

Hudson's Bay Colony



HUDSON'S BAY

INCORPORATED 2 MAY 1670

When two French adventurers (Groseilliers and Radisson) heard from a Cree source that the best fur country could be found northwest of Lake Superior bordering a "frozen sea," they sought permission to explore the area and establish a fur trading post. They were denied permission from the French governor who wanted to keep the trade along the St Lawrence River.

Undeterred, the two Frenchmen reached out to colonial Boston merchants for help in financing their expedition to the frozen sea which turned out to be Canada's Hudson Bay. Their speculative voyage failed when their ship ran into pack ice in Hudson Strait. They were encouraged to go to England for further financing and eventually gained the support of Prince Rupert who introduced them to his cousin, the reigning King Charles II.

With English support, two ships were acquired: the Nonesuch, captained by Zachariah Gillam (a 6th great-grand uncle of my niece's husband) and the Eaglet. They both left port from Deptford, England but the Eaglet was forced to turn back just past Ireland. The Nonesuch continued alone and was successful in reaching Hudson Bay where, in 1668 the first fort (named after King Charles) was constructed on Hudson Bay from which the expedition initiated the fur trade. It was Captain Gillam who reportedly made the treaty with the Indians and purchased the land (to be known as Rupert's Land).

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was incorporated in 1670 and functioned for the next 200 years as a kind of de facto

government in parts of North American until it sold the land it owned to Canada as part of the Deed of Surrender. While a fur trading business for most of its existence, HBC now owns and operates retail stores in Canada including Saks Fifth Avenue and Saks Off 5th.

As for Captain Gillam, he continued his seagoing experiences until 1682 until, while aboard the Prince Rupert, a severe storm caused his ship to drag anchor and drift out to sea. She was crushed by the ice and sank. All nine men aboard, including the captain, were drowned.

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