

## **The Miikmaq, Poor Settlers, and the Nova Scotia Fur Trade, 1783-1853**

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### Article abstract

Nova Scotia's fur trade has hitherto been overlooked. It was of small importance so long as hostilities dominated Nova Scotia until 1758-60. Once peace settled on the colony, and when the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia held a virtual monopoly on trapping, the trade remained of little consequence. The principal source of the harvested furs was neither Cape Breton nor peninsular Nova Scotia, but the upper Saint John River Valley in Maliseet territory, and much of it was exported to London via Boston. With the influx of loyalist refugees in the 1780s, the fur trade in what remained of Nova Scotia began in earnest. This view, based on an extensive examination of British Customs House records, is contrary to what previous historians have stated. Led by Nova Scotia's harvest of mink and fox, which represented, after 1810, between 20% and 25% of the annual exports from British North America to London, the colony's fur trade remained vigorous until the 1860s. Much of this increased production, exported from Halifax, resulted from the efforts of poor settlers, who successfully challenged the Native monopoly, as the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, from the 1780s, were pushed to the very brink of extinction as a people.

# The Mi'kmaq, Poor Settlers, and the Nova Scotia Fur Trade, 1783-1853

JULIAN GWYN

## Introduction

This study has two purposes: to identify the part of the fur trade carried on to the 1850s within the 21,000 square miles that constitute present-day Nova Scotia and Cape Breton; and to estimate the extent to which the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq became involved. Evidence gathered here demonstrates that the fur trade in Nova Scotia was much more significant in the first half of the nineteenth century than at any time in the Eighteenth, and that the from the arrival of the loyalist refugees in the 1780s onwards, the Mi'kmaq, formerly the usually suppliers of fur for export, were obliged thereafter to share this market with poor settlers.

## Manuscript sources

The statistical framework for this study is principally derived from the papers of the London Customs House. Known as the Inspector-General's Ledgers of Imports and Exports, they are housed in the National Archives, Kew. These manuscript ledgers contain the best records extant of the visible trade to the British Isles, when London was the world's fur emporium. They have their shortcomings. Though the Customs House ledgers obviously ignore smuggled goods, there was little incentive to smuggle furs that, when re-exported from London – which happened to the bulk of them – were assigned a drawback, or refund of import duties paid, while the export duty was so small as to make any gain from smuggling, if it was attempted, not worth the risk.

The ledgers list commodities, annually imported into, exported and re-exported from the British Isles. These are arranged by country, colony, or territory. Thus when consideration focuses on furs (also termed “skins” in the ledgers) from all these places, the annual aggregated imports into the British Isles and annual re-exports to continental European states can be calculated. The relative importance of one fur species over another, one source of furs and another, or one market for furs and another can then be demonstrated. The changing imports into Great Britain from each place, Nova Scotia for instance, can be analysed in great detail. The relative importance of one particular skin,

such as bear or mink, can be scrutinized year by year, decade by decade, or by periods of war and peace, a matter of great importance especially until 1815.

War, which was so dislocating to overseas commerce, was perhaps the most important non-economic element to influence fur prices because of its effect on supply and markets. As Britain's fur imports in any given year, when war was declared, had usually been trapped the year before, the fur and skin harvest in the first year of a war manifested only inconsequential differences from production during the last year of peace. Significant changes usually became unmistakable in the second year of war.

The statistical data underpinning this study deliberately limits consideration to those types of furs and skins that were imported from Nova Scotia, and for which there are comparable data from other fur-exporting regions. Some species have been ignored, such as the eastern cougar, wolf, or wolverine as they were exported so rarely from Nova Scotia. Also ignored are a variety of furs of lesser importance, such as those of weasel, squirrel, hare, and rabbit, even when they are found among Nova Scotia's exports to the British Isles or occasionally, in the early years, because of their quantity they proved more valuable than the very skins actually noted here.

### **What historians have written**

Whereas there is a considerable body of secondary literature on the international fur trade and that of North America in particular, very little of it deals in a significant way with the economics of the trade. Only two earlier historians of the fur trade have made any use of the British Customs House records to study its history. Eight decades ago Gordon Davidson studied the economy of Canada's fur trade after 1783 using, as part of his evidence, some British trade statistics.<sup>1</sup> Only one of his eight chapters dealt with the economics of the trade, as his consuming interest was the politics of the North West Company. Only one of his nineteen appendices reproduced the details of Britain's worldwide fur imports, and that for but the year 1800.<sup>2</sup> Two decades later, in Murray Lawson's University of California doctoral dissertation, published in 1943, extensive use was made of what is now known as CUST3 to compile data for every fifth year from 1700 through 1775.<sup>3</sup> These he summarized in a dozen appendices. Lawson focused on beaver pelts and their link to the changing fashions of the English hat industry. He did not study other types of skins, but merely noted them. Neither Davidson's nor Lawson's data were reproduced in

1 Gordon C. Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918).

2 He ignored British fur re-exports. *Ibid.*, Appendix Q, 308-24.

3 Murray G. Lawson, *Fur: A Study in English Mercantilism 1700-1775* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943); Robert R. Rea, "British West Florida Trade and Commerce in the Customs Records," *Alabama Review* 37 (1984) which deals in part with fur.

the two successive editions of *The Historical Statistics of Canada*, which ignored the fur trade.<sup>4</sup>

The classic earlier account of Canada's fur trade by Innis used neither the London Customs House ledgers nor the papers of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), and was unfamiliar with customs records for French ports.<sup>5</sup> As with almost all historians of the fur trade, he had little interest in the export market, the very reason the business had become established. Only one of his published appendices dealt with Canada's annual beaver exports to France for the twenty-nine years for which they were available, between 1701 and 1755.<sup>6</sup>

One recent rare example of interest in the export market is the research of Thomas Wien who refined some of the fur export data during the last forty years of New France, when the French appeared to have been out-competing the British for the sources of the best pelts. Though his principal focus remained on beaver, he treated the full range of pelts exported from Canada.<sup>7</sup> His particular concerns were prices, both those paid by Canadian merchants for goods imported from France and those fetched in Paris for New France furs, and in London for those from Hudson Bay. When Wien turned his attention briefly to the post-conquest era to 1790, he ignored data from the Inspector General's ledgers.<sup>8</sup>

Of the historians drawn to the HBC, only three demonstrated interest in fur and skin exports to the British Isles. Using the company's fur importation book, Ann Carlos prepared one table which provided data for all varieties of fur exported from Hudson Bay for 1804-10.<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Mancke used customs data to 1726 collected by Arthur Ray,<sup>10</sup> while Ray himself relied on HBC records to provide details of exports and London auction prices but only to 1760.

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4 M.C. Urquhart & K.A.H. Buckley, eds., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983).

5 Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade of Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

6 These data appeared in a form modified by Lawson, Appendix L, 136.

7 Thomas Wein, "Exchange Patterns in the European Market for North American Furs and Skins, 1720-1760," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference*, ed. Jennifer S.H. Brown et al (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 19-37; and his "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1990): 293-317. There are no references to CUST3, though he claims to have used it.

8 Thomas Wein, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries dans le commerce canadien des fourrures, 1720-1790," in 'Le Castor fait tout.' *Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference*, 1985, ed. Bruce G. Trigger et al, 72-92 (Montreal: Lake Saint Louis Historical Society, 1987).

9 Ann M. Carlos, *The North American Fur Trade 1804-1821: A Study in the Life-Cycle of a Duopoly* (New York: Garland, 1986), 133.

10 Ray's publications refer nowhere to his use of English Customs House data. Elizabeth Mancke, *A Company of Businessmen: The Hudson's Bay Company and Long-Distance Trade* (Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1988), 34.

Of historians who focus exclusively on Nova Scotia, none has treated the colony's fur trade in any depth. Interested in the impact on native institutions and culture of European – New World rivalries in the seventeenth century, the economics of the trade in skins is of small concern to them.<sup>11</sup> George Rawlyk grasped the importance of fur in the seventeenth century, and believed that the bulk of Acadie's furs that reached Boston came less from peninsular Nova Scotia than from the St. John River Valley.<sup>12</sup> He added nothing to the economic context, and remained unaware of the details thereafter. Earlier, MacNutt's important history of the Atlantic colonies from 1712 to the Confederation era ignored the topic.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the absence of research, the views of two authors have had an unaccountable influence. Virginia Miller, an authority on Mi'kmaq population, stated, without a shred of evidence, that "hundreds of thousands of beaver, moose, and other skins were taken out of the Maritime area before the late eighteenth century."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Harold McGee, who studied Mi'kmaq land holding, believed that "ecological changes and rapacious exploitation of fur-bearing mammals destroyed the fur trade in the Atlantic region, before the period of the fur trade even began in Upper and Lower Canada."<sup>15</sup> Such inaccurate and unsupported views have widely circulated even in such highly-praised recent studies as J.R. Miller's history of Indian-white relations.<sup>16</sup>

### Acadie-Nova Scotia's fur trade to 1783

The few statistics available indicate that the fur trade of Acadie-Nova Scotia was insignificant before 1710, and expanded in a marked way only with the

11 John G. Reid, *Acadia, Maine, and New Scotland. Marginal Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

12 George A. Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia's Massachusetts: A Study of Massachusetts-Nova Scotia Relations, 1630 to 1784* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), 7, 35-6.

13 W.S. MacNutt, *The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965).

14 Virginia Miller, "The Micmac: A Maritime Woodland Group," in *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, ed. R. Bruce Morrison & C. Roderick Wilson (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986), 340.

15 Harold Franklin McGee, "The Micmac Indians: The Earliest Migrants" in *Banked Fires: The Ethnics of Nova Scotia*, ed. Douglas F. Campbell (Port Credit: Scribblers Press, 1978), 25. Dickason remarked only that "Indians traded furs and game for supplies, but this did not reach the level of organized commerce." Olive P. Dickason, "Louisbourg and the Indians: A Study in Imperial Race Relations, 1713-1760," *History and Archaeology* 6 (1976): 1-206.

16 "In the process of pursuing furs they also induced the Maritime Indians to exhaust the fur resources of their region. Before the seventeenth century was over, the Mi'kmaq found their role as fur traders destroyed by the efficiency with which they and other nations had trapped the beaver." James R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, 3d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 52. Some 40,400 pelts from beaver trapped in Nova Scotia were exported to London between 1749 and 1853, about 385 a year.

arrival of Loyalist refugees in the 1780s. Until the first permanent French settlements were established, the trade within the region resulted from casual contacts largely between fishermen, who traded for furs when drying their catches on the coast or when fetching fresh water and firewood. There were few early fur-trading voyages, as far as the slim evidence indicates.<sup>17</sup> In the Bay of Fundy region Anglo-French rivalries made settlement dangerous and uncertain, leaving the whole region very sparsely settled and economically underdeveloped.

The St. John River basin, and not Nova Scotia, proved “the richest area for furs in all Acadia.”<sup>18</sup> There are records of thirty vessels departing La Rochelle for Acadie and Cape Breton between 1632 and 1650, but the quantity of furs traded and their value are unknown.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter much of Acadie’s fur trade went to Boston, where, for instance in 1697, the French reported that annually New Englanders brought “brandy, sugarcane from Barbados, molasses and the utensils which are needed, taking in exchange pelts and grain” obtained in Beaubassin, Minas, and Port Royal.<sup>20</sup> Where the pelts originated remains a matter of speculation. The English attacks on Port Royal in 1707 and 1710 were in part occasioned by the discovery that six Boston merchants were implicated in the illicit trade with the French in Acadie.<sup>21</sup> Nails, boards, knives, butter, rice, wine, mackerel, and textiles had been shipped, but what the returns were is unknown, though furs perhaps formed a principal part.

With Port Royal (renamed Annapolis Royal) in English hands, little more of Nova Scotia’s fur trade is known. There is evidence also of fifteen ships trading between Annapolis Royal and Boston in 1718-9, half of which had fur

17 British Library Add. MS 14027, 289-290. See David B. Quinn, “The Voyage of Etienne Bellenger, 1583,” *Canadian Historical Review* 63 (1962): 328-43. He sailed along Cape Breton and Nova Scotia and into the Bay of Fundy, then down the Maine coast to Penobscot Bay. Along the way he collected a cargo of furs, but abandoned his plans when his pinnace and part of his crew were lost in an attack by natives.

18 George MacBeath, “Claude de Saint-Etienne de la Tour, 1570-1636,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 1: 597.

19 From evidence in the Les Archives departementales Charente-Maritime. Marcel Delafosse, “La Rochelle et le Canada au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 4 (1950-51): 469-511.

20 July 1697, “Memoire on the Present State of the Province of Acadia,” in *Acadia at the End of the Seventeenth Century: Letters, Journals and Memoirs of Joseph Robineau de Villebon, Commandant in Acadia, 1690-1700, and Other Contemporary Documents*, ed. J.C. Webster, 154 (Saint John: New Brunswick Museum, 1934). Jean Daigle, “Nos amis les ennemis: Relations commerciales de l’Acadie avec le Massachusetts, 1670-1711” (PhD diss., University of Maine, 1975); and his “Les relations commerciales de l’Acadie avec le Massachusetts. Le cas de Charles-Amador de Saint-Etienne de La Tour, 1695-1697,” *Revue de l’Université de Moncton* 9 (1976): 53-61.

21 Details taken from three pamphlets, *Memorial of the Present Deplorable State of New England* (London, 1708); *A Modest Inquiry* (London, 1707); and *The Deplorable State of New England* (London, 1708). Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts*, 99-100.

as part of their cargoes.<sup>22</sup> Two reports in 1720 to the Board of Trade noted that the trade was slight, consisting “of furs and peltry of all sorts; cod fishing ... naval stores as pitch, tar, masts, lumber of all sorts as ... staves, shingles, boards.”<sup>23</sup> The second remarked that the trade was carried on by four or five sloops that made “three voyages in the year, bringing mostly West Indies commodities, the provisions of New England with some European goods ... and carry away by computation M£9,000 or M£10,000 worth of furs yearly, without paying the least duty or import towards the support of the government.” Only in 1730 were furs first shipped directly from Nova Scotia to London. Two years later the Nova Scotia council reported in the same manner that the export trade at Annapolis Royal consisted of “grain, a few fish but chiefly furs,” and was shipped in four or five Boston coasters, each of which made two or three round-trips a year.<sup>24</sup>

When the port of Louisbourg became established after 1713, the fur and skin trade proved to be peripheral to that colony’s fish-based economy. Records of fur trade survive for only three years in the 1740s. All these furs and skins, except one moose hide brought by a New England vessel, were imported from Acadie-Nova Scotia. The details are in Table 1. It was Haliburton’s opinion that the trade in furs was conducted in small sloops, in which the French or New Englanders “sailed from harbour to harbour and exchanged West India produce and European goods.”<sup>25</sup>

**Table 1. Louisbourg Fur Imports, 1740-3**

bear	5	beaver	80	caribou	35	seal	15
cat	199	fox	2	marten	81	wolf	22
mink	110	moose	800	muskrat	630		

Source: 3 June 1742-6 Sept. 1743, Archives départementales Charente-Maritime, Amiraute de Louisbourg, B.272, fol. 15v, 37-8, 71v, 145-6v, 148-9v, 154-5, 156v, 167-7v, 168-9, 177, 180-1, 191-1v, 195-5v, 202-3, 207v, 215-5v, 218-9, 227v-8. Information retrieved with the help of Ken Donovan and Sandy Balcolm, Fortress of Louisbourg. See also Christopher Moore, *Commodity Exports of Louisbourg* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1975; Manuscript Report Series 317), 83-4.

22 *Abstracts of English Shipping Records Relating to Massachusetts Ports* (Salem, 1931), cited in William C. Wicken, *Mi’kmaq Treaties on Trial: History, Land, and Donald Marshall Junior* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 32.

23 PRO, CO217/3, 111. The first from London in January by Samuel Vetch, until 1717 governor of Nova Scotia, and the second in August 1720 by Richard Phillips, governor for three years but who resided in Annapolis Royal only for four months.

24 Archibald M. MacMechan, ed., *Original Minutes of His Majesty’s Council at Annapolis Royal, 1720-1739* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1908), 227-32.

25 Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*. (Halifax, 1829), 1: 97.



One such vessel was the 20-ton *Joseph* which arrived in Louisbourg harbour in mid-June 1742, eleven days' passage from Annapolis Royal, with an assorted cargo, including beaver, lynx, marten, and muskrat furs.

The marginal economic importance of Nova Scotia's fur exports continued for some time after the founding of Halifax in 1749. If Britain and France were technically at peace between 1748 and 1756, tension in Nova Scotia from attempts to settle on Mi'kmaq lands ensured that the colony was kept on the edge of hostilities in these early years.<sup>26</sup> The impact on Nova Scotia's fur trade appears to have been considerable. In some years there were no fur exports or almost none recorded, as in 1757-61. In 1752, for instance, the only items noted in the customs papers from Nova Scotia were sixteen fox furs. Valued at less than \$25,000 in total by 1775, the meagre fur exports reflected the relative insignificance of the colony's economy, made even more fragile by the large-scale expulsion of Acadiens in the 1750s.<sup>27</sup>

Fur exports rose in the twelve years of peace between 1764 and 1775, the bulk being shipped to Boston for re-export to London. It is probable that the majority of those furs actually originated not in peninsular Nova Scotia or Cape Breton but in what became in 1784 the colony of New Brunswick. Rawlyk believed that at war's end in 1763 the "St John River trade, as had been the case for decades, was funnelled through Boston."<sup>28</sup> If this is accurate, then Maleseet not Mi'kmaq controlled the fur trade.

We know a little of the activities of the Halifax and Boston merchants involved. In 1763-4, Benjamin Greene and Michael Francklin bought furs in the St. John River Valley, shipping them to London through Benjamin Faneuil of Boston.<sup>29</sup> The only surviving records of a fur-trading enterprise, for this period, are those of Simonds, Hazen & White, a firm of New Englanders that

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26 Among the new settlers there were at least six who described themselves as furriers. They included two who settled at Lunenburg. Winthrop Pickard Bell, *The "Foreign Protestants" and the Settlement of Nova Scotia: The History of a Piece of Arrested British Colonial Policy in the Eighteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 300, 346, and 539, n20. There is evidence of Annapolis Royal-Boston fur trade in 1751. Easson Family fonds, NSARM, MG1/3487, A/9 and A/16.

27 Julian Gwyn, *Excessive Expectations: Maritime Commerce and the Economic Development of Nova Scotia, 1740-1870* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 239, n25. The recent useful contribution is by a professor of chemistry turned business historian, Harry W. Duckworth, "Halifax as a Cradle of the Post-Conquest Fur Trade in Canada," in *New Faces of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1995*, ed. Jo-Anne Fiske et al, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 331-45 .

28 Rawlyk, *Nova Scotia's Massachusetts*, 224.

29 Mauger to Francklin, 24 Mar.; 20 Aug.; 22 Oct.; 29 and Nov. 1783; Mauger Papers, Gilder Lehrman Collection, Morgan Library, NYC, GLC250-252.



began operations in the St. John River Valley the following year. Trading at first with the Maleseet at Aukpaque, the firm's initial rivals were John Anderson, a trader on the Naskwaak River, and Isaac Caton on the St. John River. In the first twelve years of operation the firm exported to New England furs amounting to perhaps M£15,000.<sup>30</sup> Their shipments were thought to have comprised five bear, perhaps 40,000 beaver, fifty caribou, sixty-seven cat, eighty-five deer, 258 fisher, 120 fox, 11,022 muskrat, 6,050 marten, 522 mink, 1,113 moose, 870 otter, 74 racoon, 140 sable, two wolf, and eight wolverine.<sup>31</sup> The claim of 40,000 beaver pelts seems an exaggeration. The Customs House records indicate that Britain imported only 37,502 beaver pelts from New England and Nova Scotia in 1764-75.<sup>32</sup>

**Table 2. Pelt Imports from Nova Scotia, 1730-75 (annual average)**

	Great Britain		New England	
	1730	1747	1749-75	1769-72
bear	6	–	52	8
beaver	704	–	474	3,940
cat	–	–	47	71
deer	–	145*	27	161
elk/caribou	–	–	15	161
fisher	–	–	17	–
fox	25	–	50	121
marten	600	–	300	3,222
mink	57	–	238	1,026
moose	–	–	30	765
muskrat	189	–	581	145
otter	2	–	103	95
racoon	–	–	5	1,004
seal	–	–	2	–

\*From Louisbourg.

Source: PRO, CUST3/30, 47, 49-75, CUST16/1.

30 See New Brunswick Museum, Indian account book, 1764-7, Box 1-4, shelf 5. In 1764 they exported 815 beaver pelts. Roy C. Campbell, "Simonds, Hazen and White: A Study of a New Brunswick Firm in the Commercial World of the Eighteenth Century" (MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1973), 53. In 1781 the firm shipped from the St John River valley to London a cargo of 571 marten skins, 3,621 muskrat, 752 sable, and "numerous other pelts," 95.

31 W.O. Raymond, *The River St. John* (Saint John, NB: John A. Bowes, 1910), 157-8.

32 Some 34,586 from New England and 2,916 from Nova Scotia. PRO. CUST3/49-75.

**Nova Scotia's fur trade, 1783-1853**

Much changed as a result of war with rebel America. For Nova Scotia, the New England fur market vanished when the rebellion brought on it the censure of Parliament. In December 1775, a parliamentary statute forbade all trade with rebel colonies. Halifax temporarily became the major North American entrepôt for the import of British goods. This unusually high volume of trade had its impact on exports of skins. When the New England rebels lost control of the St. John River watershed, the region's furs, instead, were shipped through Halifax to London.

From 1784 onward, furs from one British colony, as enumerated items under the *Navigation Act*, could only be shipped legally to another British colony or to the British Isles. This meant, among other things, that New England ports could no longer re-export Nova Scotia's fur. As direct shipping from Halifax to British ports became much more frequent after 1783 than before 1776, there was little difficulty in finding cargo space for fur consignments. The details of Britain's imports of Nova Scotia's furs down to the middle of the nineteenth century are found in Table 3. If the export of such fur species as bear, beaver, deer, and elk declined significantly after 1815, others, especially fox, marten, mink, and muskrat rose dramatically into the 1850s.

**Table 3. British Imports of Nova Scotia Skins, 1764-1853 (annual average)**

	1764-75	1776-83	1784-92	1793-1815	1816-53
	peace	war	peace	war	peace
bear	11	63	269	130	99
beaver	243	1,459	468	454	81
cat*	46	938	—	73	594
deer	4	44	92	148	4
elk	29	1,491	5,704	667	20
fisher**	17	108	—	11	75
fox	60	526	895	932	3,657
marten	385	1,019	2,615	2,175	2,650
mink	356	2,120	3,111	2,521	5,495
moose**	29	454	—	—	—
muskrat	208	1,788	3,326	892	3,858
otter	155	633	681	461	430
raccoon	2	32	48	32	335
seal	2	22	1,063	872	3,023

\*Not recorded in 1781-92 and 1800-09.

\*\*Not recorded after 1780; average for 1776-80 only.

Source: PRO, CUST3/63-75; CUST4/1-48; CUST17/1-30.

From 1784, not all of Nova Scotia's furs thereafter were shipped directly to the British Isles. Cape Breton shipped small quantities of furs to Europe south of Cape Finisterre. There is evidence only for three consecutive years in 1788-9, 1789-90, and 1790-1. From the 1830s Nova Scotia re-exported most of its sealskins to the United States, all of which were imported from Newfoundland. At the same time, from 1844 the colony developed a small market for sealskins in the Channel Islands. Tables 4 and 5 contain the details.

**Table 4. Cape Breton Furs & Skins Exported to Europe South of Cape Finisterre, 1788-91**

bear	20	beaver	3	caribou	109	mink	237	otter	113
cat	12	deer	34	elk	1066	muskrata	462	seal	42
fisher	11	fox	63	marten	430	moose	338		

Source: PRO, CUST17/11, fol. 140; CUST17/12, fol. 198; CUST17/13, fol. 101.

**Table 5. Nova Scotia Sealskin Exports Elsewhere than Great Britain, 1832-53 (annual average)**

	United States	Channel Islands
1832-35	35,288	—
1836-39	11,771	—
1840-43	13,012	—
1844-47	16,408	700
1848-51	3,635	1,151
1852-53	9,077	830

Source: PRO, CUST12/1-22.

In addition, there is scattered evidence from the 1780s, the 1830s, and the 1840s of Nova Scotia's lateral trade in furs and skins within British North America.<sup>33</sup> In 1788 and 1789, as an example, Nova Scotia imported 295 moose hides from British North American colonies. It is probable that these came from Cape Breton, which reported in the twelve months from October 1787 the export of 439 moose hides.<sup>34</sup> There is a further report that in 1789 Cape Breton witnessed an extraordinary slaughter of moose. "At the period of the first establishment of the English in the Island," forty years after the event, Haliburton recounted, "these animals became the objects of most destructive pursuit, merely for the

33 Tables of Nova Scotia Imports and Exports, 1832 through 1849. PRO. CO221/46-64.

34 In that same twelve months Cape Breton also exported to another British North American colony skins of three bear, two caribou, ten fox, fifty-two marten, 157 mink, forty-four muskrat, and thirty-three otter. PRO, CUST17/10, fol. 163. Likewise New Brunswick exported twenty-one bear, 2,353 moose, and 627 otter to another province.

sake of their hides. Their carcasses were left by hundreds along the coast, from St. Anne's to Cape North ... Ever since the commission of that indiscriminate massacre, the numbers of the moose have been comparatively scanty."<sup>35</sup> This would not have involved Mi'kmaq, who habitually "did not kill more moose than was necessary to supply themselves with provisions," as surveyor general Titus Smith noted in 1801.<sup>36</sup> By the mid-1850s moose in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton were thought to be approaching extinction. A closed season from February through August, during which the killing of moose was made illegal and punishable by a fine, was first proclaimed in 1843.<sup>37</sup>

The annual mass slaughter of seals attracted no such early attention. Principally imported from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia's sealskins went, besides to England, to the United States after 1830 and the Channel Islands from 1844.

The colonial origin of other skins noted in another set of statistical reports, prepared in Halifax by the colonial officials, remains unclear. These so-called colonial blue books are far less useful sources of information than those prepared by the London Customs House officials. Drawn up by customs officials in Halifax, these annual reports rarely provided details of individual fur or skin species. Rather, they refer to unspecified and uncounted skins and furs crated in bales, barrels, boxes, casks, chests, hogsheads, packages, puncheons, or trunks.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, this source makes it clear that some of the furs exported annually to Great Britain by Nova Scotia, principally through Halifax, had first been imported from other British North American colonies, and very occasionally from the US.

### **Nova Scotia's Mi'kmaq in the fur trade**

To help estimate the Mi'kmaq role in the fur trade, some concept of the population density in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton is vital. Estimates derive largely from informed guesswork. Like most non-native scholars, historical geogra-

35 Haliburton, 2: 244.

36 "General Observations, 1801," NSARM, RG1/380, 116-7.

37 Moose began to be protected in 1843 when 6 Vict. c. 19 which forbade "the setting of snares for catching Moose." If the practice continued, the statute explained, "it will probably in a short time lead to the destruction of all Moose in the Province, thereby depriving the Indians and poor settlers of one of their means of subsistence." A closed season on moose was imposed the following year by 7 Vict. c. 73. 25 Vict. c. 23, passed in 1862 for the first time placed a limit on the number of moose killed by a hunting party. By 1874 a three-year moratorium on the killing of both moose and beaver was further proclaimed over fears for their very survival. Donald Dodds, *Challenge and Response: A History of Wildlife and Wildlife Management in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Department of Natural Resources, 1993), 32.

38 In 1836 an unusual instance of the importation of thirty-three marten skins into Nova Scotia from other British North American colonies and the exportation of four muskrat skins was noted. PRO, CO221/50.

pher Andrew Clark described the Mi'kmaq as "a small group thinly scattered over a large area when the seventeenth century opened."<sup>39</sup>

With the beginnings of French settlement, Mi'kmaq, as with other New World natives, encountered European diseases, against which at first they had no immunity. Wicken downplayed the phenomenon as he erected his account of the inner strengths of Mi'kmaq culture.<sup>40</sup> Yet, to have avoided this demographic catastrophe, experienced widely throughout eastern North America, the Mi'kmaq would have been unique among northeast native peoples. The fullest recorded evidence of serious and rapid population decline dates from the 1740s and 1750s, a period that followed two decades of modest population growth among the Mi'kmaq. The last French estimates in 1739 and 1757 found 600 and 670 warriors respectively, that implied a total population of about 2,200 to 2,500 altogether.<sup>41</sup> One of the earliest British enumerations, that of 1772, located only 865 in peninsular Nova Scotia, and two years later another 230 on Cape Breton. If accurate, this implied a group of perhaps less than three hundred potential trappers, who first had to feed their families from fishing and hunting.<sup>42</sup> By 1838, a census identified 1,425 Mi'kmaq. Within a decade, when 1,166 only were counted in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, it was feared they would altogether disappear within a couple of generations.<sup>43</sup>

Le Clercq wrote of the Mi'kmaq: "these people live without commerce."<sup>44</sup> Fur and skins, which seem not to have been part of inter-tribal trade in pre-contact eras, became central to native concerns once European appeared regularly off the coasts. Until then not every animal successfully hunted was also prized for either its coat or skin. These were taken only when the family needs were apparent. As Denys noted, "They never made an accumulation of skins ... but only so far as they needed them for personal use."<sup>45</sup> As there is little evidence that inter-tribal trade was an important aspect of pre-contact Mi'kmaq economy, historians and anthropologists continue to debate the issue. Goods were

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39 Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia to 1760* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 67.

40 William Craig Wicken, "Encounters with Tall Sails and Tall Tales: Mi'kmaq Society and Economy to 1760" (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1994), 169.

41 By 1774 in Cape Breton they numbered 230: eighty men, fifty women, and 100 children. Olive Dickason, "Louisbourg and the Indians: A Study in Imperial Race Relations, 1713-1760" (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1971), 91-2.

42 See 1772 Report to the Board of Trade. Haliburton, 2: 250.

43 Abraham Gesner's report, 21 Dec. 1847, *Journals of the House of Assembly 1847* (Halifax, 1848), Appendix 24, 114-26.

44 Christian Le Clercq, *New Relation of Gaspesia, with the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians*, ed. William F. Ganong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1910), 100.

45 Nicolas Denys, *Description Geographical and Historical of the Coasts of North America with the Natural History of the Country* (Paris, 1672) ed. William F. Ganong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1908) 2: 426.

ceremonially exchanged at rare inter-tribal parleys. There is, for instance, only very slim evidence that the Mi'kmaq, who lived beyond the corn culture, traded for corn. To have done so on a regular basis, there would be evidence of a system of accumulation of goods expressly for such trade. Rather, the evidence indicates that accumulation of goods had little place in their culture. To the Mi'kmaq hunter, Dickason concluded, "goods were to be used either to provide for the immediate needs of himself, his family or his group, or they were intended for giving away to prove his great heart and so establish his position as a leader."<sup>46</sup>

The arrival of Europeans to fish in the Gulf of St Lawrence began to transform the native economy as it did elsewhere in North America. Initially, Mi'kmaq value to the French was in trade for furs and skins. With the development and expansion of that trade, especially through the port of Quebec under Champlain, and the consequent decline of importance of east coast sources, the Mi'kmaq acquired European goods less and less by trade and more and more by the formal process of annual presents from the French.

Early contact in Acadie-Nova Scotia occurred when Europeans came ashore to dry cod or to render whale oil. Presents were given to the natives, and casual trade in pelts took place. This included seal, moose, deer, and walrus. At least from the 1520s the Portuguese undertook such trade contacts on Cape Breton Island, while a Portuguese agent claimed that by 1540, thousands of such skins and furs were already being imported into France.<sup>47</sup>

The French first found a migratory people, who in spring moved from their winter camps inland in the forests and along river routes to traditional seashore locations to fish, catch lobsters, dig clams, and gather oysters, scallops, mussels, and other shellfish, or to hunt seal, walrus, and porpoise. These numerous coastal sites ranged from the Gaspé coast to the Fundy shores especially at river estuaries and along favoured beaches.

Le Clercq described the Mi'kmaq, among whom he lived for several years, as seal hunting in January – when the seal pups were born – the seals being valued for their skins, flesh, and oil. February and March saw the hunting of beaver, otter, bear, moose, and caribou; river fishing began with the spring breakup in the rivers. Returning birds allowed both the hunting of fowl and the collection of eggs. Besides seafood in summer they hunted hare, rabbit, pigeon, partridge, and grouse. Withdrawal from the coasts allowed them nonetheless to catch spawn eels in the shallow rivers, and to hunt deer and moose.

Hunting with bow and arrow, and aided by dogs, they were also adept at setting traps and snares. As these skills were crucial, Le Clercq noted that apart

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46 Dickason, "Louisbourg and the Indians," 78.

47 D.B. Quinn, ed. *New American World: Documentary History of North America to 1612*, 5 vols. (New York: Arno & Bye, 1979), 1: 329.

from war, no occupation was “more honourable than hunting.”<sup>48</sup> Their “wealth was in proportion to the dogs,” Denys noted.<sup>49</sup> A man could not take a wife until he demonstrated to her family his ability, through his hunting skill, to provide for her and their future children, while a boy became a man when he had killed his first moose.

Of the Mi’kmaq, Lescarbot wrote, after having observed them closely, “They are not laborious, save in hunting and fishing, loving also the labour of seafaring.”<sup>50</sup> Following this lead, modern ethnologists and ethno-historians, like Wicken, assert that the Mi’kmaq “were first and foremost fishers of the sea and not horticulturists or hunters.”<sup>51</sup> For all their vaunted skills at sea they “took very little, if any, part in the commercial cod fishery” when it became based by the French at Louisbourg or by New Englanders at Canso after 1713.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, there seemed a “basic contradiction between the subsistence activities of the eastern coast Mi’kmaq and the presence of an expanding off-shore fishery,”<sup>53</sup> as Wicken observed. Hoffman, the noted American ethnologist of the Mi’kmaq, believed that as much as 90 per cent of pre-contact Mi’kmaq subsistence came from seafood taken on the Atlantic coasts of Nova Scotia and at the river mouths.<sup>54</sup> “Fish, sea mammals, and other marine products were basic to the Micmac economy,” he wrote, “and that hunting activities became important and essential only during three months of the winter.”<sup>55</sup> Meat, largely a winter food, came principally from five important mammals, namely bear, moose, caribou, beaver, and racoon.<sup>56</sup>

Compared to tribes to the south and west, the Mi’kmaq economy was not horticultural it seems, even for the production of squash. Devoted to tobacco for healing and ceremonies, they appear to have grown it for themselves. Non-Mi’kmaq peoples in the lower St. John River Valley apparently also grew corn crops, but among the Mi’kmaq there is no evidence of a corn culture. If corn, the staple of native peoples from southern New England to the farthest reaches of South America, could not be raised in Nova Scotia, Acadian farmers demonstrated that other crops, such as wheat, barley, flax, and a great variety of

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48 Le Clercq, *New Relation of Gaspesia*, 274.

49 Denys, *Description Geographical and Historical of the Coasts of North America*, 2: 430.

50 Henry P. Biggar, ed., *Nova Francia: A Description of Acadia, by Marc Lescarbot* (London: Routledge, 1928), 3: 217.

51 Wicken, “Encounters,” 3.

52 Dickason, “Louisbourg and the Indians,” 82. 52. Wicken, “Encounters,” 180.

53 Wicken, “Encounters,” 180.

54 *Ibid.*, 280.

55 Bernard G. Hoffman, “Historical Ethnography of the Micmac of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1955), 142.

56 Bernard G. Hoffmann, *Cabot to Cartier. Sources for a Historiographical Ethnography of Northeastern North America, 1497-1550* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 214.



vegetables could be successfully grown, even in Cape Breton. In these, for several generations after contact, the Mi'kmaq appear to have had no interest in cultivating.

Wicken additionally characterizes the Mi'kmaq from the time of contact with Europeans around 1500 to the end of the French regime in Nova Scotia about 1760, as "dynamic and active agents in the events which moulded and shaped their communities."<sup>57</sup> If this is true, they must assume their share of the responsibility for their rapid decline under European contact. By trapping and hunting the beaver and other fur-bearing mammals for their pelts, Mi'kmaq not only turned away from certain aspects of their dependence on seafood but thereby opened themselves to becoming dependent on European foods, that frequently proved less nutritious, or even harmful to them. When some Mi'kmaq, as an example, were prevailed upon by French officials at Louisbourg to settle in Isle Royale, after the Mi'kmaq had declined earlier invitations as the game was so inadequate to their needs, they became almost wholly dependent on French provisions.<sup>58</sup>

Of the little research undertaken on the Mi'kmaq role in the pre-Confederation Nova Scotia economy, the failed truckhouse scheme of the early 1760s was the first to attract scholarly attention.<sup>59</sup> After treaties with various Mi'kmaq groups were signed in 1760-61, agents of the government and some of the Mi'kmaq determined together a table of prices to establish the barter rates at the truckhouses, a matter of great importance to the Mi'kmaq negotiators. These were based on the five shillings standard for a pound-weight of best spring beaver pelt. Equal to this standard were the skins of either one otter, martin, and mink, or ten muskrat. A bearskin and moose hide was worth one-and-a-third, and one-and-a-half pounds of spring beaver pelt, and the wildcat two pounds-weight of beaver pelt, and so on.<sup>60</sup>

The plan proved a fiasco. As early as 1732 a scheme had been proposed by the Nova Scotia council in Annapolis Royal. It requested Massachusetts to consider opening a truckhouse for Indian trade goods in the St. John River

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57 McGee, 20.

58 Dickason, "Louisbourg and the Indians," and Wicken, "Encounters."

59 Elizabeth Ann Hutton, "The Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia to 1834" (MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 1961) and her "Indian Affairs in Nova Scotia, 1760-1834," *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections* (1963): 33-54; R.O. Macfarlane, "British Indian Policy in Nova Scotia to 1760," *Canadian Historical Review* 19 (1938): 154-67, and "Indian Trade in Nova Scotia to 1764," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* (1934): 57-67, both of which derived from his "Indian Regulations in New England, 1620-1760: A Study of a Regulated Frontier" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1933); Leslie F.S. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists: White-Indian Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979).

60 Haliburton, 1: 233.

Valley, then a region disputed between Britain and France.<sup>61</sup> As Massachusetts already had a money-losing truckhouse system for trade with natives on its frontiers, and with the prospect of further costs from the Nova Scotia proposal, it rejected the scheme. In London, the idea also was rebuffed by the Board of Trade and Plantations. The matter was next considered in the 1752 Nova Scotia treaty with certain Mi'kmaq, the first such treaty to be concluded by the British authorities newly located at Halifax. The treaty anticipated the erection of a government trading post on the Shubenacadie River. For a second time the Board of Trade refused to sanction a monopoly. When a colonial statute in 1761 allowed truckhouses to be erected at the mouth of the St. John River, at Piziquid, Chignecto, and Annapolis Royal, among other sites, it was disallowed by London for, against long-standing British policy, the Act had created a government-sponsored monopoly. Whatever profits arising from this brief government-controlled trade with the Mi'kmaq were enjoyed only by those Halifax merchants who held the contract to supply the truckhouses with trade goods, and their suppliers in England. Their costs were met only in part by skins exchanged by the Mi'kmaq and Maleseet, and the balance by taxpayers in Nova Scotia. The experiment proved a costly failure, and did little to stimulate trade in skins. The Customs House data show a slight, brief surge in British imported furs from Nova Scotia, but only in 1763-64. None of the historians drawn to the matter discussed the quantity or types of pelts traded at the truckhouses. Rather, they concentrated on the political machinations of squabbling merchants who competed for the supposed lucrative monopoly.

Owing to the increasing loss over the control of their land principally from the large loyalist immigration, the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, by the 1790s, were in serious economic decline. An 1800 Nova Scotia legislature plan for their relief appointed a committee which recommended for the first time land grants to Mi'kmaq. Nothing came of the committee's proposals.<sup>62</sup> Mi'kmaq land petitions were thereafter routinely refused, while what land was actually allowed the Mi'kmaq was so rarely suitable for extensive agriculture that it merely bred further poverty.<sup>63</sup> In its place a system of land reserves was initiated in 1819. Land allocations again were made principally on land wholly unsuited to agri-

61 On 11 Sept. 1732 Paul Mascarene went to Boston to undertake the negotiations. Archibald M. MacMechan, ed., *Original Minutes of His Majesty's Council at Annapolis Royal, 1720-1739* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1908), 254.

62 William C. Wicken, "Mi'kmaq Land in Southwestern Nova Scotia, 1771-1823," in *Making Adjustments: Continuity and Change in Planter Nova Scotia 1759-1800*, ed. Margaret Conrad, 113-22 (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1991).

63 In 1842 Joseph Howe found that much of the 22,050 acres reserved for Mi'kmaq was of poor quality, and often situated away from streams with abundant fish. *Journals of the House of Assembly for 1843* (Halifax, 1844), Appendix 1, 6.

culture. Even these were encroached upon by Euro-American settlers, who, at least in Cape Breton, politicians described as “poor and ignorant people.”<sup>64</sup> So little concerned was the government with the increasingly desperate condition in which many of the remaining Mi'kmaq then lived, that, when in 1838 the Colonial Office inquired into the condition of aboriginals throughout the British empire, the Nova Scotia government did not even bother to respond.<sup>65</sup> By mid-century the colony's administration began the wholesale alienation of the remaining Indian-reserved lands,<sup>66</sup> even as it maintained statutes which detailed exactly how “Indian” land should be dealt with by the courts.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the economic plight of the Mi'kmaq absorbed the attention of humanitarians such as the former Royal Welsh Fusilier, Walter Bromley. He and many others had only encountered them loitering about the Halifax waterfront, sometimes drunk. Instead of scorning them as some visitors did, Bromley, in a series of public lectures and publications in Halifax and London, attempted to attract the attention of politicians and awaken in the public some sense of responsibility for the condition to which the Mi'kmaq had declined.<sup>68</sup> His efforts met failure, which Fingard has ascribed both to the colonial administration and to the independent behaviour or lack of cooperation on the part of the Mi'kmaq leadership.<sup>69</sup> Many visitors to Nova Scotia commented on the unwillingness of the Mi'kmaq to seek waged work, and occasionally described it as indolence.<sup>70</sup> They commented favourably on the women's skill in basket-making and decorating their wigwams and moc-

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64 As an example, in 1834 a legislative committee reported on encroachments made on Indian reserves established in Cape Breton only two years earlier. NSARM, RG1/430, #158. Committee to Lieutenant Governor Colin Campbell. NSARM, MG1/1889, F2/8 #187.

65 Upton, *Micmac and Colonists*, 89.

66 Theresa Redmond, “‘We cannot work without food:’ Nova Scotia Indian Policy and Mi'kmaq Agriculture, 1783-1867” (MA mémoire, Dept. of History, University of Ottawa, 1993), 26.

67 Stewart Campbell, et al., eds., *The Revised Statutes of Nova Scotia: Third Series* (Halifax: Compton, 1864).

68 Walter Bromley, *An Appeal to the Virtue and Good Sense of the Inhabitants of Great Britain, etc. in behalf of the Indians of North America* (Halifax, 1820), and his *An Account of the Aborigines of Nova Scotia called the Micmac Indians* (London, 1822).

69 Judith Fingard, “English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind: Walter Bromley in Nova Scotia, 1813-1825,” *Canadian Historical Review* 54 (1973): 123-51.

70 Robert Montgomery Martin, *History of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, the Sable Islands* (London, 1837), 19-20. He wrote “The wars between the rival contenders for the possession of Nova Scotia ... and above all ... the maddening use of spirituous liquors have swept off nearly every Indian from the face of the country, where he was once master, and but few (not one thousand) of the Mic-macs still exist. Indolent when not roused by the stimulus of hunger or revenge, the Indian dreams away life in a silent monotonous existence – his only wants are food, raiment, and shelter of the humblest kind; and within a few years more the remnant of this extraordinary specimen of the human race will have entirely passed away.”

casins with porcupine quills, and on the men's in building canoes and fashioning snowshoes or toboggans.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout these decades the Mi'kmaq retained the reputation as excellent marksmen "with the gun,"<sup>72</sup> and skilled hunters, who "get many valuable furs, which they exchange for blue and scarlet cloth ... also for rum and other spirituous liquors, to which they have become much addicted."<sup>73</sup> Occasionally their skills were employed as guides on hunting forays by well-off colonists, British officials, and military officers. Moose and caribou – elk had virtually become extinct in the late 1820s – were the most sought-after trophies. Moorsom believed that if these animals were "still frequently to be met with in the backwoods between Shelburne and Annapolis" their hunting in the late 1820s "is now dwindling into disuse."<sup>74</sup>

Long before mid-century, statutes were passed in the Nova Scotia legislature encouraging the killing of what was termed "noxious animals."<sup>75</sup> Quarter session, with the approval of the grand jury, was permitted under such statutes to publish rules and grant bounties to encourage the killing of bear, lynx, wildcat, and wolf.<sup>76</sup>

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- 71 "Their ingenuity appears to be limited to the composition of trifling articles of bark and porcupine's quills." Anthony Lockwood, *Brief Description of Nova Scotia* (London, 1818), 8. Lockwood also thought them "a useless, idle, filthy race" where attempts to "improve their condition ... even produce evil, by lessening their little energy, and teaching them to expect by begging what they ought to obtain by common industry." 7-8. Beamish Murdoch, the Halifax lawyer, modified his views between publishing *An Epitome of the Laws of Nova Scotia*, 4 vols (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1831- 2) and the *A History of Nova Scotia, or Acadie*, 3 vols (Halifax: James Barnes, 1865-7). In the first, he wrote: "It might with almost as much justice be said that the land belonged to the bears and wild cats, the moose or the cariboo ... as to the thin and scattered tribes of men, who were alternately destroying each other or attacking the beasts of the forest ... Much injustice however was done to those simple creatures by those who communicated to them the artificial vices of civilized society." 2: 57. In the second he expressed the belief that Mi'kmaq had "usually been honest, frank, brave and humane, and that they exhibited these qualities as well before as since their conversion to the Christian faith." Nor were they ignorant naked savages while their language was "so complete ... so musical and refined, as to lead to the inference that they had long been a civilized and thinking race of people," 1: 38-9.
- 72 John Robinson and Thomas Ripsin, *A Journey through Nova Scotia, Containing a Particular Account of the Country and its Inhabitants* (London, 1774). "They have no settled place of abode, but ramble about in the woods, and support themselves by hunting and fishing," 37.
- 73 Robinson & Ripsin, 39.
- 74 Britain imported some 680 elk skins from Nova Scotia in 1820-24, but only nine in the next thirty years. Haliburton reported in 1829 that the "Elks have long since disappeared." *Historical and Statistical Account*, 391.
- 75 William Scarfe Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia: Comprising Sketches of a Young Country* (London, 1830), 117.
- 76 For moose, see n37 above. For instance, 8 Vict. c. 47, *An Act to Encourage the Killing of Wolves* passed in March 1845. Earlier Acts passed in 1792 and 1796 had been allowed to lapse: 32 Geo. 3 c. 2 and 36 Geo. 3 c. 12. By 25 Vict. c. 22 the killing of otter, mink, or muskrat between 1 May and 1 November, and the killing any other animal "only valuable for its fur," between 15 March and 15 November was subject to a fine. The provisions of this Act did not

Both Mi'kmaq and colonists could participate in such schemes. At the same time, when statutes began to be passed for the protection of birds and eventually mammals, expressly exempted from these restrictions were "Indians and poor settlers,"<sup>77</sup> who could kill for their own use in any season. This was a clear acknowledgment that Mi'kmaq were not alone in the hunt for wild game, and for their furs, skins, or feathers. Beginning in 1858 such exemptions for both Mi'kmaq and the non-native poor were withdrawn.

Thus, however effective Mi'kmaq men were as hunters, by no means were they alone in supplying Nova Scotia's fur exports. The arrival of some 8,000 New England planters in the 1760s, to settle on land from which the Acadians had been deprived, were the initial rivals to the natives as hunters. Two decades later perhaps 21,000 loyalist refugees, one in seven of whom were freed blacks, and most of whom were very poor, created a second group of rivals in trapping and shooting commercial skins.

Overhunting by colonists in Maine at the end of the 1756-63 war was complained of by the Abenaki. "English hunters kill all the beaver they find ... which not only impoverishes many Indian families, but destroyed the breed of Beavers."<sup>78</sup> The colony of Massachusetts Bay, when dealing with such complaints by natives, passed laws from 1764 onwards in an unsupervised attempt to protect this part of aboriginals' livelihood.<sup>79</sup> No such Act ever became law in Nova Scotia, as no such complaints were ever voiced by the Mi'kmaq leadership in Nova Scotia. Yet they must have shared some of the feelings expressed by the Abenaki, for the identical problem arose with these two significant waves of American settlers. The problem in peninsular Nova Scotia and Cape Breton was not the sudden loss of beaver, for the beaver, as in Newfoundland, had never been plentiful there. Owing to their dwindling numbers, the Mi'kmaq were simply too few to think of dominating Nova Scotia's

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extend to bear, lynx, wildcat and wolves," whose destruction had first been encouraged by bounties in 1796. William Young, et al, eds. *The Revised Statutes of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nugent, 1851), 279.

77 The House of Assembly earlier expressed its concern with wildfowl, 34 Geo. 3 c. 4, *An Act for the Preservation of Partridges, and Blue-winged Ducks* and passed in 1794, established a closed season from 1 April to 1 August. This Act was the first to include the phrase "nothing in this Act shall extend, or be construed to extend, to any Indian, or other poor settler, who shall kill any partridge, or black duck, within the times herein before mentioned for his own use." 56 Geo. 3 c. 5, *An Act for the Preservation of Snipes and Woodcocks* passed in 1816, established a closed season between 1 March and 11 September. Indians and poor settlers were again excluded from its provisions.

78 Cited in *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, William Cronon, 106 (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983).

79 Governor Francis Bernard to the Massachusetts General Court, 5 June 1764. *Collections of the Maine Historical Society*, 2d ser. 13 [1909]: 337-8, 340, 344. Cited in *Dawnland Encounters: Indians and Europeans in Northern New England*, ed. Colin G. Calloway (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1991), 205-6.

fur trade, even during the 1770s, when unknown to them the trade was on the threshold of expansion. Unable to profit greatly from their limited success in the trade in the 1760s to 1775, they perhaps enjoyed a brief near-monopoly during the war with rebel America until 1783. The impact on the Mi'kmaq position in the fur trade, as elsewhere, became more threatened by the mid-1780s, with the loyalist refugee influx. Thus, owing principally to dwindling numbers of adult male hunters, after 1760 the disparate Mi'kmaq bands were poorly placed to undertake the very task assigned to them when the government briefly experimented with a system of truckhouses, especially established to facilitate the Indian trade.

There were two probable causes. The first is that serious overharvesting by the Mi'kmaq in the seventeenth century in territorial Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, especially of beaver, led directly to a sharp reduction in the number of fur-bearing species wanted by European importers. This showed up in the very modest exports of beaver pelts in the eighteenth century, whether through Louisbourg and Port Royal to France or Boston or later to London through Halifax itself. This frequently cited explanation lacks the least supporting evidence.

A different explanation, which is advanced here, is that the cause for Nova Scotia's modest level of fur exports arose as much from the inadequate number of native trappers and hunters as from supposed earlier excessive trapping or overhunting of fur-bearing animals. The Customs House ledgers which we have so frequently cited, make it clear that if the number of exported beaver pelts remained small, other species were not only more prolific but also remained so for at least three generations after 1760.

Modern studies suggest, for instance, that there was habitat enough for about 4,000 adult black bears in Nova Scotia at any one time from the pre-contact era to the beginning of extensive European settlement in the 1780s.<sup>80</sup> Yet few bearskins were exported in any one year. In the 105 years from 1749 to 1853, exports of only 107 black bearskins annually were recorded.<sup>81</sup> In addition some bearskins must have been retained in the colony for practical or decorative purposes. Haliburton termed this skin "the most valuable of any of the native animals, and when dressed with the shag on, is much used as a covering for sleighs, and many useful articles of apparel."<sup>82</sup> Clearly the potential annual harvest of bearskins remained much larger than the export data illus-

80 Charles J. Jonkel & Ian T. McCowan, *The Black Bear in the Spruce-Fir Forest* (Washington, DC: Wildlife Society, 1971; Wildlife Monographs #27), 40-1; A.W.F. Banfield, *The Mammals of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 320.

81 Some 6,931 between 1749 and 1809, and some 3,697 between 1810 and 1853 inclusive. Owing to the destruction by fire of the London Customs House, there are no data for 1813. PRO, CUST3/49-80, CUST17/1-30, CUST4/1-44.

82 Haliburton, *Historical and Statistical Account*, 2: 394.

trates, even after the legislature termed them noxious animals, and enabled counties, in the form of the grand jury, to grant bounties for their destruction, as we have seen.

Now, when the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq had the fur harvest pretty much to themselves during a period of tranquility, that is between 1763 through 1776 only 258 bearskins were exported from Nova Scotia – merely eighteen a year. Yet, with the arrival of the loyalist refugees, the number of bearskins exported annually rose dramatically. In the decades 1784-92 that were years of peace, and 1793-1815, years of war, the annual bearskin harvest was 269 and 130 respectively. It is more likely that the sharp increase in bearskins exported, when compared with 1763-1776, arose not from bear hunting by Mi'kmaq, but from successful hunting competition by Euro-American and poor black refugees. Some years later in the 1820s, Moorsom, whose sharp eye and attentive ear allowed him to make some interesting observations, remarked that “back-settlers frequently range in the woods in search of bears, which they also catch in strong steel traps.”<sup>83</sup>

Wildcat and lynx, mink and fox persisted to a degree similar to black bear despite the spread of agriculture and the destruction of habitat from deforestation, principally for shipbuilding and firewood. Nova Scotia emerged in the 1840s as the principal supplier, next to the Hudson's Bay region, of wildcat and lynx furs to the English market. Their destruction may have been occasioned by their being declared, along with bears and wolves, as “noxious animals.” Some details for 1810 through 1853 are supplied in Table 6.

Earlier, for instance, in the thirty-one years from 1750 through 1780, when Britain absorbed an annual average of 11,300 wildcat skins, Nova Scotia supplied an annual average of only 190, a mere 1.7 per cent of the total. From 1810 onwards the relative rise in Nova Scotia's importance in supplying Britain with wildcat and lynx skins was a matter not of unlimited supplies from Nova Scotia but the effect of the virtual disappearance of wildcat imported from Canada, through overhunting in the 1830s. Haliburton in 1829 stated that lynx were caught by settlers “in steel traps, baited with the carcass of a lamb.”<sup>84</sup> By the late-1820s Moorsom believed that besides moose, caribou, and the black bear, the only other fur-bearing animal in Nova Scotia “deemed worthy of a bullet” was the wildcat, which was hunted by the colonists “only as nuisance or by the Indian for the sake of the skin.”<sup>85</sup> He failed to notice the importance of trapping mink and fox.

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83 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, 124.

84 Haliburton, *Historical and Statistical Account*, 2: 395.

85 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, 125.



**Table 6. British Imports of Wildcat and Lynx Skins, 1810-53 (annual average)**

	Nova Scotia	British	America
	1	2	1 / 2
1810-19	188	4,168	4.5%
1820-29	584	10,982	5.3
1830-39	366	8,264	4.4
1840-49	725	27,137	2.7
1850-53	668	11,117	6.0

Sources: PRO, CUST4/1-48, CUST15/114-33.

In statistical terms, the fur trade in Nova Scotia was much more significant in the first half of the nineteenth century than at any time in the eighteenth. Miller was mistaken when she wrote that Nova Scotia's fur trade "dropped after 1780"<sup>86</sup> and "came to an end in the late eighteenth century."<sup>87</sup> As a further example of the continued and increasing success of the Nova Scotia fur and skin trade, when measured by the total fur exports from British North America, Nova Scotia remained a prominent supplier of both mink and fox fur to the British Isles. For instance, when British North America is taken as a whole from the 1820s to the early 1850s, Nova Scotia's share of mink and fox exports to Britain was 23 per cent, when some 175,700 mink skins and 128,400 fox skins were exported from Nova Scotia's ports.<sup>88</sup>

Nova Scotia exported only very modest numbers of mink, whose skins were much prized, in the 1750s and 1760s. Thereafter, from the 1770s through the first decade of the nineteenth century, a steady rise in mink skin exports was recorded. In some years almost 9 per cent of total British mink imports were shipped from Nova Scotia, as Table 7 indicates.

When we consider Great Britain's imports of Nova Scotia's fox furs the same trend is observed. Fox fur into the British market from Nova Scotia was far more significant in the first half of the nineteenth century than at any earlier time. From at least 1810 onwards about one in five fox furs imported by Great Britain from British North America was shipped from Nova Scotia. Details are contained in Table 8.

86 Miller, "The Micmac: A Maritime Woodland Group," in *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, ed. Morrison & Wilson, 347.

87 Miller, "The Micmac," 340.

88 The annual average between 1820 and 1853 was 5,303, compared with 109,515 mink skins or an average of 1,856 annually in the fifty-nine years between 1750 and 1808.

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**Table 7. British Imports of Mink Fur, 1750-1853 (annual average)**

	from Nova Scotia	Great Britain World Imports		from BNA	
	1	2	1 / 2	3	1 / 3
1750-9	142	13,134	1.1%	—	—
1760-9	550	19,509	2.8	—	—
1770-9	1,750	24,344	7.2	—	—
1780-9	2,246	25,618	8.8	—	—
1790-9	2,939	47,361	6.2	—	—
1800-9	3,487	38,348	9.1	—	—
1810-19*	2,235	—	—	9,056	24.7
1820-9	4,422	—	—	16,138	27.4
1830-9	5,966	—	—	28,972	20.6
1840-49	5,520	—	—	36,773	15.0
1850-3	6,946	—	—	33,387	20.8

\*Data for 1813 are missing.

Sources: PRO, CUST3/50-72, CUST4/1-44, CUST16/1, CUST17/1-30.

**Table 8. British Imports of Fox Fur, 1750-1853 (annual average)**

	from Nova Scotia	Great Britain World Imports		from BNA	
	1	2	1 / 2	3	1 / 3
1750-9	21	14,276	0.1%	—	—
1760-9	51	17,181	0.3	—	—
1770-9	329	16,444	2.0	—	—
1780-9	560	21,250	2.6	—	—
1790-9	1,045	34,315	3.0	—	—
1800-9	1,231	30,277	4.1	—	—
1810-19*	1,716	—	—	9,950	17.2
1820-29	3,044	—	—	14,480	21.0
1830-39	3,600	—	—	15,603	23.1
1840-49	4,534	—	—	23,207	19.5
1850-53	4,152	—	—	20,642	20.1

\*Data for 1813 are missing.

Sources: PRO, CUST3/50-72, CUST4/1-44, CUST16/1, CUST17/1-30.

Nova Scotia's annual harvest of other species remained an unimportant share of Britain's worldwide fur imports. As to the supply of beaver pelts and deerskins, the two most numerous items annually imported by Britain, Nova Scotia's contribution remained insignificant. Though deer flourished in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, the trade in their skins was directed to the domestic

hide market rather than exported to Britain. There were so few wolves found in Nova Scotia by 1749 that less than six a year were exported in the next hundred and five years, to 1853. Declared noxious animals, with bounties on their heads, what wolves were found in the colony arrived from New Brunswick through the Isthmus of Chignecto. Though British imports of Nova Scotia's marten, muskrat, and otter furs expanded from the 1780s onwards, marten skins never exceeded 3 per cent of British annual imports, nor muskrat and otter 2 per cent. Thus, before the 1850s, it was never the absence of fur-bearing animals in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton that constituted the principal concern for Mi'kmaq hunters, but, it seems, the rivalry for pelts from so-called "poor settlers."

### **Conclusion**

It is clear from evidence gathered here that despite what some have thought, Nova Scotia's fur trade continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century. This occurred during a generally buoyant and expanding world market for all sorts of furs and skins from the late-sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Of the world's annual fur that was traded across borders and the high seas during this era, Great Britain and France imported the vast bulk. With the conquest of Canada in 1760, Great Britain became predominant. The emergence of the United States of America, whose own exploitation of furs greatly expanded for some decades after the end of the American War of Independence in 1783, did not give birth to an important new rival market. Rather, most American furs were shipped to London, which remained the world's fur and skin emporium. However important to shippers, fur traders, and furriers, and to the merchants who supplied the merchandise and provisions used in the trade, the international value of the skin trade remained insignificant when compared with other staples such as fish, sugar, tea, tobacco, cotton, and a variety of agricultural and wood products.

Being among the first peoples of North America to make contact with Europeans, the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton were well-placed to profit from the trade in skins. Their trade may have prospered in the initial decades, but the absence of statistical evidence leaves the question open.

After 1600 two markets emerged in Acadie-Nova Scotia by mid-century: the original market in France and the Basque port towns of France and Spain, and a newer one, from the 1620s, in New England, where furs and skins were annually re-exported to England. Contemporary evidence, especially in the form of brief references in the published accounts of the region by French authors, indicates that much of the furs exported from Acadie originated, not in Cape Breton and peninsular Nova Scotia, but came from the St. John River watershed, the region's only significant river system between the Hudson and the St. Lawrence. Fur exchanged at Louisbourg arose from a small and irreg-

ular trade with Acadie. When Cape Breton became an independent colony in 1784, recorded fur exports described seriously limited prospects.

Though details of exports from Nova Scotia began to be reported regularly, once Halifax was established in 1749, the problem of the origin of the furs remains unsolved. Of the total annual British fur imports from Nova Scotia, we remain ignorant of what proportions were traded by Mi'kmaq inhabiting Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, or by Maleseet or Mi'kmaq inhabiting New Brunswick, or by Euro-American colonists who began the resettlement of Nova Scotia, especially in the 1760s and 1780s. If we examine New England fur imports for 1768-72, most came from what later became New Brunswick. Once the Nova Scotia market in New England closed abruptly in 1775, the great bulk of Nova Scotia's fur exports to London originated, at least from 1784, from within the colony itself.

It is thus fair to conclude that the Mi'kmaq, owing to war, until 1760 played but a small role in supplying fur to the British market. Fur was a marginal aspect of Nova Scotia's very restricted economy. When the Mi'kmaq had a virtual monopoly in the Nova Scotia fur trade in the short interval of peace 1764-75, they generated little for the international market. The bulk of the so-called Nova Scotia furs between 1764 and 1776 originated in what became New Brunswick. This arose through the labour, not of the Mi'kmaq, but of the Maleseet and others. In this way the evidence displayed here indicates that the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton probably played a less significant role in the harvesting of so-called Nova Scotia fur, than might otherwise have been assigned them.

If beaver was the king of North American furs owing to the felt hat industry in Europe, the records indicate that Nova Scotia was deficient in beaver by the 1740s, and perhaps much earlier. As this condition did not change for the next century, there were never many beaver for the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia or for anyone else to trap. Of the fur-bearing species which continued to thrive in Nova Scotia, few were harvested before the 1780s, when the Mi'kmaq had been best positioned to dominate both trapping and hunting.

The problem was less a shortage of suitable wildlife, but more of the failure of Mi'kmaq hunters and trappers to dominate the trade. A sharp and steady decline in the number of Mi'kmaq hunters and trappers, able to provide furs and skins for the trade, was the more probable cause of Nova Scotia's apparently very modest fur exports before the 1780s. There were even too few Mi'kmaq hunters to provide adequate food for their own people. During the twenty-five years after the Mi'kmaq signed the 1760-61 treaties they ceased to be self-sufficient in food.

Nova Scotia's fur trade did not end after the 1780s, as historians have hitherto believed, but thrived on a greatly expanded scale from the 1780s into the 1850s. This enlarged fur and skin harvest in the 1780s occurred simultaneously

with a rapid expansion of the colony's non-native population and the absolute decline of the Mi'kmaq's own numbers. The increased fur exports occurred simultaneously with the aggressive clearing of land for agriculture and the felling of forests for the export lumber industry and to meet an accelerated demand for shipbuilding. These twin pressures implied that animal habitats were under threat or were vanishing altogether, and hence the number of marketable mammals ought steadily to have diminished. Under these pressures both the wolverine in Nova Scotia and the eastern mountain lion or cougar, both always a very rare item in the trans-Atlantic fur trade, became extinct. Of the fur-bearing mammals important to Nova Scotia's fur exports only the fisher became extinct, but not until the 1920s.<sup>89</sup>

Until the 1780s there were very few non-native colonists involved as trappers contributing to Nova Scotia's commerce in furs and skins. Very few Euro-Americans possessed the incentive or the skills needed to trap and hunt commercially marketable fur-bearing mammals and prepare the pelts for market. If they shot deer for venison and skinned the animal, the hides, when not used for their domestic needs, entered the local hide market. The international market in 1764-75 saw the British, on average, annually import 372,300 deer skins. Efforts by Mi'kmaq and poor Nova Scotia settlers together managed to supply only seven such deer skins annually in those same dozen years. Nor were the Mi'kmaq taking seals in such numbers as to make a significant contribution to the growing international demand. When in 1764-75 Britain imported annually 36,366 sealskins, Nova Scotia supplied only twenty-two. There were no longer Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia to match the great walrus and seal hunters written about by awestruck European observers in the seventeenth century. Later when Nova Scotia's annual total of sealskin exports rose, most were imported from Newfoundland. Thus it was not from over-harvesting of seal on Nova Scotia's coasts that was the cause, it was either the loss of necessary skill by the Mi'kmaq, the loss of access to the coasts, or the very limited number of adult male Mi'kmaq available to mount an annual hunt. As far as Nova Scotia was concerned before 1800, both species were hunted in commercially insignificant numbers in Nova Scotia.

In the face of the expressed concern over the dwindling number of Mi'kmaq – they may have numbered only about 350 families by the 1820s – and doubt even about their ability to survive, how are we to account for the great growth in British imports of Nova Scotia skins from the mid-1780s onwards? Either Mi'kmaq hunters became increasingly more efficient in trapping and hunting their prey, as the size of Nova Scotia's skin exports expanded from the 1780s onwards, or poor settlers in considerable numbers were competing successfully with Mi'kmaq trappers and hunters for commercially

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89 Banfield, *Mammals of Canada*, 305.

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valuable skins. The evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive that this is exactly what happened after the arrival of loyalist refugees in 1783-84, Scots highlanders from 1803 in Cape Breton, and Irish after 1815. All of them, except for a few loyalist gentry and merchants, were poor and remained so. Most would look to any means to add to their household income or food supply. This could mean snaring rabbits and hares – Britain imported large quantities of both species from Nova Scotia in some years. It could mean shooting a moose or a couple of deer. It could mean purchasing steel traps of the right sort at the local general store, and then repaying the cost with dressed fur, as in the case of the general store at Horton Landing from 1773 to 1796.<sup>90</sup> I conclude that as there were so few Mi'kmaq males available to hunt, it is probable that the annual commercial pelt harvest from the 1780s, when in Nova Scotia it grew to unprecedented volumes, was increasingly carried on by non-natives, the so-called poor settlers. Such activity eventually caused concern for the depleted numbers of fur-bearing animals; the alarm first sounded in Cape Breton and then in peninsular Nova Scotia, and became a political issue only in the 1850s.

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90 NSARM, MG1/223-224, MG1/236. Mancke, "At the Counter of the General Store," in *Intimate Relations*, ed. Conrad, 167-81.