

Wisconsin's Fur Trade Impact

Definition: Important early business involving Native people trading beaver, mink, and otter pelts to European traders for blankets, brass cooking pots, metal axes, woolen fabric for clothing, and glass beads. Sometimes European traders took food and canoes from Native people to use to survive and travel on waterways and gave Native people European trade goods.

Impact on Native people	Impact on Environment	Impact on Economy
<p>Many Native people died from new diseases, such as smallpox, that were brought by the Europeans.</p>	<p>Native people's excessive hunting and trapping of beaver, mink, and otter led to reduced populations of these animals. Fewer and fewer animals were around to trap. Hunters had to travel further and further away from their families to find these animals or move their villages closer to remaining animals. Native people eventually overkilled beaver. This was a change for Native people from their basic value to take only what was needed to survive.</p>	<p>Overall, each nation provided for their basic needs through hunting, fishing, gathering, and growing food in a subsistence economy. They also traded with other Native people before the fur trade to obtain additional goods, such as pots and minerals, they wanted to live.</p>
<p>Native people did more hunting and trapping to get all the beaver pelts European traders wanted. Men spent more time away from families hunting and trapping. They had less time to spend tending crops, fishing, and gathering wild rice. Trade guns and traps helped Native people become better hunters. Native people learned how to use iron traps to catch beaver faster and easier.</p>	<p>When Native hunters could not find fur-bearing animals in their own hunting territories, they moved into the hunting grounds of neighboring Native nations, which led to conflicts.</p>	<p>The fur trade economy developed based on trading between Native people and fur traders. Each group could get products they wanted beyond what they could produce themselves. A trade economy is more complex than a subsistence economy since people have to produce, grow, or catch additional products to use in trading beyond what they need themselves to live.</p>

<p>Women spent more time preparing pelts for trade and taking care of family needs while men were away. They became more independent as they took on more responsibilities to repair housing, grow crops, and gathered firewood.</p>	<p>European traders built small forts and trading posts for trading with Native nations. These were often built along bodies of water, such as Lake Superior, Green Bay, and the Mississippi River. These forts and trading posts disrupted the physical landscape to a degree.</p>	<p>European manufacturers used beaver pelts or furs for felt hats that were in demand by wealthy male consumers. Native people came to depend on European trade goods rather than produce everything they needed themselves.</p>
<p>Native people used metal cooking pots obtained through trade instead of birchbark and clay pots, which made many chores easier, such as cooking. They made fewer birchbark and clay pots.</p>		
<p>Native people used iron axes and steel knives obtained through trade instead of stone tools. This made hunting and scraping furs easier. They stopped making stone tools. European metal hoes, axes, and tools helped Native people clear the land and farm better.</p>		
<p>Native people used woolen cloth to make clothes rather than only hides and furs. This allowed them to use more hides and furs for trading with European traders.</p>		
<p>Native people taught European fur traders to make birchbark canoes for traveling by rivers and through the Great Lakes. They also continued using birchbark canoes for traveling themselves.</p>		

<p>Native people traveled by canoe on waterways to trading centers on Madeline Island, Prairie du Chien, and Green Bay to trade pelts with European traders each year. Madeline Island was not only a major trading post, but was also a spiritual center for the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. They returned to the island several times a year to conduct ceremonies.</p>		
<p>As more and more Native nations traded with fur traders, they moved from larger villages to smaller bands to track game and harvest pelts better and faster.</p>		
<p>At one time, the Potawatomi handled the fur trade between the French fur traders and the different Native nations who lived around the Great Lakes.</p>		
<p>Some Native women (especially Ojibwe and Potawatomi) married French fur traders; their children were Metis or of mixed heritage. They knew languages and cultures of both parents and could work with people from both cultures. These Metis families became leaders in trading center at Madeline Island, Green Bay, and Prairie du Chien.</p>		

<p>Most Native people had a good relationship with French traders and helped them during the French and Indian War (1756-1763) when the French and British fought for control of the fur trade. The Menominee and Ho-Chunk sided with the British because they felt the French fur traders favored the Anishinaabe (Ojibwa, Potawatomi, and Odawa) over them. When the British won this war, Native people had to trade with the British.</p>		
<p>After the British gained control of the fur trade, most Native people stopped making traditional clay pots and stone tools and relied on metal pots and tools obtained through trade.</p>		
<p>British traders did not give gifts, ammunition or traps for hunting, or food during harsh winters to Native people like the French did. They raised prices and limited the supply of ammunition they traded. The British traders wanted Native people to come to a fort to trade. Most Native nations except for the Menominee and Ho-Chunk wanted to get rid of British traders.</p>		

<p>The British traders changed their trading practices and gave gifts and sold guns and ammunition to Native nations in Wisconsin. Most Native people sided with the British during wars with the American colonists in the 1700s and early 1800s. They hoped the British would stop American settlers from moving farther west onto their lands.</p>		
<p>After Native people adjusted to trading with the British, the United States and the British fought for control of the fur trade during the War of 1812 (1812-1815). After the war, the United States controlled the fur trade. Native people adjusted to work with the United States in the fur trade.</p>		
<p>Many Native people did not like the way the U.S. government treated them. The United States tried to make Native people more like Europeans and prevent Native people from trading with French or British traders.</p>		

<p>In the 1830s, Native people signed treaties with the U.S. government giving up most of their land. The treaties were generally unfair to Native people. They were written and conducted in English, negated Native people's view that land could not be owned, and were negotiated with people who were not the proper leaders of the nation. Once the treaties were signed, Europeans and European Americans settled in Wisconsin.</p>		
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