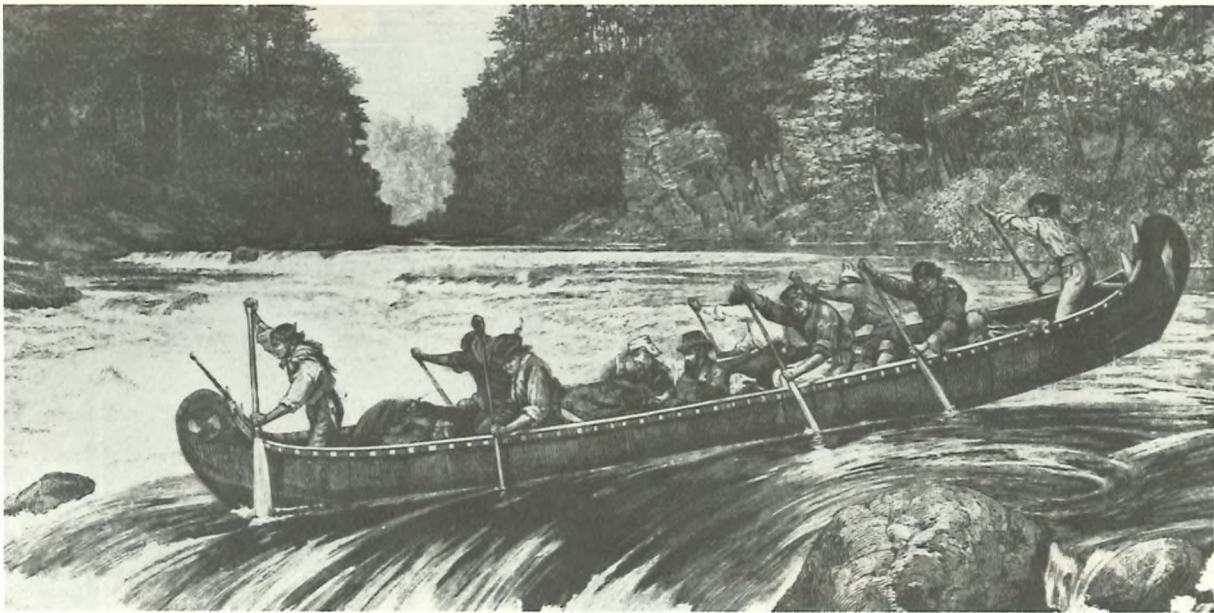
The rendezvous

At the rendezvous, Indians, trappers, traders, and voyageurs would meet. As many as a thousand people might gather for a month to exchange last winter's furs for next year's trading goods. The voyageurs worked hard unloading canoes, carrying goods to the meeting site, carrying furs back, and loading up the canoes again.

But the rendezvous was also a time for fun. And more than furs and kettles were traded. The Indians, traders, and voyageurs traded stories, songs, and dances. They probably drank, gambled, and fought as well. It was a time to let off steam after a long winter and a time to gather good memories for the winter ahead.

Fur companies

The fur companies hired traders, sometimes trappers, voyageurs, and clerks. Like the huge corporations of today, the companies competed with each other. Sometimes governments were also involved in the business. Over the years, some companies failed. Others succeeded, and the men who directed them became rich and powerful. □



Public Archives of Canada (C-13585)

Voyageurs learned the skills of navigating rivers and building birchbark canoes from the Indians. Birchbark canoes were sturdy enough to hold hundreds of pounds of furs and several voyageurs, but light enough to carry across the land portages. And repair materials were all found in the wilderness: cedar strips, birchbark, spruce roots, and pine gum.

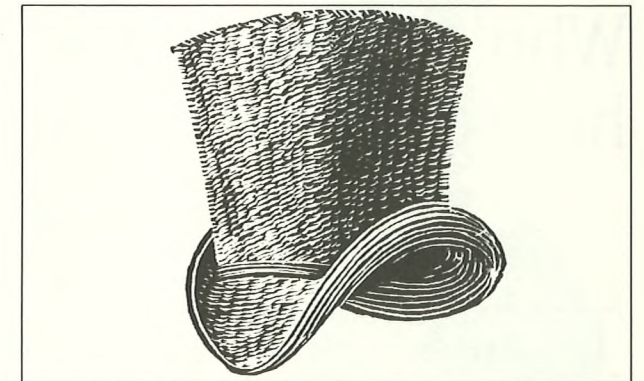


Beavers were usually trapped in the winter, when their fur was thickest. The pelts were scraped, dried, and stretched. After they were delivered to the trader, they were bundled into huge bales and shipped to Europe. In 1760, the Hudson's Bay Company shipped enough pelts to make 576,000 hats.

From beaver lodge to Paris shops: how furry animals become high fashion



At the hatter's, the first step was to pluck off the long guard hairs of the beaver pelt. Then the shorter underfur was shaved off. In this picture, the shaved fur is placed on a special table called a hurl. The hatter plucks the string of a long bow, and as it vibrates, the short hairs cling together. This worked especially well with beaver fur because of the tiny barbs, or hooks, on each hair. The mass of fur was shaped and pressed, and then boiled and pressed some more. Gradually it would shrink into a tight felt. Fitted over a hat-shaped mold, the felt was steamed and pressed. A final brushing gave it a shiny gloss.



For two centuries the beaver hat was a status symbol for men. The higher the hat, the more important the man under it. But by the 1840s the new fad was silk hats. No one wanted beaver hats anymore.



Fur muffs line the shelves in this furrier's shop in Paris in the mid-1700s. Muffs were popular with men, women, and children. On the right a worker beats insects out of a fur. More furs hang from the rafters.



Fur was always used for trims on clothing. An 1880s fashion magazine shows two "sleight suits," trimmed with the furs and feathers of five different kinds of animals. The girl's cap, muff, and coat trim are chinchilla. The woman's coat is lined with squirrel and bordered with black lynx. Her beaver bonnet is trimmed with ostrich feathers. How many furs and feathers do you spot on the horses, driver, and sleigh?

Who's in control here anyway?

TO AN INDIAN, land was like sunshine and rain—it could not be divided and it could not be owned. To a European, land was something that *could* be sold or traded. Europeans who owned a lot of land were respected and envied.

When Europeans came to America, these different ideas about the land clashed. Europeans wanted to control the land here, especially because it was a rich source of furs, and selling furs was profitable in Europe. They considered America to be unclaimed land—even though Indians had lived here for thousands of years.

As early as the 1600s, different European nations competed to explore, claim, and control the land in America. In the late 1600s a French expedition was sent out to explore the unknown lands in the middle of the continent, to make contact with the Natives, to enlarge the fur trade, to look for a direct route to the Far East, and to limit the expansion of the English. No small job! But the nation that first claimed the land in the middle of the continent would control the Mississippi River, and be able to transport people and goods up and down it.

Claimed for the king

In 1673, Louis Joliet, part of this French expedition, was the first European to step on Iowa soil (or what would later be called Iowa). Ten years later Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle (usually called simply La Salle) formally claimed the land for the King of France. He named the entire area Louisiana, in honor of King Louis XIV.

Meanwhile, as France was setting up trading posts toward the west and down the Mississippi Valley, England was doing the same across the Appalachians.

Trading was one of the ways Europeans tried to win control of the land. For example, if English traders could trade and make friends with a certain Indian tribe, then that tribe would probably help defend the English and fight as their allies. The Indians would protect the English claim to the land, and in return the trader promised to provide the goods the tribe needed.

The French, of course, also set up alliances with the Indians. Few settlers lived that far west then, so the Europeans had to count on loyal Indian tribes to fight on their side. There were a lot of wars in Europe then, too,

so France and England didn't have many extra soldiers to send to America to fight each other.

Years of war

For over a hundred years, France and England fought over control of the fur trade and the land in the center of America, where the Mississippi flowed. The final conflict was the Seven Years' War. (The war is sometimes called the "French and Indian War" by the English, because England's enemies were the French and their Indian allies.) France lost. By the treaty signed in 1763, England won all of the land east of the Mississippi River, including Canada.

But a year before they lost the war, France had secretly given up the land west of the Mississippi to Spain. The Spanish allowed French traders to continue trading there—much to the disgust of the English east of the Mississippi. Like everyone else, the English wanted the fur trade all to themselves.

Traders compete

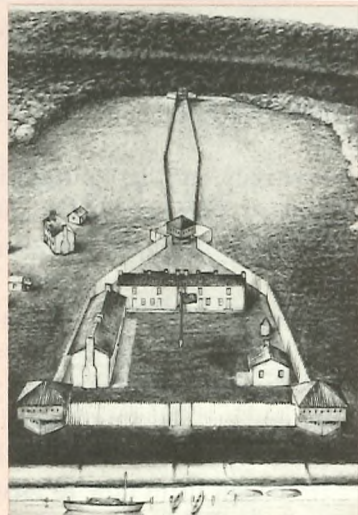
After the Revolutionary War, a new competitor entered the scene—the newly created United States. All in one treaty, England recognized the independence of the new country, gave it all the territory east of the Mississippi and south of Canada, and promised to share rights to travel up and down the Mississippi. But did English fur traders leave the area? Of course not. No one wanted to quit the business. They continued their alliances with the Indians and competed with American traders.

When a new leader, Napoleon, took control of France, he claimed the Louisiana land back from Spain. But when no French officials showed up in America to take charge, Spain continued to run things.

In 1803 the new United States bought the Louisiana area from France. President Thomas Jefferson quickly sent the Lewis and Clark expedition out to explore the area. When the expedition returned with reports of abundant wildlife, the fur traders and companies rushed in, eager to be the first to set up business with the Indians.

But the Revolutionary War had not settled everything between England and the United States. In 1812 war erupted again, over the rights at sea and control of the western area. During the conflict the American fur traders who had built alliances with the Indians in the west were vital to the United States. These alliances helped combat the strong alliances the English had made with tribes farther north. When the war was over, England finally lost all claim to trade with Indians in the western territory. Control over the rich trading area now belonged to American traders. But had anyone asked the *Native Americans*? □

Tensions on the Mississippi: Fort Madison



Fort Madison around 1813.

Bill Bunn



Black Hawk, leader of the Sauk.

IN 1805 Zebulon Pike scouted out the area where the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers meet (now the southeast corner of the state). The United States had decided that the best way to compete with English traders in the area was to build their own government-sponsored trading posts and forts. Pike's job was to find a good location.

After he chose a spot, he asked the nearby Sauk tribe for their permission to build there. The Sauk said they must first talk with their neighbors and allies, the Mesquakies. But the scout left before getting an answer.

Three years later, without the Sauk's permission, a small group of soldiers from St. Louis arrived to build the new combination fort and trading post. The leader picked a different spot for the fort. He had never built a fort before, or he might have known that this new location—under a ridge—was not very good.

The Sauk and the Mesquakie were not happy to see the soldiers or the fort. Especially unhappy was Black Hawk, a leader of the Sauk. But Fort Madison was completed anyway.

At first, business was brisk in the trading house outside the fort. The natives brought in skins and furs from deer, beaver, bear, raccoon, and muskrat. They also brought lead mined from upriver, and feathers and bees' wax. In exchange, the government trading agency gave them swords, axes, tomahawks, knives, and fishhooks, as well as blankets, fabric, ribbon and thread, and beads. But the Indians laughed when they saw the government's goods because of their poor quality. The blankets were thin, and the knives and traps broke easily. The Indians could get much higher-quality goods from the English traders.

As time went on, the situation at Fort Madison grew tense. A number of small skirmishes occurred between the soldiers and the Indians, without much damage to either side. Finally, in 1813 the Sauk easily laid siege to

the fort. From the ridge, only a few attackers were needed to keep the soldiers pinned in their barracks.

The commander of the fort sent to St. Louis for help. When none arrived, plans were made to evacuate. Secretly, the soldiers dug a trench from the fort to the river. In the night they escaped in their waiting boats to St. Louis—but first they set fire to the fort so nothing could be used by their enemy.

Fort Madison was not the only fort where tensions had turned to battles. Native Americans hadn't been given much say in whether forts should be built in their areas. And once the forts were built, they were supposed to trade their furs there, even though they could get better articles from the English traders. It was not an easy time in the Mississippi Valley.

But more forts were set up. In 1816 Fort Armstrong was built upriver, on Rock Island (across from present-day Davenport). Black Hawk talked later about the loss of that land:

We were very sorry, as this was the best island on the Mississippi, and had long been the resort of our young people during the summer. It was our garden (like the white people have near to their big villages) which supplied us with strawberries, blackberries, gooseberries, plums, apples, and nuts of different kinds; and its waters supplied us with fine fish, being situated in the rapids of the river. In my early life, I spent many happy days on this island. A good spirit had care of it, who lived in a cave in the rocks immediately under the place where the fort now stands, and has often been seen by our people. He was white, with large wings like a swan's, but ten times larger. We were particular not to make much noise in that part of the island which he inhabited, for fear of disturbing him. But the noise of the fort has since driven him away, and no doubt a bad spirit has taken his place! □

Manuel Lisa: A trader on the Missouri

AS THE YEARS went by, huge profits were made by the fur companies. The men who ran them grew powerful and wealthy. In the western part of the Louisiana Purchase, a man named Manuel Lisa struggled for the same success.

Manuel Lisa was born in New Orleans around 1700. His parents were of Spanish descent, and his father worked for the Spanish government while it controlled the Louisiana territory.

By age 25 Manuel Lisa was an established merchant in New Orleans. A few years later, he moved up the Mississippi River to St. Louis. Although still only a small town, St. Louis was a major center of the fur trade, and Lisa started a fur trading company there. In 1802 the Spanish king granted him the right to be the only trader to receive furs from Osage Indians—the best trappers in the area.

When Lewis and Clark were preparing to explore the Louisiana Purchase, Lisa was one of the St. Louis merchants who sold them goods. When the expedition returned, he heard their stories of the abundant furs. Lisa wanted to be the first to establish ties with the Indians and to organize fur trading in the area. So in 1806 he led about 50 men in the first private expedition to explore the Upper Missouri River. Lisa traveled in lands not yet reached by Europeans. He met with Indians who had only heard about the newcomers to their lands.

Lisa eventually started several trading posts in Iowa, North Dakota, and Montana. He hired trappers to search the streams for the best sources of beaver. He

wanted his trappers to be the only ones in the region, and for many years he succeeded. Lisa believed he and the new nation could grow wealthy from the abundant fur resources of the area.

He knew that the friendship of the Indians was necessary if he was to succeed. But he was also concerned for their welfare. He realized that eventually settlers would take over the Indians' hunting grounds and force them to change their ways, so he tried to teach them new ways to live. He taught them how to raise cattle and to grow new vegetables. He hired blacksmiths to visit their villages and show them how to work with the new metals he provided.

When Lisa married a woman named Mitain, her tribe, the Omaha, became his special allies. Through his genuine friendships and close ties with the Indians around the Missouri River, Lisa helped win the loyalty of these tribes for America during the War of 1812.

But Lisa never saw his dream of a fur-trading empire come true. His partners in the Missouri Fur Company worked back in the office in St. Louis. They didn't enjoy risks and adventures like Lisa did, and they didn't agree when Lisa wanted to build more trading posts, hire more trappers, and stock more high-quality goods for trade with the Indians. So the company never grew very strong.

If Lisa is judged by his wealth, he was a failure. He died in 1820 a poor man. If he is judged by his adventurous explorations, boldness in taking risks, and fair treatment of the Indians, then perhaps he was a success. □

Like puzzles? Try history

THE HISTORIAN'S game is to find all the pieces and put them together for the complete picture of how something happened in the past. In this *Goldfinch* the puzzle is the fur trade.

The stories called "Trading: furs and axes" and "How the fur trade worked" are a puzzle piece called **social history**. Social history tells us how people lived each day—what they ate, how they dressed, how they worked, and what they believed.

The story called "Who's in control here anyway?" is **political history**. Political history looks at kings and leaders, wars and governments. If political history had been different—let's say, if France had won the Seven Years' War—what would life in Iowa be like today?

The artifacts on pages 2-4 provide the puzzle piece called **archaeology**. An artifact is anything that a person makes or uses. The pipe and ax are artifacts. So are your lunch box and soccer ball. When you figure out what an artifact was used for, you learn something about the people

who used it.

We know what Europeans and Americans thought about the fur trade, because they wrote things down. But do we really know what the Indians thought? Their languages were spoken, so we have few written records. Could the "fur trade" be called the "iron trade?" The trade brought iron axes, kettles, and guns to the Indians, and changed their lives. It depends on how you look at it.

Historians are never convinced they have found all the right puzzle pieces. The game is never over, but then neither is the fun. □

Where's Iowa?

IF YOU can't find Iowa on this map, don't worry. There was no Iowa in 1809, when an English map-maker drew this map of North America. The area we call Iowa he called "Extensive Meadows full of Buffaloes, Elks and Deers."

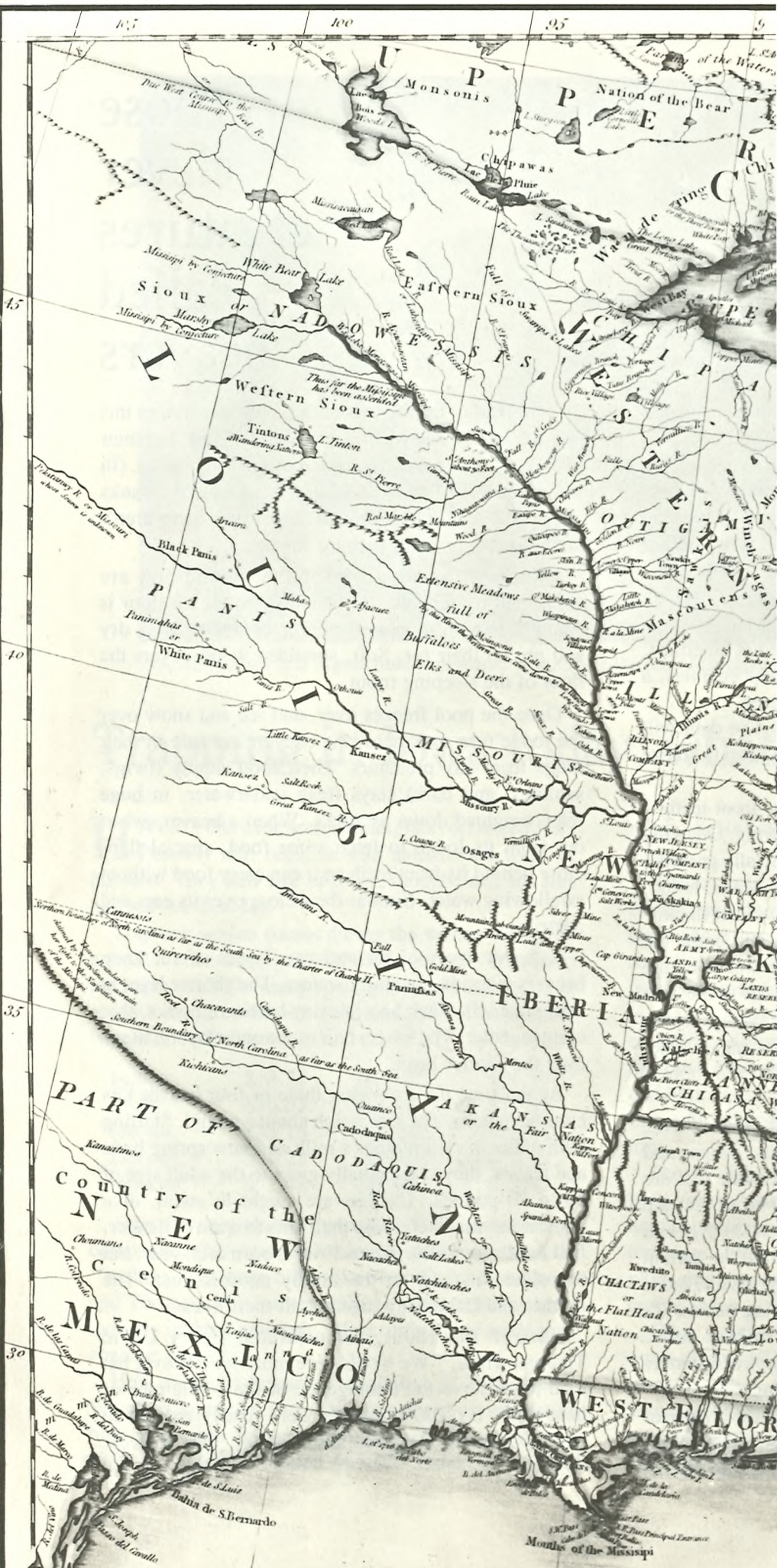
The rivers are your best clues for finding home. Look for ones you recognize. Some of the names have changed a bit. What do we now call the Moingona River? (Hint: It's also called the Salt River on the map, and was a major route for the Sioux tribes.)

Follow the Mississippi and Missouri rivers north to their sources. At the date of this map, the explorers were still searching. One of those explorers was Manuel Lisa.

In color, the map shows sections of land claimed by England, the United States, Spain, and the Native Americans (called "Aborigines" by the map-maker). He wrote on the map: "The whole of the Countries north actually settled by the Europeans should belong by right to the Aborigines." See how many references you can find to different Indian nations.

Many of the lakes of northern Minnesota aren't charted here yet, but look for the Great Portage. This nine-mile trail linked Lake Superior and a chain of smaller lakes leading to the Great Plains and the Rockies. Why would this trail be important to the fur trade?

Where would your home be on the map? Compare this with a modern map, using the lines of latitude and longitude. How has the land changed since farms and towns were started here? And when's the last time you've seen an elk or buffalo nearby?



Beaver tracks (small front feet, larger webbed back feet) are often covered when the wide, flat tail drags over them. These are one-third the actual size.



Those clever creatures called beavers

CHANCES ARE, that by the time James Isham was trading furs in North America in the 1740s, his friends back in Europe had never seen a live beaver. By then, European beavers were nearly extinct. Isham drew the picture we see on the cover of the *Goldfinch* to show Europeans how beavers lived and how Indians trapped them. (Look on the back cover to find out what the numbers mean.) Today, 240 years later, people are still fascinated by the beaver.

Beavers are gentle vegetarians that do not hibernate. Therefore they need protection from their enemies, a winter's supply of food, and a warm home.

The first step is to dam up a stream. The dam will raise the water level, making a pool too deep to freeze solid.

The beavers' best tools are their four front teeth—orange teeth, in fact, that never stop growing. Gnawing on trees keeps the teeth worn down, especially gnawing on big trees like the one in Canada that a beaver felled. The tree stood 110 feet high and was five feet thick.

The beavers gnaw off the branches, and gnaw the trunk into three-foot pieces. If the fallen tree is on the water's edge, the beavers can float the logs to the dam spot. For trees farther away, the beavers clear a "logging path" through the brush to the water's edge. (The paths also are quick escape routes if a bobcat attacks.)

Back at the dam site, the beavers jam the logs into the mud. Then they weave smaller branches, twigs, and brush in and out to form a wall. Their back feet are webbed for strong swimming, but their front feet are almost like hands, well-suited for weaving and carrying. Rocks and heavy logs on top hold the dam in place. The beavers plaster the wall with grass and mud. Some water will still flow through, leaving behind silt and debris. All this makes the dam mighty solid. Beavers in New Hampshire built a dam three-quarters of a mile long. That's a lot of log lugging.

Next the beavers begin the lodge. From the bottom of the pool, they construct a mound of brush, sticks, mud, and rock about seven feet high, with a small air hole at

the top. Half of the lodge is above the waterline. In this part the family will live. Beavers breathe air, but their lodge entrances are underwater to keep out enemies. (In Iowa, beavers often live in dens, or holes in the banks of streams and drainage ditches, because there aren't many forests or wild, rushing streams.)

"Rooms" are dug out of the mound and are connected by tunnels. In the eating room the floor is smooth. In a space near the entrance, the beavers dry and groom their fur. Soft, shredded wood covers the floor of the sleeping room.

Once the pool freezes over, and ice and snow over the lodge turn rock-hard, the beavers are safe in their lodge from any predators. Their food supply (twigs, saplings, and bark) stays fresh underwater, in huge piles weighted down by rocks. When a beaver swims out from its lodge to fetch some food, special flaps close behind its front teeth so it can carry food without swallowing water. Similar flaps close over its ears and nostrils.

A heavy layer of fat and two layers of fur keep beavers warm in the chilly waters. The shorter layer is thick and soft. Each hair has tiny barbs, or hooks, that cling together. The longer hair of the outer layer flattens over the shorter layer.

By the time the ice melts, three or four beaver kits have been born. The kits weigh about a pound. Starting with a diet of rich mother's milk and new spring buds and leaves, they'll eventually grow to the adult size of 30 to 70 pounds. The kits are taught to swim, dive underwater for safety, slap their tails to warn of danger, find food, and build. A new litter is born each year, but the older kits stay in the family another year. The mother and father stay together all their lives.

Back in the 1800s, the naturalist Henry David Thoreau wrote, "We would give more for a beaver hat than to preserve the intelligence of the whole race of beavers." By 1900 beavers were nearly extinct in North America. Better to watch them, than to wear them? □



This illustration of a beaver family appeared in the 1889 Harper's Magazine.

Trapping in Iowa today: what do you think?

HAVE YOU ever seen a mink, beaver, or red fox? Possibly not, because wild animals are wary of humans. They still live in Iowa, though, and are still trapped for their fur.

Trapping season comes during the winter, when the animals' coats have grown thick to protect them from the harsh cold. Nowadays people trap as a hobby, or as a way to make extra money. Prices paid for pelts in the winter of 1983-84 were:

beaver	\$ 8.22	grey fox	\$25.47
mink	\$16.03	coyote	\$11.95
red fox	\$33.16	opossum	\$ 0.81
raccoon	\$14.23	striped skunk	\$ 0.99
muskrat	\$ 2.48	badger	\$ 7.37

After the animals are trapped, their furs are sold to companies who in turn sell them to other companies, or "brokers," in large cities like New York, Winnipeg, and Toronto. The brokers sell the pelts to the fashion industry in Paris and Italy. Most of them are made into coats or coat trim.

How many fur-bearing animals live in Iowa today? We don't know for sure, but we can get an idea from how many are trapped each year. In the winter of 1983-84, Iowans trapped 465,000 muskrat, 22,000

mink, 8,500 beaver, 21,000 red fox, and 10,000 coyote.

Another clue is the number of complaints from landowners. In recent years the most complaints have been about beaver, coyotes, and raccoons. Beavers sometimes block a stream, which may flood part of a field. One way farmers can avoid conflicts with beavers is to not plant crops right up to the edge of the stream, according to Ron Andrews, a furbearer specialist with the Iowa Conservation Commission. Intense farming and high beaver populations do not mix well, he said. In conflicts between farmers and beavers, the beavers lose.

People disagree about whether trapping is good or bad. Some think it is good because it helps keep the animal populations under control. If the population gets too large, there isn't enough food to go around, and wild animals are more likely to damage a farmer's crops, sheep, and poultry.

Other people say trapping is bad because the traps don't always kill the animal, and it is in pain until the trapper comes to check the traps. Family pets are sometimes caught in traps. Some think it is bad because we no longer need to trap in order to have food or warm clothing. What do you think? □

your turn

1. Draw a small map of your town or farm, without using any landmarks made by people (like buildings and roads). Use only natural landmarks.
2. Look for clues that fur-bearing animals live near you (but treat their homes with respect).
3. Suppose you want to send a gift to relatives in another part of the United States. What is a common Iowa object that they might find unusual and of value to them?
4. Pretend you're an archaeologist in the year 2080. You've just discovered a huge pit filled with artifacts. (Today we call it a garbage dump.) Describe the artifacts. What do they tell you about the people who lived in the 1980s?
5. This one takes two people, one to be a Native American and one to be a European. You're offering trade items, but you speak different languages. How can you communicate about what you want and need, and what the items are worth?
6. Have you ever met someone from a foreign country? Did you exchange anything?
7. Compare the fur trade to hunting for whales and seals today. How are they different or alike?
8. Can you think of any new ways of doing things that you and your family have tried, but where you've decided the old way is better? Check with your grandparents, too.
9. In this *Goldfinch*, what Native American values did you admire? What European values?
10. Pick your favorite kind of history from "Like puzzles?" on page 12.
11. Have you ever found an arrowhead in a field, or an old toy in a garden? Describe (in pictures or words) how the artifact ended up there, and the people involved.

Cover: *Hunting Beaver*, by James Isham, a Hudson's Bay Company trader in 1743. Isham numbered the parts of his drawing: (1) beaver lodge; (2) walls of mud, stone, and wood; (3) the beaver's living space inside; (4) tunnels from the lodge to the water; (5) food storage; (6) space for young beaver; (7) an Indian breaks into the lodge with a chisel tied to a long stick; (8) beaver escaping; (9) nets in the creek; (10) armed with a stick, an Indian by a fire watches the net; (11) dams; (12) escape tunnels into the land; (13) beaver hauling a tree with his teeth; (14) stakes placed by the Indians to stop the beaver from entering the river; (15) beaver cutting down a tree; (16) tree stump; (17) tail; (18) castor glands; (19) reproductive organs; (20) intestines; (21) heart and liver; (22) eyes; (23) forefeet; (24) Indian tent; (25) an Indian hunting; (26) willows; (27) flock of partridges; (28) thick woods; (29) an Indian's stick for killing beaver; (30) the creek, running into a large river. (Courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, E.2/2 fo. 12; *Hudson's Bay Record Society . . . Isham's Observations*, vol. 12 [London, 1949].)

GINALIE SWAIM, Editor

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