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**Were the Early Years of the North American Fur Trade a Golden Age for
Indigenous Communities? (1590-1701)**

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Abstract

The trading of furs in the north eastern regions of the American continent during the 17th century brought Europeans and indigenous people into contact with one another on a level neither had experienced before. The Europeans wished to prosper from the abundance of furs in the region, while the indigenous population quickly grew to desire the European trade goods offered to them. This exchange being so profitable for the native populations has led some scholars to label the early fur trade as a golden age for these communities. In exploring the idea that the trade was a golden age for the indigenous people involved, this study will look at not only the material aspect of the goods they received but also the ways in which these goods changed native society: how the trade shaped relationships between both indigenous groups and Europeans, the ways in which the proximity the trade caused resulted in changes to spirituality, the introduction of diseases, as well as changes in perspectives. This thesis aims to look at some of changes caused by the fur trade of the 17th century and see if the resulting outcomes do indeed show a golden age for indigenous people?

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Introduction

Ventures into the north-eastern area of the North American continent in the late 16th century featured small ships, large crews and limited room, meaning that a product of small size that could produce a large and immediate income was the key to making these voyages worthwhile for traders, hunters and fishermen.

Initially the interest in the continent was cod fishing pioneered by the Basques as early as the 1400's.¹ Economic ventures into the region were led by the two most powerful maritime nations of the time: England and the Netherlands. In order to survive, the economy of maritime nations relied on imports from lands not connected to their own; with each nation being small and boarded by the sea the only way to acquire many goods was by looking elsewhere. Similarly, this smaller size and need for external products helped form a national identity of economic colonisation around the world.² For continental nations such as France, a country already so vast and bordered by enemy states on all sides, it was harder to get their subjects support and enthusiasm for colonisation. The initial voyages by France intended to find a route to the rich seas of the east, however upon landing on the Americas the businessmen of the nation decided to explore other possible financial ventures on the continent. The abundance of cod around the coasts of Canada combined with the new technique of salting and drying fish made a proverbial gold mine for those who could make the voyages.³ The process of drying fish required locations on the coast suitable for the fish to be hung up and left for a set period of time, this led to an abundance of these drying stations along

¹ Innis, H (1999). *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*. Pg.9.

² Easterbrook, W. and Aitkne, H. (1988). *Canadian Economic History*. Pg.7-10.

³ Harris, R. and Matthews, G. (1987). *Historical Atlas of Canada: From the beginning to 1800*. Pg.47.

the coast; competition for these prime areas became fierce between rivaling enterprises, leading to the exploration of more remote coastal destinations⁴. The search for better, less crowded, drying stations and for more timber to build ships led explorers to venture further inland,⁵ which produced the recognition and the acquisition of another of the continent's great abundances, fur.

The trading of furs in North America was one of the oldest contributors to the continent's economy with the practise among native groups spanning back centuries⁶ and holding strong ties to their social and spiritual beliefs.⁷ The trading of fur took the form it would take for the next two centuries. In Europe, in the late 16th and early 17th century, there was a massive rise in demand for the products associated with fur, particularly for the use of hat making.⁸ For the hat making process no animal's fur was better suited than the beaver. The fur anatomy of the beaver features a glossy and strong layer of long hairs on top known as guard hairs, below these and closer to the skin is a layer of thick soft hair which once the guard hair is removed can be used to produce felt.⁹ The felt hat at the time was a true symbol of status and sought after by all of Europe's upper class,¹⁰ in 1632 Anthony Beacon declared "the beaver hat dressed itself in silk"¹¹ showing the attire of the upper classes of the time. Unfortunately, for those wishing to make money from this process the only beaver furs available in Europe came from Russia and Scandinavia and only in small quantities due to over hunting.¹²

⁴ Marsh J. (1999). *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*. Pg.1635.

⁵ Innis, H. (1999). *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*. Pg.5.

⁶ Krech III, S. (2011). *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*.Pg.59.

⁷ Ray, A. (2005). *Indians in the Fur Trade. Their Role As Trappers, Hunters, & Middle Man in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1860*. Pg.7.

⁸ Carlisle, R. and Golson, G. (2006). *Colonial America from Settlement to the Revolution*. Pg.91.

⁹ Dolin, E. (2011). *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*. Pg.22.

¹⁰ Ashelford, J. (2009). *The Art of Dress: Clothes and Society, 1500-1914*. Pg.37.

¹¹ Anon. (1632). *Sir Thomas Overbury His Wife. With Additions of New Characters, and Many Other Wittie Conceits Never Before Printed*. Pg.239.

¹² Busher, P. and Dzieciolowski, R. (2012). *Beaver Protection, Management, and Utilization in Europe and North America*. Pg.122.

Biologically the European beaver and the North American beaver were very different, and this affected their value to the fur trade. The European beaver, although larger than its American cousin, had many more guard hairs in its coat and its under layer was of a much lower quality, meaning for the hat making processes the North American beaver was much more valuable.¹³ Likewise, the beaver spent much of its time in water as described by American naturalist Lewis H. Morgan, "Water is his natural element, and he cannot trust himself far from it with personal safety,"¹⁴ this resulted in their coats having supreme water repellent qualities; great for a hat. Another reason for the North American beaver being sought after in the early years of the trade is the process many native groups took in preparing the fur: many people would wear the fur as coats, the oils from human skin caused the guard hairs to fall out and left behind the much softer under hairs resulting in a much finer quality product than those found in Europe.¹⁵

With the new supply of furs coming from North America, European powers competed for control of more and more territories on the continent, creating more interaction between themselves and the native groups who were supplying the furs. It is these native groups and their experiences of the fur trade in its early years that is the main focus of this dissertation. Although Native American and First Nations people played a large and important part in the fur trade they are often left out of its history.

Early studies of American and Canadian history disregard indigenous contributions to either country's past, in many regards it appears that history on the continent began with the arrival of Europeans; as pointed out by Walker.¹⁶

¹³ Walker, J. P. (2015). *The Legendary Mountain Men of North America* Pg.171.

¹⁴ Morgan, L. (1868). *The American Beaver and His Works*. Pg.25.

¹⁵ Dolin, E. (2011). Pg.46.

¹⁶ Walker (1971). Pg.2.

Studies into the indigenous involvement during this time has been undertaken from as early as the 18th century however more advanced studies, and ones that, give more consideration, to native involvement have been undertaken in the last decade. The research into this area has been conducted by academics from many different fields including, but not limited to, historians, anthropologists and economists. The study of the native inhabitants of the North American continent traces its roots back to the first American anthropologist Franz Boaz who chose to study the tribes of the north-west coast, his study sparked an interest which led to a large influx of Americans wishing to study and understand the original inhabitants of where they lived. With regards to studying native people around the time of first contact, as well as the time this essay is interested in (the early fur trade), one of the key academics on the subject is Bruce G. Trigger. Trigger's work around the indigenous people of North America spans a vast history due to his background in archaeology, however, for this topic *Natives and Newcomers*, *Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (1985) and *The Impact of Europeans on Huronia* (1969) as well as his contributions to the *Handbook of North American Indians. Vol. 15* (1978) are important reading for understanding not only the topic but also a background on the study of the subject. *Natives and newcomers* tackles the historical stereotypes of studying native people of North America and the common Eurocentric flaws often found in academic literature. Trigger challenges the notion that the first Europeans in Canada were not as heroic as Canadian folk law and history books hold them to be and that the continent's original inhabitants played just as strong a role in the founding of the nation even after contact.

Primary documents which deal with native people rather than Europeans on the other hand are extremely hard to come by; as with any history regarding a culture that does not possess a written language` we must rely on the documents of those

who had dealings with these people, in this instance Europeans, and therefore there is clearly going to be a writer bias even if one is not intended. One of the largest collections of documents regarding contact with native Americans during the 16th and 17th centuries is The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents collection recorded by French Jesuit missionaries who were given the task of spreading Christianity to the native people, these documents are contained in 72 volumes written by multiple members of the order over a century and a half. Much of what is written is purely the day to day life of the missionaries as they lived amongst the natives, this gives a unique look into native culture on a social level which was rarely recorded in the earliest years. Although these documents are a key piece of early American literature, using them to understand early native culture does have its drawbacks. These documents are written by Jesuit Missionaries and record their observation; many are condescending and disregarding of a perceived “inferior” culture: often referring to people as “savages”. Similarly, the Jesuits are portrayed as fatherly figures to their new converts and as such appear to always have their best interests at heart, whether this is true or not we will never truly know as it is a one-sided document. The reason for these documents was to show the work the Jesuits were doing in helping these newly found people on a path to find God and obvious writer bias is to be expected as they were very unlikely to record the negatives in a piece designed to promote their order.

Similar primary sources for the time are the documents of Samuel de Champlain, a key figure in Canadian history. Champlain’s document *Voyages* is a collection of the documents recorded by him about everything from mapping the St. Lawrence, establishing the posts at Québec to war and trading with native people. As a

source of information on native people and their participation in the fur trade this collection is a key primary source.

Like the Champlain documents, contained in *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664*, edited by Jameson, J. Franklin, are the original writings of the Dutch contingent in North America. Within these recordings are details of native people, their villages, trading habits and locations, making it vital to understanding the effects that trade had on their communities.

Alongside primary documents there is a wealth of secondary sources and research around the history of the fur trade as well as colonisation, *In Search of Empire* by James Prichard explores the French efforts to gain lands in North America. *Beyond 1492* compiles five essays by ethnohistorian James Axtell which debate the narratives of early encounters between Europeans and natives as well as the consumer revolution that took place. *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* delves into the interesting dilemmas and changes in native spirituality and the conflict brought about by excessive game hunting as well as how these perceptions shaped the future of many of the groups.

Obviously, these are but a few of the publications on the topic, however, they show the diverse range of academics that have looked at the early fur trade and colonisation and its effects on the indigenous people of North America.

One of the most important and the one that provided the inspiration for this essay is, *A New Perspective on Indian-White Relations: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade* published in the *Journal of American History* by Miller and Hamell. This essay explores the idea that the Eurocentric views that are held by much of the literature on early North American contact is incorrect in its views of the motives of

native people behind trading as it wrongly assumes that they have the same reasons and motivation to trade as Europeans.

Using the literature that is currently available as well as the primary sources available this essay will explore and question the idea that the early years of the fur trade were a 'golden age' for the Native American and First Nations people involved. The term 'golden age' in publications such as Rhoda Gilman's *The Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1630-1850*,¹⁷ and Richard Price's *The Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties*¹⁸ is an interesting use of terminology as in the traditional sense the golden age refers to ancient Greek mythology as a time when man had no worries, didn't need to work as food was plentiful, and seemingly lived forever, this age was ended when Prometheus gave man fire and other gifts followed by the opening of Pandora's box, an act which seemingly gave man free will.¹⁹ The reason this terminology is important to this essay is that it suggests that in a sense the arrival of Europeans in the Americas and introducing the fur trade is a form of reverse Pandora's Box and as such the Eurocentric view that the native people were actually better off not living their own lifestyle. A stretch of the analogy would be to assume that in the 'golden age' of the early fur trade the Europeans are the equivalent of the gods of Greek myth.

The idea that native people fared well from the trade with low repercussions is a view often aired in text books and other literature that are popularly used in modern studies into the topic, particularly at American universities in courses that cover the area briefly in an overview of the general history. This type of study that points to the Europeanisation of the indigenous population of the northeast as a

¹⁷ Gilman, R. (1974). *The Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1630-1850*. Pg.4.

¹⁸ Price, R. (1999). *The Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties*. Pg.170.

¹⁹ Bulfinch, T. (2012). *Bulfinch's Greek and Roman Mythology: The Age of Fable*. Pg.11.

sign of a better life and sees this as the aim for all societies to achieve, disregards the idea that this might not be best for those people in the long run and could be the root of “modern day” problems.

The fur trade brought with it many changes to the indigenous way of life from its introduction to the continent till the signing of the treaty of Montreal in 1709.

Spanning a century, we see that all aspects of the traditional ways of life were affected in one way or another, from the introduction of goods to new religions and ideas, all these contributed to larger changes in the relationships within the tribes themselves and the way they dealt with other tribes and Europeans. All of which will be discussed within this paper, concluding by exploring the idea as to whether the early fur trade truly was a ‘Golden Age’.

Chapter 1:

A Short History of the Fur Trade and those Involved

Throughout history, there has been contact between cultures and people who are at various stages of development. Usually, this contact has been gradual and the coming together of the two has been a centuries-long process. For example, the Portuguese had been trading and operating within Africa for many years and gradually exerted their influence to gain more territory on the continent.²⁰ France and Great Britain slowly worked their way into India and out into the Orient along trade routes,²¹ Russia advanced into Siberia slowly assimilating or eradicating the indigenous people.²² All of these, involved, a more technologically advanced, usually European, country or civilisation influencing the other less technologically

²⁰ Mota, A (1978). *Some Aspects of Portuguese Colonisation and Sea Trade in West Africa in the 15th and 16th Centuries*. Pp.136.

²¹ Duiker, W. (2006). *World History, Volume II: Since 1500*. Pg.465.

²² Kappeler, A. (2014). *The Russian Empire: A Multi-ethnic History*. Pg.32.

advanced culture slowly over centuries. The exploration and subsequent contact in North America is considerably different to almost any other in history. Africa, Asia and Siberia all had prior knowledge of the other cultures; many of these nations had been involved in trading either directly or indirectly for many years before ventures into colonisation were made. In the Americas, on the other hand, two very different cultures came face to face with neither having prior knowledge of the other, followed by almost immediate colonisation efforts being made.²³

The exploration and subsequent colonisation of the north-eastern part of North America was a quick process once progress had been made in setting up camps and settlements in the new land. Contact with the indigenous peoples was similarly conducted with much haste, often instigated by the native people themselves. For many years, European ships had been exploring the waterways of the coast mostly through fishing voyages. Europeans had been coming to the shores of Canada since the Norse exploration of what they called Vinland. The Breton and Basque fisherman had likewise around the 16th century, found the benefits of the exposed rocky coasts and sheltered harbours to be a welcome sight when catching and drying fish for a demanding European market.²⁴ These early explorers not only found the product they sought in the New World, but they also often found people who were willing to trade. Contact along the coast was frequent in the 1500's, and the exchange of goods was common. Many indigenous people shared the custom of exchanging goods at first meeting to show friendship and create a partnership. This would usually take the form of exchanging many different items such, animal skins and furs, beads, pottery, tools and wampum: a type of beadwork threaded together and often used as currency among many

²³ Hunt, G. (2004). *Wars of the Iroquois: A Study in Intertribal Trade Relations*. Pg.3.

²⁴ Kurlansky, M. (2011). *Cod*. Pg.59.

groups.²⁵ When trading among themselves these gifts would be exchanged for gifts of a similar nature, however, with these new Europeans new goods were on offer. Although these early fishermen, when compared to the later trade missions and merchant ships were very much undersupplied, they did offer some small products in exchange, often salted fish or other dry ship foods such as ships biscuits, small amounts of textiles and other manufactured materials and most importantly metal tools and fishing hooks. These new gifts were accepted with varying degrees of joy. Salted fish was often not to their liking considering the ready supply of fresh fish, similarly, the ships biscuits and other dry foods were found unappealing.²⁶ Cloth and other manufactured textiles were taken with scepticism due to their light and flimsy nature when compared to traditional fur and skins clothes adorned by natives. European dress was looked upon as impractical in the wilderness setting of the northeast with some Europeans insisting on wearing their best clothing to show they were “civilised” and separate from the “Savage”.²⁷ Although their first impressions of the textiles and clothes worn and offered by these early Europeans were not favourable, they soon realised the potential of such items: cheap, readily available, easily repaired, fast drying and just as warm as fur and the indigenous people soon saw cloth as a highly valued commodity.²⁸ Dutch colonial officer Adriaen van der Donck commented in 1641 that native people were “increasingly adopting European cloth” although skins were still being used.²⁹ The supreme item native populations wanted to acquire, however, was anything made from metal. Iron pots, pans, kettles, swords, axes

²⁵ Vaughn, A. (1999). *New England Encounters: Indians and Euroamericans Ca. 1600-1850: Essays Drawn from The New England Quarterly*. Pg.65.

²⁶ Delâge, D. (2011). *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64*. Pg.121.

²⁷ Garvin, C. (2014). *The Empire's New Clothes: Constructing the "American" in the Colonial Northeast*. Pg.6

²⁸ Orlin, L. (2012). *Material London, ca. 1600*. Pg.113

²⁹ Donck, A. (1909) “*The Representation of New Netherlands, 1650*” in *Narratives of New Netherland 1609-1664*. Pg.301.

and knives were all obtained when European ships visited the shores in the 1500's. Although these items were sold or given in the form of complete articles, many indigenous people repurposed these items, melting them down and repurposing them.³⁰ Once colonies were founded in North America, however, Europeans sought out fur just as much as natives sought out European goods.

The quality of North American furs was discovered by Europeans by accident: furs were often acquired from native people by fisherman, traders, and explorers and their crews by mere necessity to survive the climate of the continent in the winter seasons³¹. After their return to mainland Europe, many of the furs brought back were sold or traded,³² as a result of this, the quantity and quality of these products became well known throughout Europe.³³ It wasn't until the early 17th century, however, that the fur trade took the shape of an official business and trade.³⁴

The value of fur gained from North America can be seen by the groups that led the early efforts to settle on the continent. The three leading European countries involved in the early colonising of Canada and the North Eastern United States and subsequent fur trade were: The Kingdom of France, The Kingdom of England and The Dutch Republic.

The Kingdom of France laid its claim to lands on the new continent along the St Lawrence River in Canada with the founding of Montreal by Cartier as well as the founding of Quebec and Trois Rivières by Samuel de Champlain,³⁵ all these

³⁰ Snow, D. (2009). *Archaeology of Native North America*. Pg.42.

³¹ Nuttall, M. (2012). *Encyclopedia of the Arctic*. Pg.689.

³² Sherman, J. (2003). *Samuel de Champlain, Explorer of the Great Lakes Region and Founder of Quebec*. Pg.73.

³³ Francis, D. and Morantz, T. (1983). *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600-1870*. Pg.3.

³⁴ Loewen, B. and Chapdelaine, C. (2016). *Contact in the 16th century: Networks Among Fishers, Foragers and Farmers*. Pg.274.

³⁵ Prichard, J. (2004). *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730*. Pg.31.

locations were to act as large trade centres in the region, particularly Montreal which was synonymous with the trading of furs in the 17th century.³⁶ France's location gave them excellent access to the early fur trade: situated on a major river with access to the sea as well as being at the heart of native Huron territory gave them not only an abundance of products but an easy method of distributing them back to Europe.³⁷

For the Kingdom of England profit in the early fur trade was slow but no less relevant to their colonial ventures. Historian Stephen Eddy Snow states that "the cross and fur were the two cornerstones of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, with one providing the motivation and the other providing the means".³⁸ Commerce was the primary motivator for England in the 17th century with its two main colonial efforts being spearheaded by a single company split into two separate ventures. The London company branch took Jamestown, Virginia as its headquarters and the rivalling Plymouth company branch based its efforts at Popham in present-day Maine.³⁹ Alongside these two company trading posts, smaller holdings were operated by Englishmen in Newfoundland and other areas of the Canadian coast⁴⁰ as well as in the areas that are now New England.

The newly formed Dutch Republic aimed to make itself a colonial power after freeing itself from the control of the Spanish crown. Exploration of the American northeast by the Dutch was led by English navigator Henry Hudson under the employment of the Dutch East India Company who traversed the Hudson River in

³⁶ Marsan, J. (1990). *Montreal in Evolution: Historical Analysis of the Development of Montreal's Architecture and Urban Environment*. Pg.21.

³⁷ Lytwyn, V. (1986). *The fur trade of the Little North: Indians, pedlars, and Englishmen, east of Lake Winnipeg, 1760-1821*. Pg.110.

³⁸ Snow, S. (2008). *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plymouth Plantation* Pg.98.

³⁹ Taylor, A. (2013). *Colonial America: A Very Short Introduction*. Pg.52.

⁴⁰ Prowse, D. (1896). *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial and Foreign Records*. Pg.15.

what is today New York and laid the groundwork for the Republic's territorial claims to the region.⁴¹ It is often noted that the Dutch never truly made colonising efforts in North America; instead, they established locations merely as trading hubs as they realised it was easier to export products with an appropriately set up establishment rather than relying on seasonal trade vessels.⁴² The establishment of Fort Nassau was their first venture, operating as both a defensive fortification and a trading post; this was later replaced by the notorious Fort Orange in 1614, which was subsequently replaced as the Dutch main stronghold on the continent by the later capital of the colony, New Amsterdam.⁴³ Like the French, the Dutch also benefited from their location. Located on the riverways of New York state they had quick access to areas inland that were abundant in fur-bearing animals as well as access to the coast for transporting and, although troublesome at times, they had a good working relationship with native tribes particularly the Mohawk nation⁴⁴ who were one of the leading members of the powerful Iroquoian Confederacy.

The indigenous groups in the regions of north-eastern North America were vast and varying in both population sizes and regional distribution. Many of the groups in the area had lived there for many years if not centuries with minimal migration and could trace generations of their ancestry to the region. Other groups had settled in the area due to being displaced elsewhere and had voluntarily migrated into the area. The east Canadian coastline was a harsh place to make a living: many of the groups living there in the 16th century being from Inuit groups who

⁴¹ Dunlap, W. (1839). *History of the New Netherlands, Province of New York, and State of New York: To the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, Volume 1*. Pg.6-8.

⁴² Jacobs, J. (2009). *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-century America*. Pg.20.

⁴³ Haefeli, E. (2013). *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty*. Pg.254.

⁴⁴ Jameson, J. (1909). *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664*. Pg.151.

were used to living in such difficult environments. The Beothuk of Newfoundland and Labrador were the most easterly group at the time of contact although they shunned all dealings with the newcomers from Europe.⁴⁵ The Mi'kmaq resided in the region of Nova Scotia during the early years of contact whilst the Ojibwa called the region between the Great Lakes and Georgian Bay home. The lakes region around Lake Ontario was also home to the Huron, Eerie and Neutral people while further north around Hudson Bay many Northern Cree tribes lived.⁴⁶ Further south in southern Ontario the Mohawk and Oneida had many villages that spread into upper New York State. New York State was also home to two other members of the Iroquois Confederacy, the Seneca and Onondaga with the Delaware taking up the most southern portion of the state. To the east of New York were the tribal homelands of the Mohegan, the final member of the Iroquoian Confederacy, and Abenaki, a populous group who spread as far eastward as the borders of Mi'kmaq land. Although these groups were widespread, they were all linked in one way or another due to an extensive and far-reaching trade network that operated in the region. Contrary to initial European thoughts, the indigenous populations had very sophisticated trade networks up and down the country often with one tribe acting as the middlemen. For the Plains region, it was the Mandan that acted as the middlemen; as they were located in the centre of the Northern Plains region. In the central plains of Canada, it was the Blackfoot tribe who controlled much of the trade, gathering supplies from more nomadic groups such as the Cheyenne. In the region in question during the early fur trade, eastern Canada and the bordering States of America, it was the Huron who claimed this role and had done for many years before European arrival.⁴⁷ Similarly, the Iroquoian Confederacy controlled

⁴⁵ Marshall, I. (1989). *The Beothuk of Newfoundland: A Vanished People*. Pg.35.

⁴⁶ McDonnell, M. (2015). *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*. Pg.118.

⁴⁷ Trigger, B. (1988). *Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*. Pg.219.

the more southern portion of trade although not in such a significant way as the Huron.

The fact that this trade network was centred around the Great Lakes region, particularly the St Lawrence Valley, meant that the Europeans who first explored and settled in this region came across one of the country's largest trade centres, a perfect coincidence for the French in their quest for fur. This was also ideal for the native population: it meant that European items entered the network at the source and the readily able Huron could distribute them far and wide, to many areas of the region that never actually came into contact with Europeans until centuries later. Once it became apparent that the new land would be lucrative and a good location to begin colonising, Europeans began flocking to the region quickly, this new influx was both welcomed and shunned by the various groups. For the Huron and Abenaki, who were happy to trade, these new incomers were a welcome sight that would boost their respective positions within the regions.⁴⁸

Many tribes embraced this new trading system as well as the new commodities that trade brought to the continent. The already thriving trade network of the northeast was bolstered by the introduction of the new goods and began to adapt to the European way of doing business. Europeans found a welcoming market for their products and similarly found the items they received in return, furs, to be of great importance to their own business infrastructure. It took many European traders a few years to adapt to the indigenous population's way of doing business; at first, most Europeans assumed the native trade was not as advanced as seen in Europe and they were correct in a western viewpoint.⁴⁹ The idea of the

⁴⁸ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896-1901). *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610—1791: Vol. I Acadia: 1610-1613*. Pg.77.

⁴⁹ Grant, W. (Ed.) (1812). *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604-1618*. Pg.42.

European system being more advanced was mostly a European view as they often considered something that was not to their liking or to their way of doing things to be inferior to their own, however, the native trade network was complex and far-reaching. The main reason for Europeans to find it rudimentary was due to the value the indigenous people put on certain items.⁵⁰ In the early years of the fur trade often many furs would be exchanged for small amounts of European goods such as metal and cloth, these furs would then be sold in Europe for values far exceeding that of the wares the Europeans gave the natives for them. With these types of trades happening regularly in the late 1500's and early 1600's Europeans began to assume the native people were naive in trading and easily exploited in these deals.⁵¹ Similarly, the fact that much value was placed on wampum and glass beads made many traders question the native logic in obtaining items that back in Europe were easily manufactured, in exchange for naturally occurring elements that were of a limited quantity.

From a native perspective, they found the Europeans to be novice traders. A Montagnais trapper told the Jesuit superior of Quebec, Father Le Jeune, in 1657 that "The beaver does everything perfectly well it makes kettles, hatchets, swords, knives, bread. In short it makes everything. The English have no sense...they give us twenty knives for one beaver skin" with Le Jeune commenting that native trappers were "making sport of us Europeans".⁵² Traditionally valuable items such as wampum and beads were considered valuable due to the nature in which they were made. For a native to acquire such items they had to be drawn from natural

⁵⁰ Jaenen, C. (1976). *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*. Pg.244.

⁵¹ Miller, C. and Hamell, G. (1986). *A New Perspective on Indian-White Relations: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade*. In *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 73, No. 2. Sep, 1986. Pg.311.

⁵² Thwaites, R. (1896-1901). *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France: 1610-1791*. Volume VI. Pg. 297-299.

resources and in quantities that were hard to come by making them valuable commodities. Similarly, certain groups put a spiritual value in beads made of certain materials.⁵³ The fact that Europeans were trading factory manufactured beads and wampum was not important to the indigenous people as they were unaware of such a process. Likewise, the furs that the French, English and Dutch so desperately sought were an everyday item for all tribes in the region and so held a rather limited value. The acquisition of metals and cloth for such a standard item made many native groups assume the Europeans were the inept traders; considering themselves to be getting the best deal.⁵⁴ The early fur trade was unique in this sense as both sides thought they were getting the best deal from the trade when in fact both were gaining what they wanted in exchange for items they considered to be of less value.

The first century or so of the North American fur trade is a fascinating era not only for the history of the continent but around the world. Such an early trade deal by two civilisations who shared no history had never happened on such a large scale, the exchange rate of items was similarly on a scale, unlike many others. Also, the changes this trade brought with it either by design or accident had a huge effect on the area in which it operated. Most of these changes can be traced back to the first one hundred years of the trade and contact.

Chapter 2:

Relationships and their changes caused by the fur trade in the 17th century

The early 17th century was a turbulent time in North America for indigenous peoples, the introduction of European colonists led to increased interaction and

⁵³ Jaenen, C. (1976). *Amerindian Views of French Culture in the Seventeenth Century*. Pg.265.

⁵⁴ Jaenen, C. (1976). Pg.271.

land sharing between two very different civilisations. This proximity brought with it more competition for land and resources however it also introduced more opportunities for trade and cooperation. We can see from many accounts that the opinions of each other were divided between the two groups with some embracing the new possibilities for friendship and others shunning it.⁵⁵ From a European religious point of view, these “new found” people offered an opportunity to promote the spread of Christianity and the word of the church to these supposed “savages”.⁵⁶ Similarly, many indigenous people welcomed this new god into their lives and turned away from their traditional beliefs as can be seen by the vast success of the French Jesuit missionaries.⁵⁷ On the opposing side, however, many European religious missionaries suffered a terrible fate at the hand of indigenous people who opposed this new belief system.⁵⁸ Two Jesuit missionaries, Jean de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lalemant, were subjected to torture at the hands of the Iroquois after being captured from a Huron village, including being “baptised” with boiling water, burning metal placed on their bodies as well as pieces of their skin being cut off, cooked and eaten in front of them. Once they were close to death they “made an opening in the upper chest, and tore out his heart, which they roasted and ate” according to a Huron prisoner who was captured with them.⁵⁹ It was not only the spread of religion that caused massive change: trade brought groups into conflicts on a large scale. European powers opposed each other, not in a conventional war like manner but in an economic battle to get the best deals on native goods. Indigenous groups on the other hand

⁵⁵ Delâge, D. (2011). Pg.81.

⁵⁶ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896-1901). *Vol. I*. Pg.2.

⁵⁷ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896-1901). *Vol: I*. Pg.11.

⁵⁸ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896-1901). *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610—1791: Vol. III Acadia: 1611-1616*. Pg.131-135.

⁵⁹ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896-1901). *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610—1791: Vol. XXXIV*. Pg. 25-37.

similarly competed fiercely with one another for the best trading deals and routes that would gain them not only the best price for their goods but also access to the best European market available. Certain commodities were in high demand in the north, for Europeans, there was great competition for the best fur harvests, for the indigenous groups it was a battle for metal, cloth and importantly firearms.⁶⁰ It was these things that brought the conflict to a new level and which saw many groups taking sides causing significant shifts in long-standing relationships as well as regional power struggles. This chapter will look at the relationships that were forged and broken during the 17th century over the fur trade.

As shown in chapter 1, there were many different groups and nations in the north-eastern parts of the North American continent around this time. Some had been living in this region for many years, others aiming to set up new homes for themselves and some merely operating in the areas purely for business but whatever the group's goals and intentions they all had to make alliances with another to fulfil their aims. In the objective of acquiring furs as well as hunting, these bonds were immensely valuable. For the Kingdom of France, their location offered an abundance of trading partners for both good and bad. The St Lawrence valley region was a prime location for indigenous people to live due to its supply of water, access to food and being sheltered from the harsh north winters; this can be seen by the sheer number of tribes who called the area home, many for centuries.⁶¹ The Huron tribe were one that France found a robust and lasting ally. The Huron were a northern Iroquoian group and known to be one of, if not the, most numerous in the area before European contact, their population size was thought to be around 30,000 people.⁶² Although the Huron were one of the most

⁶⁰ Francis, D. and Morantz, T. (1983). Pg.19.

⁶¹ Creighton, D. (1956). *The Empire of the St. Lawrence: A Study in Commerce and Politics*. Pg.5-6.

⁶² Warrick, G. (2008). *A Population History of the Huron-Petun, A.D. 500-1650*. Pg82.

numerous groups and part of the Iroquoian language family group and descendants of Proto-Iroquoian people, like the five members of the Iroquoian Confederacy, they did not join the Iroquoian Confederacy and were often opposed to them.⁶³ The location of the Huron villages made them the allies for the French, often settling around Lake Ontario which offered great access to the French bases at Quebec and Trois Rivieres via the waterways. The Huron themselves are thought to have encountered the French as early as the 1500's but only on a more frequent level around the first years of the 17th century, according to Jesuit Missionaries report from 1640.⁶⁴ After hearing about the French ships and other stories, a war party is thought to have been sent to see them for themselves, according to some reports these first meetings were made by members of the Arenderhonon tribe and it is that they met Champlain as the French representative.⁶⁵ Unlike his predecessors, Champlain made significant efforts to make alliances with indigenous groups and secure trade deals in exchange for French help as well as embracing many elements of native culture in the process even recording different languages, beliefs, and customs which can be found in his published journal *Des Sauvages*.⁶⁶ The efforts made by him make up a vital part of French trade dominance in the region, none more so than the securing of an alliance with the Huron. Initially, the Huron and other Algonquin groups offered to make a small trade with the French, however, violence and the fear of attack from the neighbouring Iroquoian Confederacy often hindered these trading missions.⁶⁷ In 1609 Champlain and two other French soldiers accompanied a

⁶³ Trigger, B. G. (1988). Pg.224.

⁶⁴ Trigger, B. G. (1968). "The French Presence in Huronia: The Structure of Franco-Huron Relations in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century," Canadian Historical Review 49, no. 2, (1968). Pg.115-141.

⁶⁵ Trigger, B. G. (1988). Pg.246.

⁶⁶ Heidenreich, C. (Ed.) and Ritch, K. J. (Ed.) (2010). *Samuel de Champlain before 1604: Des Sauvages and other Documents Related to the Period*.

⁶⁷ Trigger, B. G. (1988). Pg.358.

Huron raiding party on an attack on a Mohawk village situated at Lake Champlain.⁶⁸ This joint attack served several purposes for the French: firstly, it created a stronger bond between them and the Huron in the hope of more trade as well as a reprieve from attacks. Secondly, without the fear of Mohawk attacks, it freed up the trade routes to the French. The third outcome was that it sent a message of strength to other native groups, Champlain himself wrote “The Iroquois were much astonished that two men should have been killed so quickly...This frightened them greatly...they lost courage and took to flight”⁶⁹ when later documenting the raid. The Mohawk being a member of the Confederacy meant they were part of one of the strongest indigenous alliances in the area as well as being one of the most powerful warring nations. If the help of just three French men meant a Mohawk defeat other tribes were much more likely to not only look for alliances with the French but also leave any group that was associated with them alone.⁷⁰ A minor trade agreement was signed by the Huron and the French in that same year regarding the exchange of furs for French metal and cloth, however, it was not until 1614 that more permanent and lucrative trade deals were offered to the Huron.⁷¹ Since 1610 a Frenchman by the name of Étienne Brûlé had been living among the Huron in the St Lawrence Valley in an attempt to learn and document their language and customs as well as gain more insight into the lives of France’s newest allies. Although Brûlé did fulfil his primary aim he also came across something that was of huge benefit to French traders as well as the whole of New France’s economy; the Huron possessed furs in quantities and quality unlike any other group on the continent.⁷² The Huron tribes’

⁶⁸ Harris, R. C. (Ed.). (1987). *Historical Atlas of Canada: From the beginning to 1800*. Pg.84.

⁶⁹ Champlain, S. d. (1839). *Voyages de sieur De Champlain, ou Journal es Descouvertes de la Nouvelle France*. (Second Edition). Pg.89.

⁷⁰ Champlain, S. d. (1922) *The Works of Samuel de Champlain 1925 Edition*. Pg.151.

⁷¹ Nellis, E. (2010). *An Empire of Regions: A Brief History of Colonial British America*. Pg.69.

⁷² Pasquet, J. (2013). *Étienne Brûlé: coureur des bois*. Pg.20.

acquisition of the furs was down to their place as middlemen at the heart of an intricate native trading network which meant furs and other native goods came into Huron's hands from as far west as the Rocky Mountains.⁷³ This new knowledge was a massive boost to the French fur industry and was the reason behind the trade deal of 1614. This trade agreement was so lucrative for the French that by 1620 over 60% of their fur exports could be traced back to the Huron.⁷⁴

This “new found” trade agreement gave the French access to much larger amounts of Huron fur than they had had previously. The Huron were at the heart of a complex indigenous trade network that spanned the northeast and central Canada. Some French accounts stated that they either acquired personally or knew of articles possessed by Huron members from as far west as the Blackfoot people, Cree, Plains Cree, Crow and Dene as well as possessing items from tribes located in the Northern Plains such as the Mandan, Cheyenne and Sioux.⁷⁵ Similarly, an abundance of furs was brought to the Huron from the far north by many Inuit groups as well as the most northern Cree people, the James Bay Cree.⁷⁶

Their role as the middlemen made the Huron much more powerful and influential than the French initially assumed or realised, a position the Huron soon took advantage of. By the 1620's the French had become established traders around the St Lawrence Valley region as well as becoming known for their military power in the north. As they became more settled in their new surroundings, they began to explore the idea of extending their operations further west.⁷⁷ The west of

⁷³ Dolin, E. (2011). Pg.95.

⁷⁴ Riendeau, R. (2007). *A Brief History of Canada*.Pg.43.

⁷⁵ Warrick, G. (2008). Pg.29.

⁷⁶ Francis, D. (1983). Pg.19.

⁷⁷ Chamberlin, M. (2014). *Longman Companion to the Formation of the European Empires, 1488-1920*.

Canada was underexplored by Europeans at the time. The French knew of the abundance of furs available from the groups in this area due to their trading with the Huron.⁷⁸ The earlier trade agreement with the Huron became a hindrance to the French in their aim to extend. The challenge for the French and their westward expansion was that it would break the Huron's role as the middlemen of the St Lawrence's Valley trade network, a role that they were not so willing to give up. Initially, the Huron deliberately hindered the French aims of contacting the groups further west knowing that if they did make direct contact it would enable them to bypass the Huron entirely.⁷⁹ The Huron as middlemen had the best of both worlds; they could give the French the best furs from across their trade network in exchange for the best European goods. The best of these goods would be kept by the Huron themselves with the lesser quality items, or those of little need to the readily supplied Huron being passed down the trade line to the more isolated tribes. These tribes would often sell their best, most valuable furs in exchange for these lesser value European goods as they did not have access to any European markets at the time.⁸⁰ This type of trading put the Huron in a very profitable position as they offered both the natives and Europeans what each perceived to be the best while making a significant profit and retaining the best goods for themselves.

The way the Huron were able to control French trade in and out of Montreal and Quebec was due to their large population.⁸¹ The French had a small population in New France and so were forced to rely on their indigenous neighbours for support. The Huron being their primary ally meant that they were in no hurry to make

⁷⁸ Hafen, L. and Lecompte, J. (1997). *French Fur Traders and Voyageurs in the American West*. Pg.13.

⁷⁹ Warrick, G. (2008). Pg.231.

⁸⁰ Ray, A. J. (2005). Pg. 13.

⁸¹ Innis, H. (2017). *Essays in Canadian Economic History*. Pg.33.

enemies of them. The Huron exploited this and limited the French access to other trading networks for many years for their own benefit.⁸² By 1620 the French became aware of this tactic and with more numbers and a firmer foothold in the region as well as many of the tribes now being aware of their military power they slowly began to expand further into the region. This expansion brought them into more contact with the Iroquoian Confederacy tribes who saw themselves as the middlemen of the more southern fur trade.⁸³

The attack on the village near Lake Champlain forged a strong alliance between the Huron and the French: the Huron saw that the French were willing to aid them in a war that was not necessarily theirs to participate in. It also showed French bravery, a trait highly prized among many indigenous groups, as only three of them took part in the attack against one of the most feared tribes in the area, and in the most part, conducted the raid as well as leading from the front of the group according to reports from the time. French grasp of military strategy was also on display using their smaller Huron force to great effect as well as the use of guns which caused a massive increase in the native demand for them. Likewise, the French knew that it was through these types of acts they would gain more trust and later better trade deals from the natives they helped in this way. The attack also caused concern amongst the Iroquoian Confederacy who saw this new French show of strength as a significant threat to their stranglehold of power over the other tribes in the region.⁸⁴ In Samuel de Champlain's own words on the attack he stated that "The Iroquois were much astonished that two men should have been killed so quickly, although they were provided with shields... This

⁸² Pritchard, J. (2004). Pg.155.

⁸³ Tucker, S. (Ed.) (2011). *The Encyclopedia of North American Indian Wars, 1607–1890: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Pg.393.

⁸⁴ Tucker, S. (2011). Pg.394.

frightened them greatly.” Although these words are to be taken as European bravado the fact that one of the strongest native fighting forces retreated from a favourable battlefield in both numbers and terrain suggest Champlain’s words may have been truthful.

The French tactic for making and maintain relations with the native groups at the time is centred on a fair policy of trade and exchange with the groups they are allied with whilst not being the obvious aggressor towards other groups but still lending small forces to military campaigns without contributing a direct large force. Comparing this to the empires European relationships where they are contributing large forces to their own wars as well as often running trade embargos shows how the French political system really had to manage their relationships tactics during the period and did a rather good job of adapting their policies to the continent and situations they encountered.

The Iroquoian Confederacy consisted of five tribes, the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca, sometimes referred to as the Five Nations. Many of these groups resided in the northern portion of New York State in the 17th century with some venturing into southern Canada. Their population size, fierce reputation in war and the fact that they were five confederated tribes meant that they were feared by every other indigenous group.⁸⁵ This combination contributed to a great deal of displacement among other groups; evidence of this reputation can be seen in the fact that the five confederacy tribes were even feared by the European nations.⁸⁶ Initially shunning trade with Europeans, some groups soon saw the benefits of an alliance, none more so than the Mohawk who saw how

⁸⁵ Fenton, W. (1998). *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy*. Pg.3.

⁸⁶ Goldstein, R. (1969). *French-Iroquois diplomatic and military relations 1609-1701*. Pg.37.

effective French firearms could be at first hand. The attack by Champlain at Lake Champlain burnt the proverbial bridge of a friendship between the French and Mohawk with one Frenchman concluding that “Between us and them there is no more good faith than between the most ferocious animals”.⁸⁷

With a trade deal with the French being discounted, this meant whoever secured a deal with the Mohawk also gained access to the furs and other goods contributed by the other four members of the Confederacy.⁸⁸ The Mohawk, being forced out of southern Canada temporarily by their defeat to the French, came into contact with other European nations. The Dutch who were operating from Fort Orange under in what is present-day New York State, after being sold the land by the local Mohican tribe and the English who had set up operations in Albany both saw an opportunity to make friends with a group that not only hated their rivals, the French, but were willing to wage an open war against them.⁸⁹ The Dutch, in particular, carried out their fur trade operations differently to their European competitors. After the initial exploration of the Hudson and the purchase of land their new allies, the Mohican began to feel pressure from the southward expanding Mohawk. The Dutch agreed to help the Mohican against the Mohawk, which was unusual for the Dutch who often appeared to stay out of indigenous affairs. The help was short lived as the combined Mohican and four Dutchmen were defeated with all but one of the Dutchmen being killed, the Mohawk were even said to have roasted and eaten one of the Dutchmen.⁹⁰ This defeat ended

⁸⁷ Horn, B. (2006). *Perspectives on the Canadian Way of War: Serving the National Interest*. Pg. 24.

⁸⁸ Fenton, W. (1998). Pg.246.

⁸⁹ Jacobs, J. and Roper, L. H. (2005). *New Netherland: a Dutch colony in seventeenth-century America*. Pg.210.

⁹⁰ Ruttenger, E. (1999). *History of the Indian tribes of Hudson's River. Their Origin, Manners and Customs, Tribal and Sub-tribal Organizations, wars, treaties, etc.* Pg.402.

the Mohican hold on the areas around Dutch territory making the Mohawk the next closest trading tribe.

The Dutch Republic did not wish to colonise this new land but wanted to make as much money as possible in as short time as possible and then leave, due to the New Netherlands being a Dutch West Indies Company directive under the director Peter Minuit.⁹¹ Obviously with the colony being under the jurisdiction of a company of private interest, colonisation, in the sense of inhabiting a land, was much more of a political strategy and as such the motives and relationships differed from the other European countries.

Dutch independence had led to the introduction of a new state religion, Calvinism. Calvinism as a religion aids the growth of business due to its ideas behind thrift and education. The combination of these ideas built a highly educated Dutch public as well as an increase in businessmen. At the same time, the Dutch possessed a large merchant fleet due to the Dutch East and West India companies, one of the largest in the world at the time, making the Dutch the rulers of the waves. The republic funded Dutch East India Company similarly became the world's first multinational corporation which was financed by the world's first modern stock exchange, still operating from Amsterdam today. Although exploration by these merchant fleets was important the financial success of these explorations was the main aim; this can be seen in their choice of areas where they set up bases. This period of Dutch history is referred to as a golden age due to their advancements in naval technology, business, sciences and arts all funded by the companies operating out of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Because the main aim of the Dutch was to make the highest income possible from trading, the items

⁹¹ Masselman, G. (1961). *Dutch Colonial Policy in the Seventeenth Century*. Pg.455.

they offered for trade to the native people were different to those offered by the other Europeans.⁹² One of the most important rules for a French trader in the early 17th century was that under no circumstance were firearms to be given to native people, the punishment for those caught doing so was death.⁹³ A similar rule can be found in the English colonies as they saw guns as the only real reason their small numbers were able to repel the much larger indigenous populations.⁹⁴ The Dutch, on the other hand, did not have a substantial civilian population and as a result were unafraid of native raids against their towns.⁹⁵ Also, most Dutch outposts were designed with fortifications; as more of a military structure with the benefit of trading whereas the English and French had fortified towns, which were living places with the construction of some defence. As a result, the Dutch offered guns and shot to natives for the best deals on fur, often claiming large quantities of the latter for the former.⁹⁶ This deal brought the Dutch many trading partners from the New York State area as they were currently the only Europeans offering firearms. This trade agreement worked out exceptionally well for the Dutch and their Mohawk allies and caused endless problems for the French and any tribes who were French allies.

It was not only the trade goods offered by the Dutch that gained them partners but also their fair treatment of the indigenous people in the early years. As the main proportion of the Dutch population were traders they operated as such; compared to the other European powers religious conversion was not a priority for the Dutch traders to enforce on the native people, although they often viewed them as strange and savage in nature. This can be seen in the rules that followed the

⁹² Jacobs, J. and Roper, L. H. (2014). *The Worlds of the Seventeenth-Century Hudson Valley*. Pg.70.

⁹³ Weed, Parsons and Company. (1868). *Laws and Ordinances of New Netherlands*. Pg.101.

⁹⁴ Gale, R. (2010). *For Trade and Treaty: Firearms of the American Indians, 1600-1920*.

⁹⁵ Jacobs, J. (2005). Pg.147.

⁹⁶ Middleton, R. and Lombard, A. (2011). *Colonial America: A History to 1763*. Pg.69.

forming of alliances. The agreement made with the Iroquois was known as the Kaswhenta in Iroquoian or 'two-row wampum' to the Dutch, was agreed upon on equal terms with the Iroquoian leader saying "You say that you are our father and I am your son. We say, we will not be like Father and Son, but like Brothers. This wampum belt confirms our words." This form of agreement and indeed Kaswhenta is based upon the agreement of a non-intrusive partnership with both parties being free to do as they please and "...each travel the river together, side by side, but in our boat".⁹⁷

Similarly, one of the directors of the Dutch West Indian Company, Johannes de Laet, stated that he believed the native people to be friends who would facilitate their requirements for partners nicely if they were to be treated fairly by his countrymen. This idea of them treating the native people fairly can be seen echoed by the company's statement to its employees in 1626 stating:

"He shall also see that no one do the Indians any harm or violence, deceive, mock, or condemn them in any way, but that in addition to good treatment they be shown honesty, faithfulness, and sincerity in all contracts, dealings, and intercourse, without being deceived by shortage of measure, weight or number and that throughout friendly relations with them be maintained".⁹⁸

With the Dutch republic offering goods other nations did not and playing by their own rules their fur trade business from Fort Orange and New Amsterdam grew massively, the number of furs being brought into the posts doubling between 1626 and 1635.⁹⁹ The Dutch dominance in the American fur trade was short-lived

⁹⁷ Southwestern American Indian Society. (2005). *American Indian Quarterly*. Pg.442.

⁹⁸ Ryen, J. V (1625). *Instructions for the director Willem Verhulst of the Zeeland Camber of the WIC (January 1625)*.

⁹⁹ Huey, P. (1997). *The Archeology of Fort Orange and Beverwijck*. Bureau of Historic Sites, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic preservation.

spanning only around 50 years or so and coincided with the degradation of the relationships the Dutch had with their native allies. Although small-scale disputes and battles had taken place in the years prior by 1643, when the Dutch ethos on the continent started shifting towards farming, this meant they started to encroach on more tribal lands defined by an attack on a Mohawk village located on what is today New Jersey City. The attack was conducted by Governor Willem Kieft of New Amsterdam and resulted in the slaughter of some 150 native men, women and children. The conflict escalated in the following years in a war that is named after the governor himself and would eventually weaken the Dutch hold on the continent. With New Amsterdam falling to the English the Dutch trade was over, however, even though they were only trading for a short time it allowed them to make a massive income from the trade.

From the evidence, the Dutch appear to have been the most liberal of the three when it came to forming relationships for cooperation, the carrot being better than the stick is the most obvious metaphor. The lure of guns offered to tribes making them friends even to those further away than their local area. By the mid-17th century, we see the Dutch control slipping, the fur in the Hudson region began to dwindle and as a result, other forms of income were needed, the turn to farming destroyed relations with the local tribes as well as the encroaching British. These, combined with the wish to maintain their more financially beneficial Indonesia colonies, led to the fall of the Dutch colonies.

The English operated much of their fur trade from the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts and when compared to the French and Dutch exports, in the early years were working in small numbers.¹⁰⁰ This was due, in most part, to their late

¹⁰⁰ Purvis, T. (2014). *Colonial America to 1763*. Pg.92.

arrival to the trading scene with the colony only being established in 1620 giving many French traders more than 20 years more to establish trade in the area before the English, with low levels of contact or conflict with other Europeans regarding trade boundaries. Even though relatively small, the income brought from trading their furs in Europe was what enabled the colonists at Plymouth to pay off their creditors back in England.¹⁰¹ The income of beaver fur was so vital to the Plymouth colony that historian James Adams wrote "The Bible and the beaver were the two mainstays of the young colony. The former saved its morale, and the latter paid its bills, and the rodent's share was a large one".¹⁰² Most of the fur acquired by the English in Plymouth, as well as the survival of many of the colonists, was down to the local Abenaki people, an Algonquin group residing in the New England area. The beaver fur was the key to the colony's financial survival in its adolescence as well as the actual survival of its people with the bonds the trading for skins brought.¹⁰³ After this first meeting the fur trade of New England began and started to spread, only six months after acquiring their first furs the colonists sent out their first fur expedition to trade with the native tribes further north.¹⁰⁴ With this venture north, treaties were quickly signed with many of the northern Algonquin groups.

The Abenaki themselves played a vital part in the fur trade of what is now Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Québec. The supply of furs from them was critical to the survival of the English at Plymouth, however, the English only actually acquired a small portion of the furs the Abenaki had available with the largest

¹⁰¹ Dolin, E. (2011). Pg.38.

¹⁰² Adams, J. (1921). *The Founding of New England*. Pg. 102.

¹⁰³ Dolin, E. (2011). Pg.57.

¹⁰⁴ Adams, J. (1921). Pg. 210.

share going to the French traders at Québec and Trois Riveres.¹⁰⁵ The trading operations of the Abenaki are a key example of how many native groups used both sides; acquiring goods from one that the other would not provide or simply providing more to whoever paid the most while still giving small amounts to the other so that they didn't make an enemy of them.

The English faced similar troubles to the other Europeans, during the first twenty years or so of trade both the native people and English prospered from their agreements, however, English ambition soon caused rifts in this friendship.

English farms pushed further into native land by 1650 by purchasing the land from the tribes themselves. This is where the difference in ideas became apparent as many natives did not have the same notion of ownership as the English or indeed Europeans, meaning they did not necessarily move from the land they had sold causing conflict among many farming settlements and local tribes. Religion was similarly forced upon native people, around Plymouth particularly, with the establishment of 'Praying Towns' set up for those natives who had converted to Christianity. The English Missionary John Eliot being the strongest advocate for them. Eliot is an interesting figure and one who is well documented, this is particularly useful when analysing the decisions made by the English as his views are assumed to be those shared by many Englishman of the time. In Eliot's view "native culture lacked intrinsic value" and he fully rejected "their entire ethnic and cultural identity" with the goal of the indigenous people acting like "Englishmen".¹⁰⁶ Eliot is known for his authoritarian approach to converting the Native people and often struggled to gain loyalty from his converts.¹⁰⁷ With these views being held it

¹⁰⁵ Klyza, C. and Trombulak, S. (2015). *The Story of Vermont: A Natural and Cultural History, Second Edition*. Pg.27.

¹⁰⁶ Cogley, R. (2009). *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philips War*. Pg.240.

¹⁰⁷ Tetek, R. (2010) *Relations between English Settlers and Indians*. Pg.52.

is clear to see why the emphasis of many religious efforts were to change the Native culture. The fact that separate towns were set up for Christian natives caused concern among elders of native communities. Also, the fur-bearing animal populations began to decline during the latter part of the 17th century, leading to great frustration from the natives who had become accustomed to European goods. For the latter part of the 17th century the relationships between indigenous people and the English were often tentative at best with wars breaking out over things such as land claims, trade deals and other things which had often been negotiated or ignored previously.

With the growth of trade in the region and the spread of colonised land, European powers were pushed into closer contact with each other. The English began expanding further north while the French expanded further south. The small colony of New Sweden became sandwiched between the northern English colonies and the growing Dutch Republic to the south in New York.¹⁰⁸ With this, competition for furs became fiercer and alliances became much more important.

France struck the first blow to the English colonies in the fur trade with the raid on the Plymouth Companies Penobscot storehouse. When a French ship appeared close to the storehouse the English were rightfully sceptical, however after a brief exchange of words, the French informed the English that they were in fact lost and taking on water and required help, none of which was true. Once helped to shore the English told the French that in fact they were the only ones there and the leader and other members were at Plymouth collecting supplies. This surprised the French who then took a keen interest in guns resting on the rack and proceeded to inspect the firearms. Upon confirmation that they were in fact loaded

¹⁰⁸ Hoffeecker, C. Waldron, R. Williams, L. and Benson, B. (1995). *New Sweden in America*.

they turned the guns on the English and relinquished them of the goods in the storeroom. The raid was bloodless and conducted by the French with comical ease due to the slow and unsuspecting nature of the English stationed there, but it ended with the French making off with five hundred English pounds worth of goods and three hundred pounds in weight worth of beaver furs.¹⁰⁹ This is an example of the types of raids that took place between European powers with the two rarely engaging in open warfare or anything that would bring about a war between the colonies. Mid-way through the 17th century this type of raid was replaced by armed conflict and battles, by then all nations involved were well established and it soon became apparent who were the strongest. New Sweden soon found out that they were no match for the rapidly growing and militarily capable Dutch Republic. In 1655 Sweden became occupied with the Second Baltic War back in Europe, this gave the Dutch the opportunity to take their small overseas colony.¹¹⁰ The land of New Sweden was incorporated into the New Netherlands quickly and with minimal disruption until August 29, 1664, when the British invaded and conquered New Amsterdam.¹¹¹ With the rise of the Second Anglo-Dutch War the English and the Dutch were at open war across the world including America causing significant disruptions to both trade and relationships. From a financial standpoint the Dutch were in a superior position both in Europe and in America; the Dutch were the most dominant nation in world trade and were superior in both current trade and national wealth.¹¹² Although wealthier, the Dutch American colonies were taken over in the first years of the war by the English and retained throughout. Towards the end of the war, the English in Manhattan looked

¹⁰⁹ Abbott, C. Goldfield, D. Anderson, V. Argersinger, J. Argersinger, P. and Barney, W. (2002). *The American Journey: A History of the United States*. Pg.122.

¹¹⁰ Leiby, A. (1964). *The Early Dutch and Swedish Settlers of New Jersey*. Pg.124.

¹¹¹ Jacobs, J. and Roper, L. H. (2014). Pg.154.

¹¹² Go, S. (2009). *Marine Insurance in the Netherlands 1600-1870: A Comparative Institutional Approach*. Pg.65.

less and less likely to retain the new island; the Dutch were gaining more allies than the flagging English and by 1666 France had joined the Dutch Republic in declaring war on England.¹¹³ This meant that the English colonies in North America were now sandwiched between two nations their mother country was at open war with; this was a worrying time for the colonists who were already struggling for survival. By 1667 the English were keen to make peace after suffering during the war; part of the peace agreement was that they could keep Manhattan and the Hudson Valley in exchange for the island of Run in the Dutch East Indies.¹¹⁴ This brought an end to the Dutch operations in North America and strengthened the English claim. This left only the French to challenge them for the fur trade in the north.

Throughout the 17th century French-English relations were tenuous at best however so far, in North America, nothing had come of their European skirmishes. With the fall of the Dutch, France had lost its' southern ally on the continent and now had to rely on its' own capabilities. As said previously, the French colonies in Canada were not designed or prepared for open war, they could deal with minor native skirmishes or the loss of a village or two but had nowhere near the numbers required to take on a nation like England in open warfare.¹¹⁵ Their native allies by the time of the mid-1600s were similarly in a sorry state from their wars and conflicts.

The native allies of the French, most notably the Huron and Eerie, had had a similar state of decline. By 1628 Frances' allies had come under attack from an ambitious Iroquois Confederacy these native groups had come under a punishing

¹¹³ Rommelse, G. (2006) *The Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667): Raison D'état, Mercantilism and Maritime Strife*. Pg.151.

¹¹⁴ Rommelse, G. (2006). Pg.189.

¹¹⁵ Pritchard, J. (2004). Pg.3.

offensive. The relationships between native groups were often very fluid with some instances of peace changing to war very quickly however the Iroquois Confederacy had been a threat to many of their neighbouring tribes for as long as the alliance had existed. By the late 1620s with a successful trade relationship being formed with the Dutch the Iroquois saw their opportunity to expand their territory and capitalise on the fur trade in the region by positioning themselves at the centre of the native side of the exchange. This threatened many local groups; the French saw their allies being pushed further and further out of their land although conflicts between the Europeans and the Iroquoian Confederacy were limited. The Iroquois Wars often referred to as the Beaver Wars were the outcome of this. The war itself was fought between the members of the Iroquois Confederacy against the Huron, Erie, Ojibwa, Miami, Illinois as well as many other native groups. Each side were supported by their own respective European countries, the Iroquoian Confederacy had the aid of the Dutch and later the English, the other native groups were aided by the French.¹¹⁶ The war itself was brutal and operated under the European concept of total war, a foreign concept for many native groups. The Iroquois had similar numbers to their native enemies in the number of warriors they could call to arms however they had a slight advantage in the number of firearms and weapons traded for from Europeans.¹¹⁷ The Iroquois had the advantage of being a mostly unified group while the other native groups did not have such unity, but the imminent threat posed by the Iroquois did aid the peace talks between the groups leading to them quickly becoming allies with one another against their common enemy.¹¹⁸ For the Iroquois

¹¹⁶ Barr, D. (2006). *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America*. Pg.29.

¹¹⁷ Cavem A. (2004). *The French and Indian War*. Pg.5-7.

¹¹⁸ Seeman, E. (2011). *The Huron-Wendat Feast of the Dead: Indian-European Encounters in Early North America*. Pg.122.

Confederacy, this new strength provided them with the means to expand their territory, one that had seen them on a proverbial island surrounded on all sides by tribal enemies. During the Beaver Wars, the difference in trading tactics influenced the way the war would end. The Mohawk being supplied by the Dutch, allowed them to provide guns and other European steel weapons to the other tribes in the Iroquoian Confederacy which made them a fierce fighting force. Frances' native allies on the other hand, like the Huron, had no such opportunity to acquire European weapons due to the French policy of outlawing such a trade to native people, the few weapons they did possess came as items to show status rather than to equip a war party.¹¹⁹

The Iroquoian Confederacy conquered the Wenro by 1638 and moved within range of the more powerful Neutral and Erie people. After such an attack the French proposed a peace founded in trading. When this peace effort failed due to the French not honouring their side of the deal the Iroquoian Confederacy went on the warpath once again.¹²⁰ Up until the mid-1640's the conflict was relatively evenly balanced with the Huron putting up most of the resistance and after striking an alliance with the Susquehannock found themselves at a numerical advantage over the Iroquois.¹²¹ After winning a few small battles during 1647 and 1648, the allied tribes appeared to be able to stem the tide of the Iroquois advance, but by the end of 1648, the Dutch authorised the direct sales of guns to the Mohawk rather than through traders resulting in over 400 firearms being provided and a full armed war party being formed with the Huron in their sights.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Barr, D. (2006). Pg.42.

¹²⁰ Pritchard, J. (2004). Pg.154.

¹²¹ Van Zandt, C. (2008). *Brothers Among Nations: The Pursuit of Intercultural Alliances in Early America, 1580-1660*. Pg.124.

¹²² Silverman, D. (2016). *Thundersticks: Firearms and the Violent Transformation of Native America*. Pg.24.

The Iroquois attack at the heart of the Huron led to the devastation of the tribe. The Iroquoian invasion force featured “some twelve hundred warriors” with hundreds of Dutch guns according to one Huron man,¹²³ this attack was so important to the Iroquois that these numbers represent 50% of the Iroquoian Confederacy’s total fighting force.¹²⁴ The raid resulted in huge losses for the Huron, including Jesuit missionaries stationed with them, and many more being taken captive and integrated into Iroquoian Confederacy tribes. The official number of Huron killed is not available however some estimates suggest only a few thousand survived out of a possible thirty thousand.¹²⁵ This forced the Huron to flee and integrate themselves into other allied groups, causing the end of the Huron as a single tribe.¹²⁶ One Huron chief described the loss of his tribe to a Frenchman by saying "My brother, your eyes cheat you when you look at us: you think you are seeing living beings, whereas we are only the spectres and souls of the departed".¹²⁷ By the 1650's a similar fate had become of the Neutrals, and after a “hard-fought” war, the Erie had been similarly defeated.¹²⁸ By this time the French had seen many of their native allies destroyed and forced from their homelands eliminating the buffer they formed between the colonists and the Iroquoian Confederacy.

After the defeat of the Dutch, the English provided the Mohawk with the same resources the Dutch had previously, investing heavily in the continued attacked on the French. The lands that the Iroquois now gained in the valley had been a rich and abundant source of beaver furs which was the reason the Iroquois saw the

¹²³ Goldthwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896-1901) Vol. XXXIV. Pg.28.

¹²⁴ Lonergan, T. (2013). *From Hiawatha To Geronimo: The Assault on Native America*. Pg.30-31.

¹²⁵ Rogers, E and Smith, D. (1994). *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*. Pg.56.

¹²⁶ Trigger, B. G. (1988). Pg.227.

¹²⁷ Gilmore, D. and Turgeon, P. (2000). *Canada: a people's history, Volume 1*. Pg.74.

¹²⁸ Waaldman, C. (2014). *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes*. Pg.191-192.

area as worth acquiring.¹²⁹ By the 1650's, however, the beaver population in the area had been on a dramatic decline due to overhunting caused by the trade, leaving the Confederacy lacking in furs to trade therefore forcing them to have to move further into other native territories and French held ground.¹³⁰ The French had seen their native allies destroyed and quickly took up the war mantle themselves, launching raids into Mohawk and Seneca lands with the latter doing the same. The war became a bloody conflict for the next forty years, through the latter part of the 17th century. Mohawk and Seneca towns and villages were attacked on a regular basis by French militia, crops and stores raided causing mass starvation during the winters for the Confederacy.¹³¹ Similarly, Montreal was harassed and assaulted by war parties regularly during the 1680's with the adjacent town of Lachine being raised to the ground by Mohawk attackers in 1689.¹³² The Beaver Wars incorporated King Williams War (1688-1697) in which French-backed tribes attacked and invaded English settlements in the same way the Iroquois tribes, supported by the English had attacked and invaded the French settlements.

The war between the French and the Iroquois ended with the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701.¹³³ By the latter years of the 17th century, the Iroquois had begun to see the English as a larger threat than the French. Whilst the French had operated raids into Confederacy territory they had not aimed to colonise it, the English on the other hand, had been slowly spreading their influence over land close to the Confederacy and with the English colonisation of Pennsylvania the

¹²⁹ Francis, D. (1983). Pg.19.

¹³⁰ Robinson, J. (2015). *Trade Your Furs or Die: Derived and Translated from the writings of Pierre Esprit Radisson*. Pg.7.

¹³¹ Wallace, A. (2010). *Death and Rebirth of Seneca*. Pg.25.

¹³² Creighton, D. (1956). Pg.13.

¹³³ Harvaerd, G. (2001). *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century*. Pg.5.

Mohawk decided it was time to negotiate for peace with their bitter rivals the French.¹³⁴ The French were similarly disheartened with the war; after the best part of a century of war, they were no closer to defeating the Confederacy that had caused so many problems. With the signing of a peace treaty with the Confederacy, they could have a monopoly over the northern fur trade that the Iroquois now controlled. On the 4th of August 1701, thirty-nine native chiefs came to Montreal and signed the document as well as the governor of New France Louis-Hector de Callière thus drawing an end to the Beaver Wars and one of the most turbulent periods in the history of the region.¹³⁵

We can see that the relationships that were formed during the 17th century were calculated as well as being formed due to locality. The Europeans often wished to make deals with as many groups as possible however soon realised that due to the political nature of inter-tribal relations this was not going to happen, meaning they were going to have to back one group over another. For the French and the Huron this type of deal worked in their favour until the middle part of the century when the Huron soon realised they were not getting the same types of goods as other tribes when they were defeated by the Iroquois. The Iroquois similarly learnt that their trade relationship was also based on what suited their European partners best; once fur was no longer profitable in the region the Dutch were quick to turn their guns on their former partners in the hope of expanding farmland. In many regards the English were the easiest to operate with as they often shunned natives and saw them only as trade partners, they did not embrace natives living among them. Men like John Elliot detested the native way of life¹³⁶ and even when “embracing,” for lack of a better word, indigenous people into Christianity they

¹³⁴ Fenton, W. (1998).

¹³⁵ Harvaerd, G. (2001).

¹³⁶ Cogley, R. (2009). *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philips War*. Pg.240

were set up in separate towns and not permitted to live in the colonies. Many native leaders knew that they were disliked by the English however what they gained from the trade deals was too good to miss as well as the military power of the Europeans being too great. Relationships are key to any good trade deal however trusting ones' trade partner seems to have been many of the groups' downfall, both European and indigenous.

Chapter 3:

The Effects of the Early Fur Trade on Indigenous Society

As explored in the previous chapters, the fur trade caused many changes to the regional structure of the north-eastern parts of North America. However, changes in living locations as well as the endurance of certain tribes as a collective group had been a story as old as the history of the continent itself, as with many tribal based social systems change, was something that came along with the passing of time. Although the coming of Europeans sped up this process and changed many of the outcomes, there were much greater changes caused by the fur trade in the 17th century on a social level. The fur trade and the coming of Europeans brought with it access to new goods such as clothing, weapons, new foods, and tools, all of which affected the ways the indigenous population conducted their lives. It is important to remember, and it is also one of the reasons this period is so exciting to North American history, that the exchange of goods was conducted on equal terms during the early years; one group did not hold the other to ransom, and the partnership was considered equal.¹³⁷ It was not only these physical items that

¹³⁷ Carloss, A and Lewis, F. (2011). *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade*. Pg.68.

trade brought, however; due to the close contact caused by the trade relationships new ideologies were spread and exchanged. Christianity soon came into conflict with the traditional spirituality of the indigenous people and the introduction of capitalism changed how people looked at objects and their notions of ownership. Either by accident or deliberately, Europeans also introduced and spread pathogens among the native communities that their immune systems had never encountered. All these introductions shaped and changed the indigenous culture in the region, some were embraced, and others were shunned. Obviously different tribes and people had different approaches to the trade and what it brought which caused changes whether intended or not, all of which will be explored in this chapter. This chapter has also been divided into subheadings due to the broad nature of the topics discussed.

Ethnohistory

When discussing Indigenous American history, it is important to discuss ethnohistory as a source of information and indeed the contribution of ethnohistorians to our understanding of the topic. The definition of ethnohistory as a historical method is one that has several descriptions. On a basic level ethnohistory “is the branch of anthropology that is concerned with the history of people, particularly those who are part of non-western cultures” according to the Oxford Dictionary. W. Raymond Wood in his article titled Ethnohistory and Historical Method used “the use of historical documents and historical method in anthropological research”¹³⁸ as his minimally defined term for what ethnohistory is. Another well know ethnographer, James Axtell stated that in 1960 both anthropologists and historians had no discrepancy with agreeing that ethnohistory

¹³⁸ Wood, R. (1990). *Ethnohistory and Historical Method*. Pg.81.

is essentially “the use of historical and ethnological methods and material to gain knowledge of the nature and causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories”¹³⁹ and goes on to state that the practitioners of the discipline are those that bear the “diachronic dimensions of history and the synchronic sensitivity of ethnology”.¹⁴⁰ From these descriptions, we can see that ethnohistory as a field of study is a hybrid between anthropology and history.

As pointed out by James Axtell, the early years of the field were dominated by its members being from an anthropology background with those from a purely historical background often feeling the need to renounce their own background to join however, with the rise of social history subjects and research being conducted into lesser-known groups the field has grown to accommodate both historical and anthropological ways of study. Since ethnohistory has expanded as a field of study many historians have found themselves becoming more involved in the field due to the changes it has caused to the study of history, many who previously studied the archaic named field of “pre-history” found themselves now involved in the field of ethnohistory as a field of study. This is due in part to many native groups pointing out that the notion of pre-history insinuates that they had no history prior to the arrival of Europeans. The reason ethnohistory is of particular importance as a field of study to this essay and the reason it is what this essay is centred upon is that it allows for the best way to evaluate and explain the experience of Native American people in the past. Ethnohistory uses evidence, stories and thoughts from all aspects of the past, not only written sources but includes, oral histories, paintings and artistic representations, archaeological data, and even items held in museums.¹⁴¹ All this is corroborated in a similar style to

¹³⁹ Axtell, J. (1979). *Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint*. Pg.2.

¹⁴⁰ Axtell, j. (1979). Pg.2.

¹⁴¹ Carmack, R. (1972). *Ethnohistory: A Review of its Development, Definitions, Methods, and Aims*.

how an anthropologist would study a modern-day people to establish a picture of the social structure that is used by the people in question. An ethnohistorian must use all data available to them to try and gain an insight into the social structure of a society that they cannot ask direct questions to, although some modern relatives may be able to aid in some records of oral tradition or memories passed down this is often a luxury not afforded to them.

The study of Native American history is one that ethnohistorians have played a crucial part in, particularly when looking at their way of life from a social aspect, many academics in the field have published and contributed crucial and key publications and theories to this area of history. Important to this essay and our understanding of the native communities in the northeast before and after colonialization is Dr Bruce Trigger and his works on the Huron people. His work *The Children of Aataentsic* and subsequent work provide a definitive study and into the history of the Huron people. The reason his work is so definitive is due to his grasp of history using many different fields, his background in archaeology and its theory, coupled with his anthropological way of looking at the past provide an in-depth look at history on a social level. His more recent work titles *Natives and Newcomers* tackles the more modern perception of Indigenous people's pasts and offers a different view to the often-followed misconceptions of the continent's original inhabitants being almost prehistoric before European arrival. It is interesting to note that much of Trigger's work outside of the Americas is on the history of Nubia, an area that many people in the west have no issue with assuming contained very advanced civilisations at an equivalent time that many assume the indigenous population of the Americas were living at a stone aged level. Trigger's work on the Huron always aimed to show the complexity of native

life even before European contact, a lifelong work that saw him adopted into the Huron-Wendat Nation.

A second very important ethnohistorian to the field of Native American history is James Axtell, Unlike Trigger, his background is more history based than anthropological however much of his work around the topic discussed in this essay blends history with anthropology. Axtell's work focuses on the contact between indigenous people and Europeans particularly in the 17th century with publications such as *Natives and Newcomers* and *Beyond 1492* being two of particular relevance to the contact during the fur trade. Axtell's books use European accounts and native ones, where available, to create a picture of what it was like during this period of contact and give an insight into the societies of native people. Both Axtell and Trigger are highly accomplished and crucial to our understanding of native culture during contact periods with both bringing the field of ethnohistory into the forefront of study.

They also provide two different approaches to the field; Trigger uses his anthropological and archaeological backgrounds to create a very well-rounded picture of history and society while Axtell uses the historiography of the period combined with an anthropological view on culture and society to do a similar thing. What this does is show that for an ethnohistorian many branches of both history and social science are combined to create a fuller picture of the past and provide a more complete view into past societies. This makes ethnohistory crucial to our understanding of pre-European and early contact indigenous societies in the Americas and during the fur trade as well as a very important research method to keep in mind when regarding the evidence of change.

Textiles

As with any trade, the aim is to acquire goods or items that one cannot gain without trading; this can be due to various factors such as, unavailable manufacturing processes, scarce resources or that it is simply easier to trade for the item than it is to acquire it yourself. For the fur trade, all these criteria were fulfilled on both sides. As suggested in the name, fur was the goal for Europeans. After the acquisition of furs as gifts in the early years, Europeans had to find a way of gaining furs in a much higher quantity than could be obtained as a gift. Although trappers and hunters acquired a fair share of furs themselves and held an idealised place in American and Canadian folklore, they could not feasibly collect furs on the scale demanded by their home nations' part of the trade. One of the main reasons that these trappers struggled was due to them being few in numbers, their inexperience in the new land and terrain as well as encountering some animals they had not encountered before.¹⁴² The indigenous populations, on the other hand, had been hunting and trapping in these regions for generations and knew all the best locations and times of years that yielded the best fur harvests. Why would Europeans bother hunting the furs themselves when a readily available market was offered by their neighbours?

The quality of the furs provided by the indigenous traders is well known to be of high quality and in abundant quantities.¹⁴³ Even though it is known as the fur trade one of the most important aspects of the trade is the goods that Europeans gave in exchange for the fur, particularly when trying to evaluate the claims that these changes caused by the goods were a positive thing. The items Europeans were willing to trade varied considerably and even differed based on which European country the traders came from. Europeans had abandoned furs and pelts as

¹⁴² Krech III, S. (2011). *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*.

¹⁴³ Philips, G. (2003). *Addictions and Healing in Aboriginal Country*. Pg.137.

clothing years before the exploration of the Americas and instead opted for wool-based clothing and later made textiles such as linen, silk, and cotton. Clothing differed between indigenous groups across North America, to the far south the Pueblo often made their clothing from agave plant fibres, the richer in society opting for cotton which they either acquired from the wild or cultivated on farms. To the south-east, many Mississippian and Cherokee people made clothing material from the underside of tree bark, beaten to soften and then woven together to form clothing, much like some African groups. Further north and in Canada fur was the only option for clothing to survive the cold winters as any of the plant-based clothing options were simply not warm enough.¹⁴⁴ Wool clothing was often used by Europeans in such a climate, however, for the indigenous groups in the northeast, there were no naturally occurring ovine species with only the Dall breed occupying anywhere north of the Rockies and only in the cold mountainous regions of north-western Canada. Once trade commenced between indigenous communities and Europeans the popularity of European textiles was soon realised. Favoured by the indigenous people due to its properties of being warm but lightweight, being faster drying than skins, less bulky to carry and much easier to repair and even replace.¹⁴⁵ A fur garment could take 6-12 months upwards to make it suitable for everyday wear due to the nature of transferring body oils explained in the introduction. A wool blanket, on the other hand, could easily be acquired from a local European trader who often possessed an abundance of textiles due to its known popularity and its' ease of being able to be carried in bulk.

¹⁴⁴ Pritzker, B. (2000). *A Native American Encyclopaedia: History, Culture, and Peoples*. Pg.399-401.

¹⁴⁵ Trigger, B. (1986). *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered*. Pg.204.

The evidence for such significant amounts of textile goods being traded is difficult to find as the archaeological evidence does not necessarily corroborate with the logbooks kept by traders. The logbooks suggest large amounts were traded but due to the degradable nature of the textiles there is little evidence to corroborate this.¹⁴⁶ Textile goods do not hold up well to the test of time, particularly when buried. Because the products being acquired by trade were held in high regard, many indigenous people treasured their blankets and textile clothing and as tradition would dictate would be buried in or with such garments.¹⁴⁷ We know such textiles were held in high regard due to the remnants of small fragments of fibres left at burial sites as well as the imprinted on certain graves.¹⁴⁸ Many tribes of the northeast held the common tradition of the dead being buried with their prized possessions including the Huron, Algonquin, and Narragansett people as well as others.¹⁴⁹ Before Europeans, this would usually mean wampum, weapons and fine clothing, including spiritual items.¹⁵⁰ When an individual was buried during the wet season, the cloth would leave its mark on the soil which would later freeze come winter and result in the mark staying. As well as these rare finds the more common way in which the number of textiles being traded during this period is identified in the archaeology is the small lead seals they left behind.¹⁵¹ In the 1600's large quantities of blankets were produced to sell, the maker would often attach a small lead seal to one corner with their mark as a way of quantifying the number of blankets being shipped, following seals were tagged by the sales merchant, quality inspector and tax officer. This was also done so that shipping

¹⁴⁶ Phillips, P. (1961). *The Fur Trade Vol. 2*. Pg.831.

¹⁴⁷ Pauketat, T. (Ed.) (2015). *The Oxford Handbook of North American Archaeology*. Pg.102.

¹⁴⁸ Pauketat, T. (Ed.) (2015).

¹⁴⁹ Tooker, E. (1991). *The Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615-1649*. Pg. 131. Crawford, J. (2005). *American Indian Religious Traditions: A-I*. Pg. 573.

¹⁵⁰ Johansen, B. and Pritzker, B. (2007). *Encyclopedia of American Indian History (4 volumes)*. Pg.40

¹⁵¹ Jamestown Rediscovery: Lead Cloth Seals. <http://historicjamestowne.org/selected-artifacts/lead-cloth-seals/>

companies could not cut up a whole blanket into smaller ones to make more profit because if a blanket didn't have these marker seals, it couldn't be shipped. Luckily although the textiles themselves did not survive in the wet northern soil these seals did and can be seen at multiple sites and often in high numbers either at native sites or trader outposts. From these not only do we know cloth was traded but also its origin, manufacturer and port it was taxed at leaving.

Archaeological evidence

Another source of evidence can be found at the bottom of rivers and travel ways used by French and European traders. Traders often planned to make landfall at trading posts just before the onset of winter, pack and process the furs as the cold swept in and then carry the goods back to headquarters once the river unfroze. The journeys to reach these trading centres were perilous, particularly to the early Europeans who did not know the riverways as well as the locals.¹⁵² Canadian rivers are notoriously dangerous even today, with calm rivers soon turning into rapids and waterfalls without warning. As a result, numerous canoes and caravans were upturned on rivers or swept away at crossings and goods lost along the journey. Although no whole sites have been discovered up to now, there have been many occurrences of goods dated to the 17th century been found at the bottom of Canadian rivers along known trade routes used by both the French and indigenous people.¹⁵³ These sites have also become more numerous and better documented in recent times with the advancement of underwater archaeology. Underwater archaeology is of particular relevance to studies of the early fur trade when trying to access the goods that were acquired by both sides. Due to the

¹⁵² Innis, H. (2017).

¹⁵³ Northrup, C. et al. (2015). *Encyclopedia of World Trade: From Ancient Times to the Present, Volumes 1-4*. Pg.58.

nature of waterways in Canada and the passing years, many sites that were once along shores or river are now underwater due to receding coastlines, particularly along the fast running rivers around Quebec and the surrounding areas.¹⁵⁴

Similarly, due to the fur trade taking place on locations chosen because of their river access, this means many former posts in the St Lawrence region are now under water. It is not only natural resources that have threatened these sites, however, in America and to a lesser degree Canada there has been a trend of dam building projects during the 19th and early 20th century, and unfortunately, this has resulted in the flooding of many traditional and current indigenous tribal lands. This has led to either the loss of or quick research of sites that are now beyond reach. Regardless, underwater sites have yielded good finds to show what goods were being acquired by the fur trade. Although these underwater sites are hard to come across due to the changes mentioned above in the landscape, a few national parks as well as university sponsored explorations, have been funded at known early fur trade sites.

It was not only blankets and textiles that were sought after, however. In an essay titled *Archaeology as a Key to the Colonial Fur Trade* for the Journal of Minnesota History John Witthoft identifies six distinct phases of archaeological findings for the fur trade up to the 1700's. The way these phases are defined and categorised is by the changing style and quantities of items that are found at sites, this led to the dating of sites being made much easier. Sites related to the earliest years of the fur trade (1400-1600) are the hardest to identify and date due to the few European goods that are found. Often only a small amount of brass and other metals, small, delicate glass beads and the occasional knife and fish hooks in the more coastal

¹⁵⁴ Birk, D. (2004). *From Things Left Behind: A Study of Selected Fur Trade Sites and Artefacts, Voyages National Park and Enviro, 2001-2002*. Pg.46.

regions. Axes and small knives can be found at individual sites but are few and far between with copper kettles still being cut up and put to other uses rather than for their intended purpose.¹⁵⁵

The second stage is defined by the lack of trade goods making it to the interior, the Huron and Iroquois gained the best trade from the French and English in Canada while the Powhatan, Cherokee and Susquehanna controlled the New England and Dutch coastlines of trade, items found rarely differ from the early stage.¹⁵⁶ However, glass bead types seem to change slightly, to a flatter shape rather than conical.

By the third phase of the trade, the dates appear to run together a little more with it being defined as from 1600-1620. This phase is less defined by new goods appearing at native settlement sites but the change in usage. This is the time that the French, English and Dutch had become more permanent settlers in the land and is the reason we see European goods being used for their intended purpose rather than repurposed; as indigenous people got to see it being used first hand. The Seneca for example, appear to have done away with stone axes completely and had an abundance of steel from the Dutch.¹⁵⁷ Firearms are non-existent at this period in the evidence although small amounts of lead balls and strike flint can be found.¹⁵⁸ The bead type changes once again here and is known as "Jamestown Blue" by many collectors and historians due to its blue colour.

By the fourth phase, we start to see that tribes have begun controlling the trade from their neighbours by the types of goods that are found. The more central and

¹⁵⁵ Ehrhardt, K. (2005). *European Metals in Native Hands: Rethinking Technological Change*. Pg.91.

¹⁵⁶ Phillips, P. (1961). *The Fur Trade* Vol. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Witthoft, J. (1966). *Archaeology as a Key to the Colonial Fur Trade*. Pg.206.

¹⁵⁸ Given, B. (1994). *Most Pernicious Thing: Gun Trading and Native Warfare in the Early Contact Period*. Pg.72.

interior tribe sites show similar European goods to the third phase. However, the dates range from 1630-1660. The beads discovered in the early 1600's are still found at these sites and are there due to being traded to them by the more dominant Huron and Iroquois who were willing to trade them in favour of the newer types of beads and other goods they were able to acquire.¹⁵⁹ Guns are found at sites of this period for the first time; those found are of older flintlock designs than those used in Europe at the time with Dogear and Jacobean locks.¹⁶⁰ The fact that the much more expensive and complex flintlock guns are found in relative abundance rather than the older and outdated matchlock shows how important the fur trade was to Europeans. Similarly, to note is, that many of these native sites, particularly those known to have been inhabited by members of the Iroquoian Confederacy, appear better armed than some European towns. Most notable of which is Rochester Junction, New York that possessed many more munitions than Jamestown.¹⁶¹ This abundance of guns shows a new age in the warfare of the indigenous people.

It is in the latter years of the 17th century when we start to see the effects of all this trade on native culture; this obviously varies between groups with those more central to trade being affected by the influx of goods much more so than those in on the fringes. By this stage, guns are abundant at sites in the northeast and arrowheads, and spear tips are extremely scarce.¹⁶² Native pottery and ceramics appear to have been made obsolete by European brass, kettles were in regular everyday use and native pottery was used more for ceremonial and decorative use, bone hoes were replaced by steel entirely as well as irrigation tools and

¹⁵⁹ Witthoft, J. (1966). Pg.205-206.

¹⁶⁰ Given, B. (1994). Pg.23.

¹⁶¹ Middleton, R. and Lombard, A. (2011).

¹⁶² Silveman, D. (2016). Pg.67.

knives being supplied by Europeans.¹⁶³ Wampum had similarly become less important, with the influx of European beads and fake shell, wampum, which was once a high-value commodity and used as currency by some, is now more of a ceremonial offering often found in graves.¹⁶⁴ Beads have similarly become much more decadent featuring all ranges of tints and all are glass, these types of beads have become more widespread and can be found in even the most remote villages of the regions and not confined to the traditional trading tribes.

The fourth phase is the period spanning the last twenty years of the 17th century and marks a very significant time in native culture. Many traditional native goods and tools have been rendered completely obsolete in the northeast with metal replacing many household goods as well as cloth and textiles replacing furs entirely in native villages.¹⁶⁵ As well as many tools that were in use during everyday functions being replaced by European goods these goods had become much more decadent and lavish, many chosen for their appearance rather than their overall use. This is a huge change for many indigenous groups who, although appearance was important, often went for form over function. Pewter pipes had become commonplace among tribes and featured ornate animal figurines around the bowls, a trait not found in European provided goods meaning native people were changing the way they looked at goods and wished to indulge.¹⁶⁶ Although altering goods was not Naturalist uncommon as from the first phases kettles were reused for their metal rather than what they were ever intended for. However, this marks a change from reusing for practical reasons to altering purely for vanity. A French pewter chamber pot was found at a

¹⁶³ Witthoft, J. (1966). Pg.208.

¹⁶⁴ Ingersoll, E. (1883). *Wampum and Its History* In *The American* Vol. 17, No. 5 (May). Pg.468.

¹⁶⁵ Witthoft, J. (1966). Pg.207.

¹⁶⁶ Cusick, J. (2015) *Studies in Culture Contact: Interaction, Culture Change, and Archaeology*. Pg.95.

Susquehanna grave showing how European vanity goods had indeed influenced the cultures of native groups.¹⁶⁷ By this phase, beads had become so numerous that they have lost value and meaning. All the same colours and size as well as a dull appearance with no real care shown to them and the fact that they are no longer found in graves shows they had lost their worth due to oversaturation. Glass bottles are also frequently found in the region and appear to have replaced native pottery in that regard too.

The archaeological data from the region shows a very slow up taking of the use of European goods in the first fifty years or so of the trade followed by a rapid expansion in the uses of European goods with them seemingly making native alternatives redundant in the space of a few years. This could be to do with the Europeans push to share more advanced goods with native people, the indigenous population gaining more experience as time went on as to the full uses and potential of such goods or the fact that obtaining these goods simply became easier as time went on. Whichever is the case the fact that European goods took the northeast by storm is evident.

Wampum

When discussing the early years of the fur trade and trade between Europeans and Native Americans in general one of the most important trade commodities is wampum. The story and trade of wampum offers a great insight into the mindset of trading at the time as well as how traded items develop and evolve from their original purpose, including the subsequent impact trading wampum had on other trade commodities and social-political alliances.

¹⁶⁷ Lipman, A. (2015). *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast*. Pg.218.

Wampum had been around amongst the tribes of the north-east for many centuries before the arrival of Europeans.¹⁶⁸ Wampum came in many different sizes, lengths and colours. Wampum is crafted sections of shells strung together in lines and rows to form a similar shape to a wide banded belt however, its function was very different.¹⁶⁹ The history and change to wampum in the 17th century is very important when looking at the changes in native culture during the time. When wampum first started to be used by the people of the northeast is unknown, however by the time the Europeans arrived the use was well established, and its purpose well known amongst native groups.¹⁷⁰

The traditional appearance of wampum belts is one that does not follow uniformity it is more an expression of the artist and the tribe he came from and an indicator of the local resources that were available to them. According to archaeological data gathered from studying ancient native burial sites the earliest examples of wampum are found around the Long Island region of present-day New York.¹⁷¹ As for the origin of wampum, many groups have similar stories; the production of a wampum belt being part of a peace or trade deal, the most famous being the Hiawatha belt of the Iroquois which tells the story of the joining of the five Iroquois tribes¹⁷² and the pattern of the belt still features as the tribes' flag today. The true origin of wampum cannot be determined nor can its original maker, however, many groups have stories of wampum and its origin being associated with making peace or ending a conflict. As for its appearance, the types of shells used are narrowed down to three, the periwinkle and the whelk shells being the more

¹⁶⁸ Richter, D. (2009). *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*. Pg.45.

¹⁶⁹ Price, G. (1996) *Wampumpeag. The Impact of the 17th century wampum trade on native culture in southern New England and New Netherlands*. Pg.13.

¹⁷⁰ Williams, R. (1999). *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of law and peace, 1600-1800*. Pg. 52-55.

¹⁷¹ Price, G. (1996). Pg.10.

¹⁷² Johansen, B. (2000). *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee*. Pg.163.

common white beads and the quahog clamshell, which provides much more variety as the shell ranges from very dark blue to light blue, purple and even red. These early types of wampum consisted of both tubular and disk-shaped beads.

The types of shell and its shape also helps us date wampum. Due to its hard nature the quahog shell was very hard to make tubular with traditional tools and so disks were very common in these pre-contact belts, tubes were possible but usually found on the honoured and sacred belts. The more popular tube design of quahog shells appears more often after the introduction of metal tools which allowed these more intricate design.¹⁷³

The use of wampum during the period before European contact was as a precious and highly regarded ceremonial gift and exchange present. They were also being gifted to more inland groups, where they were often more revered due to the inability of these groups to make their own. This process and use really comes down to the traditional economics of bartering, also known as substance economics, which was used by many native groups at the time. For many groups inhabiting the eastern regions of North America at the time life was good and easy.¹⁷⁴ Many Europeans who first saw the continent noted how abundant resources were, this was down to not only the small population sizes in the region but also the substance-based lifestyle the traditional tribes lived. This can be seen in the traditional practices of hunting seasons; allowing populations to grow and replenish, not taking what is not needed, brush burning allowing for vegetation to grow back as well as the process of rotating lifestyles with the seasons.¹⁷⁵ Many groups who lived on the coast would move inland for winter and then move back

¹⁷³ Richter, D. (2009). Pg.46.

¹⁷⁴ Price, G. (1996) Pg.4.

¹⁷⁵ Kowtko, S. (2006). *Nature and the Environment in Pre-Columbian American Life*. Pg.4-5.

to the coast for the other seasons when resources were plentiful, and they were able to gather enough for winter the next year.¹⁷⁶ Due to many of these groups living in these areas for generations their local knowledge of the resource and life style were extensive and unrivalled. Many indigenous groups lived according to the belief that what they needed would be there when they needed it, and if it was not, or some years a harvest was not very good they would often request help from neighbouring groups. As all the groups had a similar lifestyle if one group had more than they needed they were usually willing to help; the common practice being that they would help with the intention that if they ever needed the same, the help would be reciprocated.¹⁷⁷ This also helped build tribal alliances and keep the social structure in the regions stable. To understand the traditional society and economical structure during the time of European contact it is important to understand wampum as well as the fur trade. When Europeans first see wampum being handed over for other goods such as furs during trading ceremonies, and other occasions, it is almost impossible for them to not see wampum as a form of money due to them perceiving it to hold no value compared furs and other goods. The relevance of wampum to the early fur trade and its effect on the indigenous people of the northeast is in how it changed during the 17th century and how its entire purpose changed as a trade item. Prior to European arrival wampum was considered a decorative and ceremonial item and not regarded as a form of money but a bartering item,¹⁷⁸ this can be backed up by the archaeological data.¹⁷⁹ Many pre- European sites contain wampum beads, however, never in large hordes or caches that we see of monetary items at other dig sites from

¹⁷⁶ Cumbler, J. (2005). *Northeast and Midwest United States: An Environmental History*. Pg.16-18.

¹⁷⁷ Price, G. (1996). Pg.8.

¹⁷⁸ Allen, D. (2012). *Rattlesnake Revolution; The Tea Party Strikes!* Pg.117.

¹⁷⁹ Shell, M. (2013). *Wampum and the Origins of American Money*.

around the world.¹⁸⁰ Also, around the northeast coast discarded shells and beads are often found in trash deposits from villages which suggests that wampum itself held no intrinsic value other than to make belts, if the beads themselves held monetary value then they would have been kept even when broken. Europeans assumed wampum was a form of money based upon how they saw it being used in the exchange of good.¹⁸¹ The goods often given by inland tribes in exchange for wampum was fur, an item the coastal groups did not have in abundance compared to the woodland groups. As Europeans desired fur so much and saw that the tribes with fur wanted wampum this made wampum highly sought after by these early European traders. As wampum held no monetary value to the groups who produced it they were most likely very surprised that Europeans were willing to trade highly prized items such as metal tools and weapons for wampum. A misunderstanding of the purpose of wampum gave it a value previously unthought of by either group. This created a trading triangle where the coastal tribes produced wampum, the Europeans would trade their good such as metal, textiles and food for the wampum belts and they would then trade the wampum with the inland woodland tribes for their furs.¹⁸² This is also where the misunderstanding makes each group think they are getting a good deal and a very well-functioning trade. Woodland groups had an abundance of furs but no wampum, coastal groups had a lot of wampum and could manufacture it at a good rate and had a strong desire for European goods. Europeans required fur and saw that inland tribes were very willing to trade it for wampum. It is easy to see how these early traders saw wampum as a money as they could see it holding no other value in return for a very valuable commodity.

¹⁸⁰ Snyderman, G. (2013). *The Functions of Wampum*. Pg. 469.

¹⁸¹ Herman, M. (1956). *Wampum as a Money in Northeastern North America*. Pg.21.

¹⁸² Price, G. (1996) Pg.27.

The first Europeans to enter this type of trade and include wampum in the fur trade were the Dutch operating in New York.¹⁸³ The Dutch would acquire wampum from the tribes around Long Island and the New York coasts as well as southern New England, these would then be sent up to Fort Nassau which was in Iroquois territory, the closest tribe was the Mohican and the Mohawk, which led to wampum then being distributed among the Iroquois Confederacy tribes. The English first acquire wampum in 1627, not from any native group but from the Dutch.¹⁸⁴ They didn't, however, use the wampum for the fur trade until 1635, prior to that they use it as another trade item to spread among the native groups further north who didn't already use or make wampum. By this point, wampum was becoming increasingly valuable to all sides involved, those who manufactured it held great power and those who wanted it would go to great lengths to obtain it. The idea of making it official currency was one that originated at this time, this would put the tribes who possessed it in a position of power, the Europeans, and particularly the English did not like the idea.¹⁸⁵ The incidents of 1636 and the factors that caused the Pequot war are well documented and, knowing the English motives at the time, appear to revolve around wampum.¹⁸⁶ The stated causes of declaring war by the British on the Pequot is the murder of Captain John Oldham by the Pequot but it was in fact members of the Narraganset tribe who were actually responsible for his murder. The blame fell on the Pequot even though they told the English they were not involved. The Pequot were very well known for their wampum production and held a very bountiful stretch of land along the Connecticut coast, this appears to have been the largest factor in the declaration of war, and it suited the English

¹⁸³ Richter, D. (2013). *Trade, Land, Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America*. Pg.100.

¹⁸⁴ Fenton, W. (1971). *The New York State Collection: The Case for the Integrity of Cultural Treasures*.

¹⁸⁵ Price, G. (1996).

¹⁸⁶ Cave, A. (1996). *The Pequot War*. Pg.51.

to blame the Pequot so that they had an excuse to declare war on them.¹⁸⁷ By this time making wampum an official currency had been discussed by both the English and the Dutch; it was easily transported and made, European coins were in shortage, and one of the most enticing factors was that Europeans had found wampum a prime offering for peace negotiations, using it for example, in exchange for the release of hostages.¹⁸⁸ For Europeans a monetary object that could be gained from natives by brute force was ideal.¹⁸⁹ The Pequot war ended in their complete destruction as a recognised tribe, whole communities were raised to the ground and slaughtered.

By 1637 wampum became an official currency of the region, this could be for a variety of reasons. The desire for wampum by all groups and its value as a trade item is obviously a prime factor however there are others; many Europeans, both Dutch and English, had a shortage of coin money and had no real way of minting it without it being counterfeit, this led to many items being used as a form of money such as wampum and maize.¹⁹⁰ Europeans had attempted to manufacture their own wampum in these early years which had been strongly rejected as a trade item by native people who saw the quality as inferior to their own, this led to native wampum holding a value as it could not easily be replicated; meaning it would hold its value and be standardised.¹⁹¹ However, this is not to say that Native manufacturers were not guilty of passing off less than perfect wampum as the genuine thing.¹⁹² Making wampum official currency also meant that Europeans could adjust the value of wampum based on the price of furs and the fluctuation in

¹⁸⁷ Cave, A. (1996). Pg.107.

¹⁸⁸ Cave, A. (1996). Pg.109.

¹⁸⁹ Tweedy, A. (1998). From Beads to Bounty: how wampum Became America's First Currency-And Lost Its Power.

¹⁹⁰ Lawson, R. (2013). Encyclopaedia of American Indian Issues Today. Pg.417.

¹⁹¹ Price, G. (1996). Pg.50.

¹⁹² Murry, D. (2000). Indian Giving: Economics of Power in Indian-white Exchanges. Pg.122.

the availability of commodities giving them control of the market, which was how business was done back in Europe. The making of wampum as an official currency meant that it had to be standardised and given a typical monetary value, this value would fluctuate over the years, however at conception, it stood at 8 white beads were equal to one Dutch Stiver with 4 of the darker beads being equal to the same value. On the English side, 6 white beads were equal to one penny and 3 of the darker beads were equal to one penny.¹⁹³ Both the Dutch and the English agreed that the darker quahog shells were worth more due to the more skilled craftsmanship it takes to produce the beads. Often these beads were then measured in fathoms, based on how many shells could fit on a fathom of rope. By the 1650's wampum had started to decline in value and use, this was mainly due to the influx of European gold and silver as well as some colonies such as Massachusetts starting to mint their own coins.¹⁹⁴ Although this use of wampum in terms of the fur trade was short lived the effects of the trade did affect the indigenous people in the area.

The effects of the wampum trade in the fur trade are hard to determine; during these fifty years or so there were great changes in general to the region; contact with Europeans and their habitation of the region caused a great deal of change. Isolating which were caused by wampum becomes very difficult. The production rate of wampum increased as demand grew massively, this can be seen by the amounts of wampum seen in the archaeological records, particularly stockpiles. One might think that this would lessen its spiritual meanings and use, however even after the 1600's and into the present day, wampum is still seen and used for spiritual purposes.¹⁹⁵ This could be attributed to the Native held idea that the

¹⁹³ Molly, A. Wampum. Pg.27.

¹⁹⁴ Price, G. (1996). Pg.71.

¹⁹⁵ Akin, M. Akin, K. and Bard, J. (2016). Numismatic Archaeology of north America: A Field Guide. Pg. 43.

wampum used for trade was just that, a trade item, but that used in ceremony was crafted and cared for much more. One of the biggest changes would be the political powers in the region, wampum manufacturing tribes gained great wealth and power in the region, however, because of this Europeans dealt with them very harshly and often decimated entire tribes, some tribes like the Pequot were never allowed to reform and their tribal identity was lost due to European greed. One of the biggest learning factors for native people during these early years of the wampum for fur trade was that Europeans, particularly the British, were ruthless in pursuing their aims, be it via manipulations, treaties, or outright violence they eventually gained what they wanted.

Alcohol

Many of the goods that the indigenous people received as part of the fur trade made their lives easier in the sense that they were better than those they replaced or offered an easier option than them obtaining them themselves. Alcohol, on the other hand, is almost unique as a trade item. Alcoholic beverages do not appear to exist in indigenous societies of the northeast.¹⁹⁶ Initially, alcohol was offered to native people as part of a trade deal or negotiation in the European tradition of a toast and never offered as a trade item.¹⁹⁷ By the 1650's both France and England had begun producing liquor from distilled West Indian sugar; France looking to introduce brandy and England rum to the world trade market. By this time the fur trade was well underway, and both had native allies they acquired their furs from, the need to keep supplying these allies with the newest goods and the ones they wanted was paramount to keep them trading. There is no suggestion that the

¹⁹⁶ Blocker, J, Fahey, D and Tyrrell, I. (2003). *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia, Volume 1*. Pg.53.

¹⁹⁷ Mancall, P. (2003). *Alcohol and the Fur Trade in New France and English America, 1600-1800* In Jankowiak, W. *Drugs, Labor, and Colonial Expansion*. Pg.92.

introduction of alcohol to the native people of North America to get them addicted was deliberate but the economic benefit for them of trading a product they produced for the furs they required made for a substantial profit. The reason that alcohol became such a popular trade item was that the demand for alcohol appeared to remain consistent and never really fluctuated when compared to other goods with which the market could become over saturated.¹⁹⁸ Alcohol became popular with young male hunters; they were often willing to trade a good amount of fur in exchange for alcohol, however, drinking of alcohol was considered troublesome by some.¹⁹⁹ In the late 1600's native leaders complained to French and English officials about the supplying of drink to young native people and some traders began to fear the aggressive behaviour of some young indigenous men after they had been drinking. In 1678 the French held a meeting dubbed the Brandy Parliament which was to discuss a ban on the trade of alcohol. One of the arguments put forward for banning the trade was that it would cause losses to the fur trade and therefore make French citizens pursue a more agriculturally based living which would be better for the longevity of the colony. Robert Caviller told the meeting that brandy was supplied to 20 thousand natives a year and in return, they were gaining 80 thousand beaver skins, a profit margin well above the average for the colony,²⁰⁰ he went on to say that "The health of the colony depended on it".²⁰¹ The following year the French king declared that the trade of alcohol should continue thus showing how important the trade of alcohol to natives was to the colonies' income.

¹⁹⁸ Trentmann, F. (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*. Pg.119.

¹⁹⁹ Walfram, J. (2006). *Aboriginal Health in Canada: Historical, Cultural, and Epidemiological Perspectives*. Pg.170.

²⁰⁰ Carlos, A. and Lewis, F. *The Economic History of the Fur Trade: 1670 to 1870*. Url: <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-the-fur-trade-1670-to-1870/>

²⁰¹ Mancall, P. (2003). Pp.96.

The English took a different approach to the trade of alcohol with many of their colonies passing laws to ban the trade to non-English people. Many officials saw it as a “drug food” with traders relying on getting natives addicted to the substance in an attempt to make more profit.²⁰² Although addiction among native people cannot be said to be the exact intent of the sale as this is not known it is clear however that this was an unforeseen outcome. The French used it as a lure to encourage trade, and even though the English banned the trade much continued as the profits of continuing to trade were too good to pass up.

For the indigenous people, although concern was expressed by some of their leaders in the 17th century, it was considered a high commodity. Also, it is interesting to note that due to its reality altering properties it was seen by many as a spiritual item, similar to a traditional hallucinogenic that was smoked, and alcohol was incorporated into some religious ceremonies.²⁰³

Alcohol soon did become a "drug food" to some, it was used as an incentive to trade, but to many young native men, it became an addiction that they were willing to collect and trade furs to supplement.

Repurposing goods

The most interesting aspect of the types of goods indigenous people acquired was the way their intended use was first ignored, and then later on, we see evidence of them using the goods obtained for their intended purpose, showing the creeping influence the Europeans were having.²⁰⁴ The most typical example of this was the copper kettle. Copper kettles were common trade items given by Europeans during the 17th century and were carried in abundance. When indigenous people

²⁰² Mancall, P. (2003). Pg.89-90.

²⁰³ Ray, A. (2005). Pg.29.

²⁰⁴ Cipolla, C. (2017). *Foreign Objects: Rethinking Indigenous Consumption in American Archaeology*. Pg.165.

first acquired these kettles, they valued them not for their use to carry and boil water but for the copper they were made of. We see very often in the native culture that copper and other 'red' metals are prized for their looks and used as jewellery, as well as statues or as a sign of the status of a tribe. Because of this, many indigenous people saw the use of copper to make such a utilitarian object as a kettle as a waste and instead they cut the kettles into small pieces. These copper fragments were then utilised for the things mentioned above as well as being a sign of status, showing someone as being close to Europeans and a successful trader in the community. As the trade progresses and we move through the 17th century, we start to see these kettles appearing in their original state and very rarely cut up.²⁰⁵ This could be for many reasons, one being that indigenous people have seen Europeans using these kettles more for their intended purpose and therefore they are held with much less regard. Another reason being; that the market had become oversaturated with copper and kettles making the metal much less desired as it could be acquired at any time. The third reason being that the supply was so consistent they saw them as much more disposable and better than their pots which could easily break and were hard to repair.

Firearms

The acquisition of firearms was one of the main aims for many native groups particularly in the hostile north-east and firearms were also one item that had the biggest effect on native life. As covered in chapter three, guns were an item Europeans were very reluctant to trade during the first twenty years of the 17th century; the fear that guns were the only thing that made them militarily superior

²⁰⁵ Ehrhardt, K. (2005).

was one of the main things that held the trade back.²⁰⁶ By the time the French and English realised that the Dutch had been trading guns with natives for years, they also realised that to gain the best deals on furs they too would have to start trading such items. The indigenous people similarly tried to use the Dutch trade as leverage, some insisting that if guns were not offered by the French or English then they would simply take their supplies to the Dutch.²⁰⁷ Guns were an interesting acquisition at the time for native people because really, they were not of much benefit to them for their intended purpose. Guns replaced the bow and arrow for the north-eastern tribes as the projectile weapon of choice. As previously mentioned Europeans had used guns against natives early on in their engagements to what appeared to be to a devastating effect; in the cases of Champlain defeating a much larger army with only three guns, which drove home the idea to native leaders that they needed guns. In fact, the guns of the 1600's were much more of a psychological weapon than a real physical threat. The 17th-century flintlock musket was the weapon of choice for many European armies of the time with the soldiers being well drilled and trained in their use; the trained English and French soldier could fire two to three shots a minute.²⁰⁸ However, this was a slow fire rate when compared to the native bow. Similarly, the flintlock mechanism often failed when wet or mistreated and when repeated shots were being fired in succession the barrel and chamber often became sodden with powder and debris making the ball harder to ram down and often misfire.²⁰⁹ The native bow and arrow, on the other hand, could function in all weather, except high winds, and needed low to no maintenance. The ammunition that was required for

²⁰⁶ Carter, G. (2012). *Guns in American Society: An Encyclopaedia of History, Politics, Culture, and the Law, 2nd Edition (3 volumes)*. Pg.633.

²⁰⁷ Given, B. (1994). Pg.63.

²⁰⁸ Moller, G. (2011). *American Military Shoulder Arms, Volume I*. Pg.23.

²⁰⁹ Pauly, R. (2004). *Firearms: The Life Story of a Technology*. Pg.50-51.

guns was a similar downfall, lead balls, ramrods and gunpowder were all only acquirable from Europeans and at very high prices, the material for arrows on the other hand, grew on trees and came out of the ground. Accuracy was another issue for early flintlocks, European army formations neutralised this issue due to the sheer number of shots being fired however in a one on one encounter they were inaccurate. In some duelling cases of ten paces apart it was not uncommon for the shots to miss entirely.²¹⁰ Europeans also supplied hunting rifles to natives, these were rifled and with tighter barrels which required a much smaller grain of gunpowder resulting in a more powerful and accurate shot, however, a much longer load time made them redundant in a war setting. The real question for the trade of guns then is; why would native people want guns so badly when, really, they had some major flaws? The 17th-century musket featured a very large combustion, fire from the barrel as well as clouds of black smoke when shot, this to people who had not experienced such a sight before, was utterly terrifying. This combined with the fact that when a ball hit its' target, it resulted in massive blunt trauma splitting bone and tearing flesh in a gruesome manner. This led to guns having an enormous psychological effect on the battlefield resulting in many native groups retreating or laying down their arms after few shots being fired,²¹¹ which was beneficial for the slow firing gunman. As well as their effect on the battlefield a gun was a status weapon, if a person could acquire one then they must be important to the Europeans which meant a lot in a tribal setting.²¹²

With guns being more available at the turn of the mid-17th century we start to see how this new trade item and weapon began to affect native culture. At first, we know it gave the Europeans the security blanket they needed on the new

²¹⁰ Given, B. (1994). Pg.51.

²¹¹ Silverman, D. (2016). Pg.23.

²¹² Silverman, D. (2016) Pg.11.

continent, Englishman John Smith stated that “If it had not pleased God to have put a terrour in the Savage’s hearts, we had all perished by those vild and cruell Pagans, being in that weake estate as we were”.²¹³ When referring to the use of guns as well as held belief that it was god that saved the English rather than Native provided food. Similarly, this worked for indigenous groups too; the ones with the most guns often were the most powerful in the region. The Iroquoian Confederacy used Dutch guns to great effect to conquer and in some cases eradicate their tribal rivals. The Huron on the other hand similarly acquired guns and used them to halt the Iroquoian advance for a short time. However, this was too little too late for them. The introduction of guns and European assistance also changed the way in which natives conducted a war on each another. Europeans operated in the form of total war, meaning their aim was to conquer their enemy,²¹⁴ take their land and often kill large numbers of their army and population. Native society often operated in a more back and forth manner, meaning one group attacks a village and then the other would counter with an attack of their own. Rarely was the aim to wipe out a group entirely it was more a settling of vendettas. Guns and the European mentality made total war a much more viable option, and many new battles for land resulted in making the killing of entire groups much easier due to the acquisition of guns.

Hunting

It was not only goods that were exchanged during the early fur trade, ideologies and ways of life similarly changed. Initially, the Europeans acquired the furs that indigenous populations had on hand or that they gained each winter, during the early parts of the 17th century these numbers were enough to quench the

²¹³ Arber, E (ed.). (1980). *Capt. John Smith. Works. 1608-1631.* Pg.122.

²¹⁴ Diamond, J. (2017). *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies.* Pg.56.

European thirst for furs, however as the years moved on native groups found it harder and harder to keep up with European demand. At the time Europe manufactured a good portion of its goods, and few were naturally occurring objects, therefore when demand increased so did production. Indigenous people at the time, however, gained most of their goods from nature and relied on good harvests. As a result, the number of products available fluctuated with good and bad seasons of each commodity; this system soon came into conflict with the European demand.²¹⁵ Fur demand spiked dramatically after 1620 and kept on rising. Many native groups, although not heavily reliant on European goods until the later parts of the 17th century had seen the benefits of European goods and wished to obtain them in greater numbers. European cloth had replaced many fur garments and manufactured blankets had made harsh winters much more bearable. European dried food supplies had put less strain on harvests and meant one bad crop season did not mean life or death. Metal tools and utensils had made manual work far easier and the acquiring of guns had caused a small arms race between tribes which led to the tribe that had the most arms being the most powerful.²¹⁶ What this meant for native trappers and hunters is that they could not afford to have a bad harvest, a bad harvest had been accepted before but no longer was now; this was an unusual change in indigenous society. It is evident that because of this change hunting soon became industrialised.

Prior to the coming of Europeans, indigenous people had made “no great havoc” among the beaver according to Father Charlevoix and conclude that native “hunting had both its season and ceremonial fix”.²¹⁷ The demand for furs to trade

²¹⁵ Cornelius, J. (1976). *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*.

²¹⁶ Miller, C. and Hamell, G. (1986). *A New Perspective on Indian-White Relations: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade*. In *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 73, No. 2. Sep. Pg.315.

²¹⁷ Charlevoix, F. X. (1923). *Journal of a Voyage vol. 1 of 2*. Edited and Translated by Kellogg, L. Pg.145.

forced hunters to take up the job full-time and throughout the whole of the year. For many tribes, such as the Cree, hunting of fur was a wintertime activity when the animal furs were at their thickest and best.²¹⁸ With the rising demand hunting soon became a summer task which resulted in much thinner furs being acquired as well as ones in a poorer condition. This demand forced more young animals to be killed that in the past would have been spared until they reached adulthood, in beavers the young have a more mottled coat and don't gain strong guard hairs until puberty, this meant smaller furs were acquired as well as ones of questionable quality.²¹⁹ The killing of young animals also meant that the breeding populations were stricken; the loss of the younger beaver population in the St Lawrence valley caused an almost region-wide extinction of the beaver.²²⁰ The over killing of beavers and other fur-bearing animals in one region caused groups to move and expand to new areas to find furs which often caused conflicts. Even when a new suitable region was found many discovered that the groups already in the area had resulted in a similar decline in the species as they had in their area.²²¹ By this point in the trade native groups had become quite reliant on the items brought in by the fur trade and the loss of animal populations meant a decline in trade and a loss in their way of life.

The topic of animal depopulation in the area is one that often contradicts the traditionally held belief or myth among many non-indigenous people; that native people were a 'guardian' for the animals and led a very naturalistic life. Although it is true that many native groups held close spiritual beliefs associated with animals and did try to keep population numbers up in their hunting grounds, this was in

²¹⁸ Carloss, A and Lewis, F. (2011). Pg.164.

²¹⁹ Martin, C. (1982). *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade*. Pg.9.

²²⁰ Cumbler, J. and Stroll, M. (2005). *Northeast and Midwest United States: An Environmental History*. Pg.39.

²²¹ Martin, C. (1982). Pg.83.

fact done as a form of self-preservation.²²² The reason for under hunting was so that the animal population would survive in such numbers that it allowed them to continue to hunt them rather than out of respect for the spirit of the animal. Many native groups in the northeast believed in reincarnation and over killing was not a concern.²²³ The coming of Europeans and their demands combined with the belief in reincarnation and denial of overhunting as well as the introduction of guns making killing on a large scale much more possible combined to cause one of the most significant changes to the ecosystem of the northeast.

Religion

It was not only the native groups that relied heavily on the trade, French and other European traders had invested heavily in the trade and placed a lot of their hopes for a good harvest in their native allies. In the years following 1630 a good shipment of furs could fetch around 300,000 livres, however when times were hard and the harvest less plentiful or of poor quality, a mere 50,000 livres could be gained back in France.²²⁴ The main problem that the French had with this was that before 1650 the native people they traded with did not respond to supply and demand the same way as the Europeans did.²²⁵ If anything, making indigenous people reliant on European goods and invested in the trading of furs was a necessity for the Europeans to have a successful business.

The way natives viewed fur-bearing animals and the way trade was conducted was not the only ideology that changed; the coming of Europeans and the setting up of the fur trade brought very different religious views into contact with one another. The largest known documentation of the spread of Christianity has come

²²² Martin, C. (1982). Pg.39.

²²³ Krech III, S. (Ed.) (2008). *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Keepers of the Game*. Pg.93.

²²⁴ Innis, H. (1999). Pg.101.

²²⁵ Axtell, J. (1992). *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America*. Pg.8.

from the documents left behind by the French Jesuit missionaries in their attempts to save the souls of the native people of Canada. Many indigenous belief systems in the 1600's were based on a polytheistic system based on the primary god being the earth.²²⁶ Similarly, spirits were associated with animals, although not gods directly they were sent by the gods. Due to many different religions existing in the region the idea of others having different beliefs was common among native people however none had come across a monotheistic religion such as Christianity where one god is all powerful.²²⁷ The Jesuit missionaries were some of the first Frenchmen to start to attempt to colonise the new lands and often were the first contact between Europeans and more far-flung native towns and villages. The success of such missionaries' efforts was both positive and negative from both perspectives; among some groups, the missionaries found a warm welcome and acceptance as well as open ears to their teachings.²²⁸ Other groups were openly hostile to the idea of a new god and a change in ideas, viewing it as a trick of the Europeans or even a test of their faith from a trickster god from their religion.²²⁹ The conversion from native religions to Christianity was one of the main aims of all European explorers, traders, kings and politicians wherever in the world they explored.²³⁰ Some religious missionaries say it is with the hope of saving lost souls and improving their lives, others it is to make them more European and raise them from 'savagery', making them better partners.²³¹ The other outcome of this conversion of indigenous people from their native religions to Christianity was; it made them more reliant on Europeans themselves to show

²²⁶ Griffiths, N. and Cervantes, F. (1999). *Spiritual Encounters: Interactions Between Christianity and Native Religions in Colonial America*. Pg.49.

²²⁷ Riley, M. *"All Souls Travel on Foot": Religious Conversion Among the Huron*. Pg.34.

²²⁸ Thwaites, R. (1853-1901). *Vol. I*. Pg.10.

²²⁹ Thwaites, R. (1853-1901). *Vol I*. Pg.69-71.

²³⁰ Insoll, T. (2011). *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion*. Pg.1040.

²³¹ Thwaites, R. (1853-1901). *Vol III*. Pg.133-136.

them the way and change the way they live to a more approved way of living. With this in mind, the fur trade encouraged more missionaries to go deeper into native life than almost any other group had gone in the history of the region.

The Jesuit missionaries first came to Canada in 1611 under authorisation of the French king to set up a missionary and spread the word of Christ to the local Huron people. The French were unwilling most of the time to leave the major towns they had set up and lacked the population and incentive to expand much further. As a result of this blessing from their homeland, the Jesuits positioned many of their people among the Huron. At first their main aim was to learn the native languages so that they could serve the indigenous people better.²³² They were at first welcomed with scepticism by the Huron, but they soon saw that the Jesuits were quite different from the rest of the Europeans. Many Jesuits did not wish to alter the culture or society in any way more than it took to make them Christians and follow the teachings of Jesus. For example, Father Jan de Brebeuf learned the Huron language and documented much of his work in the Bear language, also writing a French to Huron dictionary and even translating a Christmas carol into Huron for the children to sing. This could be considered a way of embracing native culture or, it could be simply a method of coercion or a way of making Christianity more accessible. For the Jesuit missionaries, the task at hand was varied and met with variable levels of success. The Huron people appeared to both welcome and shun the Jesuits; some who were more inclined to the idea of Christianity saw similarities in the teachings and stories of Jesus and spiritual beings from their religions, some even claiming that Jesus was merely another name or form that their gods had undertaken when appearing to the Europeans,²³³

²³² Riendeau, R. (2007). *A Brief History of Canada*. Pg.40.

²³³ Thwaites, R. (1896-1901). *Vol III*. Pg.133.

Again Brebeuf's accounts show this when he states "They have recourse to the sky in almost all their necessities and respect the great bodies in it above all creatures, and remark in it, in particular, something divine"²³⁴ On the other hand, many Huron were perfectly happy with their own spiritual identity and saw no need to convert to the new European religion; this sentiment was backed up by the tribal shaman who spread the word that in fact, the Jesuits were simply sent to test their devotion to their spirits.²³⁵

The coming of diseases also hindered many missionary's efforts. Due to the nature of the infections that the Europeans spread it often meant that when they came into contact with the natives, it resulted in them becoming ill. Jesuits very often offered to help try and heal the sick or at least aid them in their path to heaven. Often in traditional beliefs, the sick person is surrounded by family and spiritual members who try different medicines and chants to help the person. The missionaries on the other hand often shut the infected person away; for two reasons, one it helped them focus on the person who was sick and secondly, they often knew how the infection spread so treating them away from the tribe was a form of limiting the spread of infection. From these stories, we can see that the job of the missionaries in trying to convert the Huron was a difficult one, although in some cases they were successful. One of the key ways that the Jesuits could get on the same level of thinking as the native people was through the stories of the Virgin Mary. As many indigenous groups held the role of the mother as the matriarch of the family the idea of the mother of god was one that struck a chord with them.²³⁶

²³⁴ Jenness, D. (1977). *The Indians of Canada*. Pg.171.

²³⁵ Riley, M. Pg.38.

²³⁶ Riley, M. Pg.37.

Louis XIV, the king of France, similarly aided the conversion of natives where Jesuits were struggling by the issuing of a royal decree which made any native who converted to Christianity, a full-fledged French citizen with all the same rights and privileges offered to them.²³⁷ This was the biggest incentive for native traders to convert and was also seen as a way of drawing the fur trade away from English and Dutch outposts as well as achieving the political goal of turning the native people away from their so-called savage beliefs.

One of the biggest aides in the conversion from native religions among all tribes, not just the Huron was the fur trade. Many of the Huron who chose to convert to Christianity were those who travelled and traded with Europeans the most frequently. Those who were taking part in the fur trade often opted to convert out of economic gain rather than anything to do with spiritual reasons.²³⁸ The native traders often saw that those who had converted to Christianity received much better treatment at European trading posts than those who kept to their traditional beliefs; better prices for their furs as well as lower prices on European goods and better access to newer goods from the old world. As well as prospering in trade by converting, by the 1630's many Huron saw converting as an only option, smallpox had ravished the region and their population was reduced to half due to this and warfare.²³⁹ Many blamed the missionaries for the disease. The Huron understanding of the spread of disease is explained in some parts by the Jesuit Missionaries and they narrow the causes down to three things, a natural cause, an unfulfilled desire and witchcraft. The natural causes of disease could be stopped by dieting, sweating or herbal remedies. If these did not work then it must be an

²³⁷ Servaes, A. (2015). *Franco-American Identity, Community, and La Guianée*. Pg.23.

²³⁸ Ray, A. (2005).

²³⁹ Goddard, P. (1998). *Converting the 'Savage': Jesuit and Montagnais in Seventeenth-Century New France*. Pg.224.

unfulfilled desire, it was the job of the shaman to figure out what the desire was and fulfil it, modern studies of this suggest it is like an advanced form of Psychotherapy.²⁴⁰ The final possible cause to the Huron was witchcraft usually caused by jealousy, to cure the disease the witch must be confronted and made to confess they are the cause.²⁴¹ The reason the Jesuits and indeed many Europeans were blamed was due to the native perception that they did not suffer from the ailments that were affecting the native populations. By this point and due to a decline in numbers they had become more and more reliant on French goods and could not afford to expel them or distance themselves from France. Similarly, around 1640 the St Lawrence Valley was hit by a famine due to crop failure and drought. This meant that now natives were even more reliant on French food goods and one of the easiest ways to get these was to convert to Christianity and received special treatment over other groups who refused to convert; the ones who converted were given priority in the queue in supply drops.²⁴² This caused a massive rift in the Huron community; some wished to distance themselves from France and refused to convert or take part in trade, the others saw the only route to survival was via the French. The problem for the Huron who did not participate in the trade was that they had no idea how reliant on European goods they had become. With a broken community and a significant drop in numbers, they became vulnerable to attacks from other groups resulting in their near destruction at the hands of the Iroquois by the mid-way point of the 17th century²⁴³.

The biggest and most documented example of the destructive nature of religion brought on by the fur trade is the stories of the Huron and the Jesuit missionaries,

²⁴⁰ Wallace, A. (2010). Pg.80.

²⁴¹ Trigger, B. (1986). Pg.245.

²⁴² Thwaites, R. (1853-1901). Vol. XIV. Pg.216.

²⁴³ Servaes, A. (2015).

and this is because the Jesuits kept information on their experience. The Jesuits are prominent in the 1600's not only due to their documentation of events but to their genuine wish to save native peoples souls. The English on the other hand used religion as more of a blunt weapon against indigenous people; instead of using god to save their souls it was used more as a way of justifying harsh treatment. The main reason for this discrepancy in treatment is that the English in the 17th century were protestant and a significant number of those were puritan in belief. Although some English priests did aim to spread the faith among natives, such as John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, they were few and far between.²⁴⁴ A much more common sentiment among the English clergy was that the natives were natural sinners, as stated by Massachusetts most well-known minister John Cotton that natives were "children of Satan who should be blasted in all their green groves and arbours".²⁴⁵ This treatment can be reflected in the conversion rate among indigenous people as by 1675 there were only 13 "praying" villages known to have converted to Christianity even after a century of English presence in the region.²⁴⁶ While the French and Spanish were relatively successful in the conversion of natives to Christianity, the English were struggling, and many researchers such as Axtell point to the difference in religions, lack of incentive provided by the English as well as the fact it was nearly impossible for native people to follow the codes set out by the English to be a true Christian mostly due to the fact that all breakings of the rules came with a monetary charge.²⁴⁷ Whereas the French used the fur traded as a proverbial carrot to conversion the English used it as no such thing; the French Catholic Jesuits saw all souls as

²⁴⁴ Delâge, D. (2011). Pg.292.

²⁴⁵ Conlin, J. (2013). *The American Past: A Survey of American History, Volume I: To 1877*. Pg.81.

²⁴⁶ Mair, E. (2015). *The Praying Indians of King Philip's War*.

²⁴⁷ Tetek, R. (2010). Pg.51.

worth saving and as being able to be saved. The English did not wish to convert natives and even those who did convert they thought were still most likely going to hell for being a 'savage'.²⁴⁸ This, unsurprisingly, was considered a minimal incentive to the natives who were going to hell either way.

From the above evidence, we can see religion was both a tool to aid the fur trade and a hindrance in some instances. Although the conversion rate was slow during the 17th-century religious expeditions into native land affected native life either way. It brought relationships between Europeans and indigenous groups closer together and much more able to see eye to eye in some regards, it also caused significant rifts in native groups, with those wishing to adhere to the old religions being alienated and ostracised by their now Christian neighbours. Many indigenous groups relied strongly on a bond among tribal members and the spiritual belief being one of the strongest contributors to this relationship, breaking this caused many groups to become much weaker and susceptible to infiltration as seen by the Huron and their eventual demise. It was not only the fur trade that helped religion though as it also worked the other way, fur trappers and traders often explored much further afield and into new territories which opened up avenues for religion to spread further and to new groups. Missionaries often followed in the footsteps of the traders to new groups and similarly learnt of new tribal groups whom they could spread their religion too. With reference to the 'golden age' religion is a staple of European culture during the period, it is easy to see how some early scholars and historians on the topic saw the spread and embrace of Christianity as a massive leap forward for native culture.

Disease

²⁴⁸ Delâge, D. (2011). Pg.166.

One of the most devastating events to hit native society and cause the largest level of change brought by the fur trade was brought by accident to the indigenous people. The spread of infectious diseases from Europeans is one of the key causes of population decline among all native groups in the 17th century with the effects of such diseases being well researched and contributing to the decline of the indigenous population in a much higher proportion than warfare and famine combined.²⁴⁹ Diseases often referred to as old world diseases were introduced on small scales as soon as the first European ships made it to the north-eastern coast in the 1500's, however, the first European ships were only interested in fishing in the area and due to the nature of fishing, the diseases were not spread much further inland. Once Europeans had set up more permanent bases we see the range of spread of the diseases becoming much larger with the boom in trading European goods bringing more tribes into contact with the diseases.²⁵⁰ Old world diseases such as smallpox, measles, yellow fever, pneumonia, influenza, typhoid, whooping cough, scarlet fever, and mumps were all introduced onto the continent with the arrival of European ships. Due to the indigenous way of life refraining from built-up centres of civilisation and the lack of domesticated animals this led to them being relatively disease free with death being mainly caused by famine, warfare, nutritional deficiency infections and some contagious diseases.²⁵¹ This is their downfall, as lack of immunity and adjusting to a more European way of life, as well as the trading in furs leading to closer contact, meant that these diseases, decimated local populations.

Before the 17th century, we see a small number of deaths associated with diseases in the north-eastern portion of the continent, although Jacques Cattier

²⁴⁹ Cook, N. (1998). *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650*. Pg.170-171.

²⁵⁰ Robertson, R. (2001). *Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian*. Pg.7.

²⁵¹ Trigger, B. (1988).

mentions high numbers of members of an Iroquoian village dying in 1535 from an unknown cause it is unlikely that this was an “old world” disease.²⁵² At the beginning of the 1600's, we start to see small numbers of these epidemics taking place although not directly linked to these “old world” diseases; in 1611 members of an Algonquin tribe suffered from fever and later in 1623 were hit by famine and diseases. At the same time smallpox had struck the native population of New England and caused substantial deaths among the tribes of that region.²⁵³ 1634 saw the first case of a European disease hit local groups, measles or another form of infant illness hit the Huron infecting all villages causing a rise in child mortality, at a similar time the Mohawk tribes of the area contracted smallpox which spread quickly through their settlements. Just two years after the measles epidemic the Huron were struck by influenza-like disease followed by another unknown ailment that is thought to have killed many Susquahanna as well as other tribes of upper New York State.²⁵⁴ The 1630's ended with a lethal bout of influenza which affected every tribe in the region causing massive damage to their population sizes. The French claimed this was brought to the area by the Algonquins after a trading trip to another tribe. By the later part of the 1640's the Iroquoian groups had contracted the same disease and suffered a similar fate. This bout of diseases appears to be the first one to hit the region of the St Lawrence Valley and took a heavy toll on its inheritance; the Huron had dropped to an estimated 50% of their original numbers.²⁵⁵ The reason these diseases were so deadly to many native people was not only the fact that they had no immunity as Europeans similarly very rarely had a natural immunity to them, but it was also the fact that once the

²⁵² Trigger, B. (1988). Pg.499.

²⁵³ Thornton, R. (1987). *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492*. Pg.71.

²⁵⁴ Cook, N. (1998). Pg.196.

²⁵⁵ Trigger, B. (1988). Pg.98.

host died the disease did not. Many of the diseases lived on in blankets and clothes, items that were often taken from the dead and reused or traded, which is why we see a pattern of the same or similar diseases coming back year after year or at intervals.²⁵⁶ This very nature of the disease made it deadly to the groups that operated in the fur trade. As the nature of these diseases were not understood by native people the goods and blankets that once belonged to a sick member of the tribe would be reused or even traded away, the idea that the germs of the illness could still be living within the item of clothing was unknown.

It was not only those infected that the disease affected, the loss of the young and infants to diseases such as measles and pox meant a loss in entire new generations of individual villages. Similarly, mothers who became sick could not care for their young resulting in a similar level of loss. Due to the trade being participated in by the younger males this meant they were the most affected by diseases, leading to these tribes being unable to hunt for food as much or defend themselves from others. The old are similarly at the highest risks along with infants. In many native groups, the rights of passage and spirituality of a tribe are carried on and passed down from its oldest generation, with many senior members of tribes becoming ill some groups even lost their spiritual identity, one which could never be gained back. According to some estimates, the population of New England declined by 90% from the first contact to the 1700's.²⁵⁷ The spread of diseases is one of the largest tragedies to hit the region and caused the most significant loss of life seen in the northeast in history, in 100 years many populations had been decimated to levels well below 50% of their original numbers. Many areas Europeans had noted as being affected before they had

²⁵⁶ Cook, N. (1998). Pg.197.

²⁵⁷ Thornton, R. (1987). Pg.64.

had any contact with them, Dutch explorers learnt of Mohawk villages that had been abandoned years before their exploration of the region due to smallpox-like diseases.²⁵⁸ Stories of such abandoned villages can be found throughout the history of the area as well as among many of the plains regions and southern tribes. A few theories exist as to how this would happen with the most likely being that those who had been in contact with Europeans had lived or passed through these villages spreading the disease without knowing. Another similar theory is that trade goods such as blankets or clothes had been infected and traded down the line. Although this method was used by later Americans to reduce native populations it is doubtful that during the 17th century this was deliberate.²⁵⁹

The decline in population was obviously devastating for the natives themselves and it was similarly so for the Europeans. The trade happy Dutch and French found their trade partners being whipped out at an alarming rate with whole tribes, like the Huron, being destroyed by diseases and warfare. Likewise, this hit their supply of furs; with the working population dying they had to move to new areas to find hunters and trappers this, in turn, resulted in the spread of the disease to other tribes too. These new diseases also caused unrest and distrust in Europeans. Missionaries and traders were persecuted by native tribes who saw that these new diseases only came to them once they let Europeans in, Jesuit missionaries were known as black coats and thought by some to be the bringers of the disease.²⁶⁰ One account, from a missionary, mentions how the resurrection of a cross in a Seneca village coincided with a full-blown infection as well as a crop fail which resulted in the inhabitants, with some prompting from the local

²⁵⁸ De Lamberville, J. (1996). *Of the Mission of Sainte Marie Among the Lower Iroquois and the mission Gandaouague or of Saint Pierre, in the Country of Agnie*. In Snow, D. *In Mohawk Country: Early Narratives about a Native People*. Pg.176.

²⁵⁹ Cook, N. (1998). Pg.214.

²⁶⁰ Thwaites, R. (1853). Vol. LIX. Pg.32-33.

shaman, banishing the Jesuits from their village forever. Similarly, when Europeans offered to help those ill with smallpox or other diseases they very rarely survived, and the Europeans appeared to be doing nothing to help as they knew the diseases were virtually incurable even to them. It is possible to argue that the spread of disease can be linked back to colonialism in general, and that the fur trade and trade as a whole was simply coinciding with the colonial spread of disease. This could be argued by the fact that there are multiple accounts of whole villages being found abandoned due to disease outbreaks prior to Europeans contact, however this is often the unseen consequence of the fur trade. The Native trade network was complex and far reaching and so even prior to the arrival of the Europeans they acquired items from Europeans that may have been infected causing catastrophic losses of life without the need for contact with them.

Conclusion:

Were the Early Years of the North American Fur Trade a Golden Age for Indigenous Communities?

Many historians and anthropologists of the mid-20th century, and indeed some today, see the early years of the fur trade as a "golden age" for the native people of the north-western Americas and the other regional groups that the fur trade spread to, as pointed out by Brice Trigger in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*,²⁶¹ and those mentioned previously, Rhoda Gilman's *The Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1630-1850*,²⁶² and Richard Price in *The Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties*.²⁶³ Also, many European traders and officials

²⁶¹ Trigger, B. (1996). *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*.

²⁶² Gilman, R. (1974). Pg.4.

²⁶³ Price, R. (1999). Pg.170.

at the time often saw themselves as giving the indigenous people a better way of life. As would be expected by the ideologies at the time, Europeans saw their way of life as being far superior to any other, especially a hunter gathered based society such as those in the region being discussed.²⁶⁴ The notion of the “golden age” stems from a similar belief; the introduction of European goods, the ease of life and financial gains all being key factors contributing to that notion. During this period the native people were very rarely not given a fair price for their furs, in many cases, they received much more than they expected with many even voicing their disbelief about the value Europeans put onto the native product. Many saw such gain in new technologies as putting less strain on native life: due to the fact it allowed them to purchase goods from traders that made their existence easier. Likewise, the introduction of European goods made many of the daily tasks much easier and energy efficient resulting in a much better standard of living, according to some.²⁶⁵ When trying to decide if it was indeed a golden age, it is important to not only look at what the indigenous people gained from the trade but also what they lost. When these two sides are compared the question, “was the early fur trade a golden age for native people of the northeast” becomes easier to decide. When analysing the effects of the European actions during the trade and its effects on indigenous populations it is easy to find oneself taking sides. The more contemporary studies into the actions of Europeans with native people are often trying to disprove many of the previously held opinions: that the Europeans could do no wrong. In this instance it is important to note that many of the adverse outcomes of the trade happened due to circumstance rather than by design, they were not simply due to right or wrong actions on either side.

²⁶⁴ Schaefer, R. (2008). *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society, Volume 1*. Pg.1092.

²⁶⁵ Fladman, M. (2015). *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity*. Pg.125.

As stated throughout this thesis the fur trade brought many European goods into the hands of the native people which they had had no access to previously. In chapter four; the discussion of firearms and the discussion of hunting, we see how Europeans revolutionised both. Although they had an adverse effect on animal populations, on the positive side they improved the native diet and daily life. Hunting rifles made the hunting of large game much easier compared to the bow, caribou and other large animals could be taken down by a single hunter with a gun. Traditionally the killing of large game was a task that carried one of the biggest risks among indigenous men. A bow could often bring a large animal down if it were in range. However, it would not kill the animal outright, so the kill sometimes had to be attempted at closer range, therefore bringing an individual into striking distance of a thrashing dying animal. Likewise, the bows themselves required a close range when compared to a gun to get a good enough shot to kill or bring the animal down, so in many ways, guns took much of the danger of hunting away.²⁶⁶

The ease of hunting with guns made not only the act of hunting less dangerous but also the food yield much higher. The hunting of large game brought much more food than that of smaller game, shooting birds during migration season was far easier with a gun than a bow too meaning birds could similarly be killed in much higher quantities.²⁶⁷ Many native groups of the north-east lived on a diet of red meat such as caribou, deer, and moose, with some smaller game like beaver, martin and woodland birds making up a large part of the diet.²⁶⁸ Some groups substituted the meat portion of these diets with fish, although fish was more often

²⁶⁶ Carlos, A. and Lewis, F. (2011). . Url: <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-the-fur-trade-1670-to-1870/>

²⁶⁷ Murphree, D. (2012). *Native America: A State-by-State Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 1*. Pg.861.

²⁶⁸ Moerman, D. (2010). *Native American Food Plants: An Ethnobotanical Dictionary*. Pg.51.

used as a source of food when the game wasn't so readily available. Wild rice and other vegetation foods like berries and fruit made up a small portion of the diet at the time. Just as the introduction of guns made game animals easier to kill; likewise, the European fishing nets provided made the catching of larger quantities of fish much easier. Also, steel knives, especially gutting knives, made the preparation of such food much quicker than before Europeans arrived.²⁶⁹

One interesting aspect of the changes that happened due to Europeans is explored by Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis in their book *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade*. Although written about the 18th century the outcomes of the trade in the 17th century caused these types of changes. One aspect that is studied is calories consumed and quality of diet between the average indigenous person in the region and the average British individual. They concluded that the native diet was superior in both protein content per calorie as well as the financial cost per calorie. The native diet contained almost double the amount of protein as the British, and if an individual from Britain were to switch to a native diet, then the cost would also be doubled. Put into figures the average native male consumed 1.5kg of meat daily, in Britain the cost of this type of consumption would add up to £30.16 annually based on beef prices in London during the 17th century²⁷⁰: to put this in perspective the quarterly wage for a skilled person, such as a carpenter or mason, in Britain in 1623-32 was 9 shillings and 75p.²⁷¹ This is made more remarkable by the fact that on average native people consumed nearly double the calories of the average British person of the time, meaning their expenditure was not only higher but the food that the

²⁶⁹ Martin, C. (1982). Pg.42.

²⁷⁰ Boulton, J. (2000). *Food Prices and the standar of living in London in the 'century of revolution', 1580-1700*. Pg.464-Table 4.

²⁷¹ Comas, K. (2011). *Wages and Prices in England, 1261-1791*. Pg.93.

native people ate was of a much higher quality. Overhunting, however, became a real concern; such large amounts were hunted, as demonstrated by the need for groups to move around and acquire new hunting grounds. The abundance of food was due to the significant drop in population sizes in many native communities of the time. However, the dietary improvements were a positive outcome for many indigenous people of the region.

As seen previously clothing was changed quite dramatically by the introduction of European goods, with cloth and other textiles replacing native garments quite quickly. It also made the preparation of traditional clothing quicker too: metal needles, awls and leather punches made the preparing of skins much faster than the traditional bone and porcupine quills the natives used.²⁷² The fineness of European thread over caribou hair and sinew also made decorations on clothing more complex, particularly amongst the Cree tribe.²⁷³ The speed acquired by the use of these new tools also meant that less time had to be spent over these garments and opened up either more free time or made it possible to make much more in the same period. Although we can see that these tools sped up production times of these traditional garments the introduction of cloth did replace the traditional clothing in many ways, leaving these indigenous clothes to play more of a unique role: worn for a ceremony and not everyday life.²⁷⁴ Obviously, at the time, this made many indigenous women's lives much easier and less time-consuming, but from a historical aspect, the replacing of traditional skills such as bone tool weaving meant that many of the younger generations at the time learnt with European tools and never knew the traditional ways. Many native groups did

²⁷² Condra, J. (Ed.) (2008). *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Clothing Through World History: 1501-1800*. Pg.174-175.

²⁷³ Kotch, R. (1990). *Dress Clothing of the Plains Indians*. Pg.54.

²⁷⁴ Deogaonkar, S. (2002). *Native Americans and Native Indians*. Pg.141.

try to keep their traditional methods going, if only for ceremony, but due to Europeanisation, population decline, as well as later actions taken by governments, many of these skills have been lost to history.

Metal goods didn't only make clothing easier to make, kettle and pots from Europe made the tasks of cooking and transporting water much easier. They were much less likely to break and had a higher heat transfer: meaning things often cooked faster or could be left over the fire for a day while the individual did other things without worrying about the heat breaking the pot.²⁷⁵ Ice chisels made the breaking of ice around boats much easier allowing for easier winter travel and also functioned as an excellent beaver dam breaker meaning beavers could be hunted even during their hibernation seasons.²⁷⁶ Steel axes allowed for trees to be felled far easier than before thus making the production of hollowed out canoes much simpler and less time-consuming. Metal knives likewise made everyday tasks much; they held an edge for an extended period and could be reshaped without breaking. The introduction of metals to the native way of life was one of the biggest changes to their lifestyle, every everyday task became much easier than it was before, and the time spent on these necessary tasks was almost halved.

The goods brought in by the fur trade could be seen as having a positive effect on the traditional ways of life; they filled the roles that bone tools had before, made tasks easier and didn't affect the social structure too much. There are however many things the fur trade brought that can be seen to have had a detrimental effect on the social structure.

²⁷⁵ Cipolla, C. (2017). Pg.260.

²⁷⁶ Carlos, A. and Lewis, F. (2011). . Url: <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-the-fur-trade-1670-to-1870/>

The largest negative outcome of the fur trade and the most damaging to the region was the introduction of foreign diseases to the indigenous people. These rampaged through the villages and killed without discrimination, population estimates of some village's death rates are as high as 90% in some locations including the loss of future generations.²⁷⁷ Many of the groups affected were never able to recover from these losses. With no youth to carry on the tribe's name and no elders to pass down their history many groups are lost to us during this period: histories we will never know and traditions that have died with them. If they did not die from the diseases themselves it made them too weak to carry on as a collective group, many being forced to be adopted into larger groups who hadn't been affected as severely or ended up decimated in war by neighbouring tribes who saw them at their weakest.²⁷⁸ The population decline alone is one of the key arguments that this period was not a golden age for the native people: life became easier due to tools, but this was not a replacement for the loss of entire generations, friends and families as well as the histories that died with them.

The political turmoil caused by the desire for more trade and goods is similarly a negative side to the trade. In the early years of European exploration of the land, many explorers noted the good nature of native people and their freedom from greed, on the contrary one Frenchman Pierre Biard stated "our desire tyrannizes over us and banishes peace from our actions"²⁷⁹ when referring to European actions on the continent. When native groups began to see the advantages of European goods they were very keen to acquire them, this caused conflicts on a scale very rarely seen in the area: the Iroquois Confederacy killing and displacing

²⁷⁷ Trigger, B. (1988). Pg528

²⁷⁸ Trigger, B. (1988).

²⁷⁹ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896- 1901). *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610—1791. Vol XIII.* Pg.85.

many tribes being the most obvious example. The loss of the Huron to the region is another, a large group who were the centre of a massive trade network fell at the hands of disease, European weapons in the hands of their enemies and fractures within the tribe over decisions based on how to deal with the Europeans. It was not only natives who made larger inroads into lands with furs in them, but the English were also on a constant expansion effort, often displacing the tribes whose land they now occupied, ignoring treaties or agreements in their desire to take over more land. The French similarly expanded their trade through regions and into new areas bringing some tribes into conflicts. Likewise, the groups that chose to side with the Dutch over other Europeans were left to their fate once the Dutch were defeated: smaller tribes lost the protection offered by the Dutch and were now left stranded and had no way of obtaining new goods either.²⁸⁰ The fur trade shook the regions structure to the core; we see groups moving, changing and disappearing at a much higher rate than the 100 years before European arrival;²⁸¹ much of this being due to the need for trade.

The introduction of Christianity similarly caused significant rifts among social groups and between traditional religions themselves. As with the example of the Huron, many native groups similarly struggled with their people turning to this new religion, especially in French and English colonies if they were taken away from their villages. Indigenous shamans saw their power and influence being sapped by these newcomers which resulted in a massive shift in the authority in the tribal hierarchy.²⁸² Traditional indigenous religions had a significant impact on the daily lives of people as well, so a move away from this was a huge change. The change

²⁸⁰ Franklin, J. (1901). *Narratives of New Netherland 1609-1664*.

²⁸¹ Dimond, J. (1999). *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. Pg.29.

²⁸² Martin, J. (2010). *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*. Pg.291.

in religion is a form of neutral change as to whether it was for the best or worse for indigenous people: native religions often evolved over time anyway, incorporating new stories and tales passed from other groups and so were semi-fluid in some regards already. Native traditions such as the Huron feast of the dead: a ceremony held by the whole village involving the passing of the dead person's spirit, a highly sacred and bonding event among the Huron people, were labelled as "foolish and useless"²⁸³ by Jesuit fathers thus weakening the community spirit within the villages. The move from traditional religions was also another means of making native people more European and thus diluting their native identity in yet another way.

The fur trade in the 17th century brought with it one aspect that would cripple native communities for years to come, debt to foreign traders and reliance on non-native goods. In many ways the changes brought by the fur trade could be overcome: population, if left and not devastated again by war, could grow, the goods bought helped native life, and other challenges could become less turbulent but with these new goods came a reliance on Europeans for these products to continue, meaning the options for many indigenous groups were very limited. Once a tribe had access to these goods and used them to replace their traditional ways of life it was tough for them to return to their traditional ways; as with most societies, regression is not a viable option. What this meant for native communities was that they slowly lost control and power over their destiny and land and left it instead mostly in the hands of foreigners. Likewise, the traditional religions had to stand aside for Christianity otherwise trade could stop as a result and their societies would suffer. At first, hunting was improved but species quickly

²⁸³ Thwaite, R. (Ed.). (1896- 1901). *Vol. X*. Pg. 3.

became over hunted due to demand causing the natives to become reliant on European food sources; their very survival was in the hands of European trader's food stores.²⁸⁴

The idea that the 17th-century fur trade was a golden age for the native people of the north-eastern part of the Americas is dependent on an individual's perspective as to what constitutes a better quality of life. The evidence shows that the goods provided by the trading in furs significantly improved native lives, making jobs quicker, more free time and survival a lot easier. But many would find it very hard to justify that these improvements were worth trading independence, traditional skills and religions and in many cases even their lives for. The large number of negative outcomes, and population decline make it difficult to say that the 17th-century fur trade was a golden age for the native people involved.

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²⁸⁴ Cave, A. (2004). *The French and Indian War*. Pg.32.

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