

FUR TRADE CHARACTERS



- *"The North American fur trade didn't start after 1800 in the Western mountains. It started in the 16th century along the Eastern Seaboard. It was called "the fur trade" because it wasn't trapping; it was buying furs from native hunters and trappers using European goods for currency.."*
-Charles E. Hanson, Jr.

Following list consists of brief descriptions of a few different characters involved in the frontier history of North America during the years 1700-1840.

Further information can be found by following the link "Recommended reading" at the S.M.M. website.

Coureur des Bois

As the French Empire spread through Canada and along the rivers of the Midwest, young Frenchmen began to discover an exciting new life. These adventurous Frenchmen became known as Coureurs des Bois - the woods runners. Acting as both trappers traders, usually without of a royal licence, the Coureur des Bois became more Indian than the Indian. The wood runners spent most of the year living with the Indians, returning to "civilisation" only to sell his furs, get new trade goods and carouse.

The Voyageur

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, much of the fur trade depended on river transport. Keel boats, North canoes or the massive 34-foot Montreal canoes - all were propelled by the hardy voyageur. These incredibly tough French boatmen could paddle all day, portage loads of over 100 pounds each, cordel up up river and still find the energy to sing and dance around the camp fire. The Yellowstone, the Missouri, the rivers of Canada, the Great Lakes: all the waters heard the happy French songs from voyageurs such as this.

The Longhunter

As the American Colonies grew, a new breed of men pushed the frontier westward. Their forays into the wilderness, part trapping and part exploration, were of such duration that they became known as "Long Hunters." Throughout the 1700s, they explored the dark and bloody ground, Kentucky, and moved into Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee and Illinois. Their names ring through American history : Wetzel, Kenton, the Girtys, Harrod, Boone.

The Settlers

The "long hunter," like the Indians, learned to live with the forest. To the settler, however, the forest was as much an enemy as a raiding "redskin." The settlers moved ever westward, searching for free land and free lives. They cleared the land, built cabins, planted crops and fought to defend what they had. Although he often had the skills of a woodsman, the settler was a farmer and family man. His wife could help till the fields, cook, sew and load the spare musket.

Traders

Not all those who went west for the fur trade were mountain men. Beaver pelts became big business; men of wealth and power went into the mountain. They were company owners like General Ashley and Pierre Menard, or brigade leaders such as Manuel Lisa.

They started operations, founded forts and returned to St. Louis or Kaskaskia. To manage affairs in the mountains, they appointed booshways - men such as Jim Bridger, Jed Smith and Tom Fitzpatrick.

Mountain Men

After the Corps of Discovery's search in vein of a northwest passage, a new era of American history evolved. The rumour of huge beaver populations out west got the fur company owners to invest all in the still unbroken hunting grounds. Great men such as Manuel Lisa, Ashley and Astor financed the first legendary expeditions.

The era would be coloured and remembered thanks to the brave beaver trappers, today known as the mountain men, whom after a year in the wilderness gathered at rendezvous.

In their search for beaver, great parts of the area, today known as western USA, would be mapped. The rendezvous era ended with the last great rendezvous in 1840.

Different Indian Tribes

Wherever the white man on the American Continent turned, he was never first.

Native Americans or Indians are like most of you know the natives of America, and they were the ones whom to the greatest part had to pay the price for the white man's way of life.

The Native Americans lived in numerous tribes with different culture, religion and language, everything from the eastern woodland cultures to the plains buffalo hunters.

The white man's influence has probably changed the Native Americans in a much higher degree than vice versa.

Source

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