

HUDSON'S BAY BLANKETS

Three hundred years ago, what is now southeastern Canada (southern Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces) was held by France. All the rest of present-day Canada was held under Royal Charter by the Hudson's Bay Company, a London Chartered Company in which the Duke of York, Prince Rupert, and Lord 'Churchill (among others) had shares.

Here in the U.S. we are mostly rather ignorant of Canada's history. One thing that is familiar is the traditional Hudson's Bay blanket, the soft thick white woolen blanket with colored stripes at both ends. The London archives of the Hudson's Bay Company show that such blankets were ordered specifically, three hundred years ago, for trading goods in business with the northern Indians.

The minutes of the board meeting of the company of March 3, 1682, show that the governing Committee

"Ordered that the Secretary buy some Oxfordshire Blanketts

as
15 paire of large
15 paire of middle sorte
15 paire of the course streaked in the ends
For Chychewan
and for the other three factories..
.soe equally sorted."

A factory in the Canada of those days meant a trading post or store, where the legal tender was fur. The Hudson's Bay Company was in the business of selling all kinds of goods for fur.

The Company is still in the business of selling all kinds of goods -- the modern name for which is a "department" store. The Hudson's Bay Company is the oldest department store in the world, having celebrated its tricentennial nine years ago in 1970. Although it is no longer an English firm, and no longer claims title to western

and northern Canada, its business has expanded from the original four "factories" to more than 250 branches across the length and breadth of the nation.

A century after the company's founding, the "streaked" or striped blankets were no longer "course." They were the highest priced blankets on the Company's price list, selling for 6 beaver skins. Except for long guns, the striped blankets had a higher value than anything else which the Company sold.

Two hundred years later the Hudson's Bay blankets are still made in England, in Oxfordshire, and are still the top of the line. With such a heritage, they are indeed the covers of history.

Sally Garoutte

References

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E. E. Rich & A. M. Johnson, eds., MOOSE FORT JOURNALS, 1783-1785, Hudson's Bay Record Society, Vol. 17, Winnipeg, p. 371

Personal communication, Blanket Division, Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg

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ROBERT FROST

According to TIME, March 30, 1962, in an article about Robert Frost, "He went up to Boston University to get an honorary degree his 41st or so. No one knows the total for sure, and the task of keeping track has been scrambled by two admiring seamstresses who whipped up a nice quilt for him out of a flock of his multi-hued academic hoods." There is also a picture of Mr. Frost with the caption "Academic hoods make good quilts." (Ed. note: Anyone know anything further about this?)