

Becoming A Business

1870 and Beyond

*A*ugust, 1881. Winnipeg, Manitoba. With construction of the transcontinental railway moving rapidly ahead, Winnipeg has become the boom town of the west. Now something almost as big and exciting as the CPR has opened at Main and York. The company that had built a trading post called Fort Garry long before anyone dreamed of a city called Winnipeg has now opened a Hudson's Bay Company department store three storeys high and a full city block long.

Excited Winnipeggers wander through it, fingering sensible English woollens, examining the hunting rifles, and trying on the snowshoe costumes. They gaze in wonder at stacks of Russian caviar, displays of Belgian lace, and fine musical instruments. The Hudson's Bay Company name means more than beaver now!

When the Company gave up its territorial empire in 1870, furs for fashion were replacing pelts for hatmaking. But it continued to run a thriving business in furs. Hbc headquarters at Beaver House in London could proudly claim to be one of the great centres of the worldwide fur trade, and the Company's fur auction business was among the world's largest. With settlement spreading across Canada, the fur business moved farther into the north, and the Company went with it, exporting furs and importing supplies the way it always had. For most of the twentieth century, a Hudson's Bay Company

trading post, along with an RCMP detachment and a Christian mission, stood at the heart of many northern communities. Hudson's Bay factors were doctors, diplomats and radio operators as well as shopkeepers.



Donald Smith (1820–1914)

Smith spent decades as a Hudson's Bay Company fur trader in remote Labrador and eventually became governor of the Company. The wealth he amassed serving the Company enabled him to invest in the Canadian Pacific Railway. As one of its principal shareholders, the old fur trader had the honour of hammering in the last spike for the transcontinental railway in 1885. In 1897, Queen Victoria made him Lord Strathcona.



(Left) The first modern Hudson's Bay Company department store. Its displays were more lavish than anyone in Winnipeg had ever seen before, as shown in this photograph (above) from the 1890s.



In this 1940s photograph, a Hudson's Bay Company storekeeper and an Inuit trapper barter fox furs for goods. Notice that even the employee is wearing a fur jacket. The Company's posts in the north were often unheated to discourage customers from lingering around a warm store instead of tending their trap lines.



For people who lived far from its modern stores, Hudson's Bay Company published a mail-order catalogue from 1881–1913. (Left) These illustrations of women's fashions from an early catalogue would have matched anything found in the ladies' department of the Company's stores (above).

Transporting Company Goods in the Twentieth Century

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, new means of transportation replaced the traditional canoes and York boats. In cities where the Company was building its new stores, delivery wagons were used, then trucks not long before the First World War. To bring in supplies to the north and serve its increasingly scattered posts, the Company had its own fleet of cargo ships. Most famous of these was the tough *Nascopie*, designed to punch her way through the ice. Launched in 1912, she also served on convoys during the First World War and even chased off an attack by a German submarine. For more than three decades, the *Nascopie* headed north from Montreal each spring and into Hudson Bay, visiting countless small posts to land supplies and take away furs. In 1947, she hit an uncharted reef and sank.

In the 1930s, the Company also started to use small airplanes to keep its distant posts supplied. Journeys that had once taken days by canoe or York boat could now be made in hours.



(Left) The *Nascopie* makes its way through heavy ice. (Below) Early airplanes such as this were used increasingly to carry goods during the 1930s. (Bottom) A Winnipeg Hbc delivery truck from 1912.



From 1670 to 1870, the Company had never entirely occupied the vast territory King Charles' Charter had 'granted' to it. Still, when it gave up its claims to Rupert's Land in 1870, the Company received about seven million acres (2.8 million hectares) of land in compensation. These acres soon became very valuable, for immigrants hungry for land were coming to settle the prairie west. At the start of the twentieth century, Hbc's Land Department, established to sell what remained of King Charles' land grant, was the Company's most flourishing enterprise.

Later, it grew into an important land developer,



building office complexes and shopping centres in cities across Canada. It also invested in Canadian resource industries, and Hudson's Bay Oil and Gas Company became one of the Company's most important investments for much of the twentieth century.

From Sea to Sea

For more than 200 years, Hudson's Bay Company was very much a western and northern concern. Only in the early years of the twentieth century did this begin to change. In the 1920s, the Company moved east, into Canada's maritime provinces, becoming involved in Prince Edward Island's booming silver fox industry. Later, it became active in the Newfoundland fishery, packing salmon for sale in its stores under the Hubay and Labdor labels (below).



(Left) For over fifty years the Company was heavily involved in the oil and gas industry. Here a Company-owned well pumps crude oil in western Canada.

Mostly, however, the Company became the store-keeper to the nation. The department store it opened in Winnipeg in 1881 became the first of many. In Vancouver, the first Hudson's Bay store opened in 1887, barely a year after the city was incorporated. Early in the twentieth century, Company directors Leonard Cunliffe and Sir Richard Burbidge, using department-store expertise Burbidge had gained at the famed Harrod's of London, helped the Company build up the largest retailing enterprise in Canada. Across the west HBC opened handsome department stores on downtown main streets. Expansion eastward began with the acquisition of Morgans of Montreal in 1960. Subsequently the Company absorbed or replaced several distinguished names in Canadian retailing, including Freiman's, Zellers, Simpson's, Woodward's and Kmart Canada.



Between 1960 and 1999 the Company expanded its reach by acquiring stores all across Canada. Among these were Morgans, a Montreal retailer since Victorian times (left), and Simpson's, whose flagship Toronto store (above) had long been a city landmark.



Zellers, acquired in 1978, is today Canada's largest mass merchandise department store chain. Fields is Hbc's discount banner. Hbc has expanded its retail market to include two new specialty stores: Home Outfitters and Designer Depot.



In 1970, on its three-hundredth anniversary, Hudson's Bay Company became a Canadian corporation, relocating from London to Canada. Today, the handsome decorated parchment with wax seal that is the Royal Proclamation Charter of May 2, 1670, resides in Canada. Sealed under protective glass, it has a proud place in the Company's head office.

The modern Hudson's Bay Company, however, has left the fur trade which created it and which it influenced so greatly. In 1987, the Company sold

its fur department and Northern Stores division. Across the land once called Rupert's Land, however, the fur trade endures. Hunters and trappers still look to the land as their ancestors did, and still go out in the cold and snow to harvest pelts.

Today's Hudson's Bay Company

In 2006 Hbc was acquired by American businessman Jerry Zucker. Mr. Zucker took the Company private, thus ending over 335 years of public ownership. With over five hundred stores including the Bay, Zellers, Home Outfitters, Designer Depot and Fields — and nearly 70,000 employees — the Company remains the country's largest department store retailer and fifth-largest corporation. New investments are being made in technology and e-commerce. At the world's oldest chartered company, business continues.



(Left) In March 2006, Jerry Zucker, a South Carolina businessman, became Hbc's official owner, CEO and the company's thirty-seventh governor. (Right) A Bay store today.



Soapstone Sculpture



Evocative Inuit soapstone carvings are a symbol of Canada throughout the world. In 1949, a Baffin Island-based Bayman named Norman Ross helped gather together samples of the work done by local Inuit carvers to send south. Interest was strong, and a booming market for Inuit carvings and, later on, prints evolved. For many years, Hudson's Bay Company was the largest purchaser of these, buying as much as forty tons of soapstone sculpture for resale in a single year.

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Hbc is Canada’s largest diversified general merchandise retailer, operating in department store (the Bay), mass merchandise (Zellers), specialty (Home Outfitters and Designer Depot) and discount (Fields) formats. With over 550 stores and nearly 70,000 associates located in every province in Canada, Hbc provides Canadians with stylish, quality merchandise at great value, through retail banners focused on exceptional customer service. Hbc is a Canadian retail leader in corporate social responsibility, and the annual Hbc CSR report can be found at www.hbc.com.