



Fur Trade

Discover important people,
places and things associated
with the fur trade.

School Resource Kit
Central Michigan University
Museum of Cultural and Natural History

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Introduction to this Kit

This School Resource Kit focuses on the tools of the fur trade. This booklet also briefly discusses important places, conflicts and people associated with the fur trade. With this kit, students will gain an introduction to one of the forces that created a relationship between European traders and Native Americans. After experiencing this kit, students will have the ability to name key items and events related to the fur trade. Students will be able to recognize some basic lasting influences of the fur trade. Students will also be able to name some positive and negative aspects of the fur trade in early American and Michigan history.

This kit includes numerous artifacts related to the fur trade. Each artifact is labeled clearly with a number. This booklet will serve as a manual which shows a picture of the actual artifact, gives the number of that artifact (which can be referenced to the number on the artifact). The fur trade was one of the early influences of Michigan history which is partially responsible for the way things are today.

This school resource kit is designed to help meet educational standards of history in the classroom. Included in this booklet is a list of the educational standards which this kit meets.



The Care of School Resource Kits

Each School Resource Kit is comprised of authentic, historic artifacts and modern reproductions. Nevertheless, every item in a kit is meant to be handled or touched, unless it is sealed in plastic.

There are a few “rules-of-thumb” when it comes to using and caring for a School Resource Kit.

Allow people to touch the objects and pass them around, but remind them that some items are delicate and may break if they are not careful.

If an item is in plastic, please leave it in the plastic. But let students pass the plastic package around to closely inspect the item.

There are some items in certain kits that may be considered weapons in your school; be aware of your school’s policy regarding weapons and take appropriate action (i.e. inform the principal, leave it at home).

Remind students that these items have been specially chosen for “hands on.” In any museum, items on display should never be touched unless a museum staff member invites you to touch them.

If an item is damaged, please gather all the pieces into a plastic bag and return it with the kit.

If you find an item is missing or is damaged, please inform the museum’s student staff when you return the kit.

Why do we ask you not to touch? The oils, dirt and moisture from your fingertips can stain textiles and etch metals, permanently changing them. One touch may not seem like much, but hundreds of touches in a year can wear a hole in a cotton dress or a notch in a wooden axe handle.

Ask students to look closely at the materials used to make these historic objects; look at their colors and decorations; feel how light or heavy they are; are they made by hand or machine; would they have been used by adults or children, women or men? How would these things be made today? Would we even have use of these items today?

Michigan Educational Standards

Strand I Historical Perspective

Standard I.1 Time and Chronology

All students will sequence chronologically the following eras of American history and key events within these eras in order to examine relationships and to explain cause and effect: The Meeting of Three Worlds (beginnings to 1620); Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763); Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1815); Expansion and Reform (1801-1861); and Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877); The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900); The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930); The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945); Post War United States (1945-1970); and Contemporary United States (1968-present).

Standard I.2 Comprehending the Past

All students will understand narratives about major eras of American and world history by identifying the people involved, describing the setting, and sequencing the events.

Standard I.4 Judging Decisions from the Past

All students will evaluate key decisions made at critical turning points in history by assessing their implications and long-term consequences.

Strand II Geographic Perspective

Standard II.1 Diversity of People, Places, and Cultures

All students will describe, compare, and explain the locations and characteristics of places, cultures, and settlements.

Standard II.2 Human/Environment Interaction

All students will describe, compare, and explain the locations and characteristics of ecosystems, resources, human adaptation, environmental impact, and the interrelationships among them.

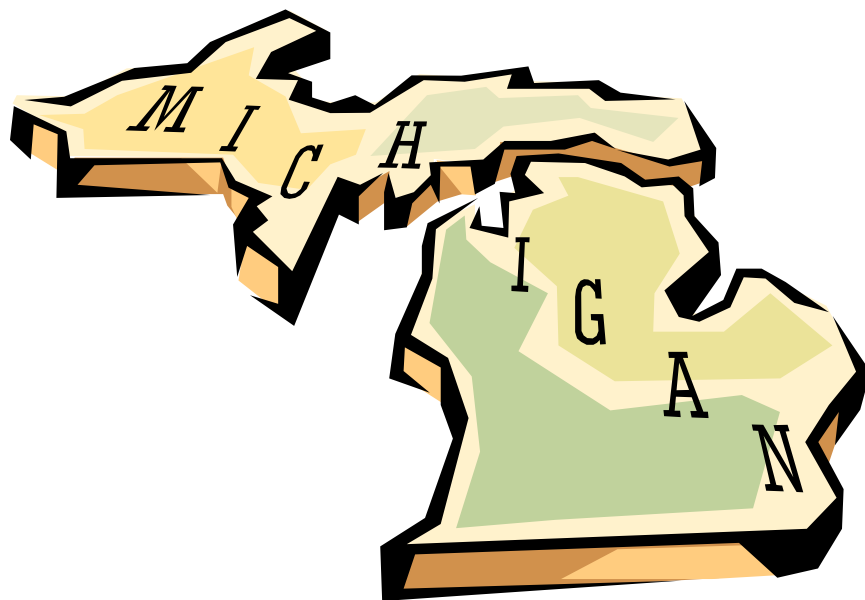
Standard II.3
Location, Movement, and Connections

All students will describe, compare, and explain the locations and characteristics of economic activities, trade, political activities, migration, information flow, and the interrelationships among them.

Strand IV
Economic Perspective

Standard IV.5
Trade

All students will describe how trade generates economic development and interdependence and analyze the resulting challenges and benefits for individuals, producers, and government .



Introduction to the Michigan Fur Trade

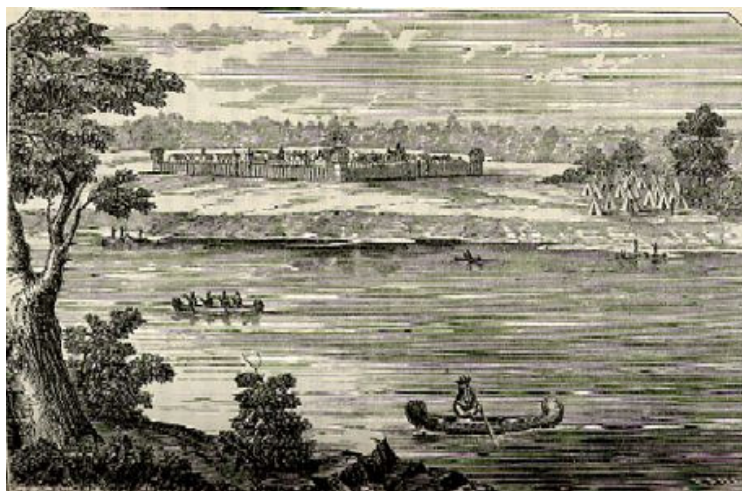
The fur trade was an important part of the early history of Michigan. It is important to understand the reason furs were so important to the early economy. This being that luxury commodities were in high demand and were therefore the first important items of trade. Furs could be made into luxurious garments worn by the aristocrats of Europe.

Three Important Forts in Michigan

There were several forts established in Michigan that were important to the fur trade. Forts were places where fur traders could gather and re-supply themselves as well as sell their fur pelts. Fort de Buade built in 1683 was the first fort established that had strong ties to the fur trade. In its most successful days the fur trading post was run by the Frenchman Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac. This fort was most likely a wooden stockade, no remains have been identified as of late. It was probably located in the current site of St. Ignace.

Cadillac decided to move his post to present day Detroit due to conflicts with missionaries. He then established Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit, or Fort Detroit in 1701. It was built on the Detroit river. The goal of the fort was to stop the western movement of the British who were constantly in conflict with the French and to monopolize the fur trade in North America. Cadillac was removed from control in 1712.

Next, the French built the third important fort near present day Mackinac City called Fort Michilimackinac. It was built primarily for fur trading purposes. The fort was part of a larger French fur trade post system.



Fort Detroit in 1705

Three Conflicts Involving the Fur Trade

The Fur Trade contributed to many conflicts in its history. The Beaver Wars of the mid to late 1600's were a result of competition between the Iroquois and other Algonquin Nations to control territory and access to European markets. This is considered one of the most violent conflicts in American History.

In the French and Indian War lasting officially from 1756 to 1763, conflicts between the French and British concerning territory trading posts contributed to the outbreak of war. The Native Americans became involved due to their ignored claims to territory also concerning the fur trade. The British eventually won the war and in the Treaty of Paris, control of all forts and fur trading posts was given up to the British.

The conflict that eventually led to the War of 1812 was also fueled by conflicts of the fur trade. This mainly had to do with British traders on American soil. Some British traders were not even aware that they were on American territory. Others continued to trade, angering American traders. British presence in the trade was enough to further aggravate the situation leading to the War of 1812. The Fur Trade sustained a large booming period until about 1830 when it moved west.



This is a re-created image of Fort Michilimackinac.

Important People of the Fur Trade

John Jacob Astor was born in Germany but moved to the United States in the year 1784. He founded the American Fur Company in 1808. His company traded mostly with China and as a result Astor became extremely rich. In 1822 he established the Astor House near Mackinac where he set up the new headquarters for his company which now had two subdivisions beneath it. He was successful in monopolizing the fur trade until about 1830 when he pulled out to invest solely in real estate, more specifically, he bought land in Manhattan. Astor was estimated to be worth about 20 million dollars when he died in 1848, he was the richest person in the United States at that time. Also, his grandson, John Jacob Astor IV was among the casualties of the Titanic disaster.

Madame La Framboise was a woman in this time that was able to do well in the fur trade. She was born to a French-Canadian father and an Ottawa mother. This type of ancestry produces a person considered a Metis. There were many children born into this Metis category as a result of the fur trade. La Framboise became an independent trader for at least 14 years. She was a prominent figure in Mackinac Island society where she lived and also donated land.

Antoine Laumet de LaMothe Cadillac first was appointed to oversee actions at Fort De Buade. Next he was able to establish another fort known as Fort Detroit. Cadillac is credited as being the founder of Detroit. He was later dismissed from his position at the fort in 1710 when it became clear he was using his power for personal gain. He became governor of Louisiana for some time. He died in 1730. His name still lives on in Michigan in the city of Cadillac and in GM's luxury line of automobiles.



This is a monument representing Cadillac's arrival in Detroit in 1701. It is located downtown in Hart Plaza.

This is the house of Madame La Framboise.



Beaver Pelt

E97.20

Many types of furs were harvested for the fur trade, but it was the fur of the beaver that drove the market. It set the standard of trade and was the hide most sought after by traders because European fashion had grown fond of hats made from it. The thick, soft under hair was removed from the pelts, pressed into felt sheets and formed into hats. As a result of the fur trade, the population of the beaver became extremely scarce due to over hunting.



Native Americans were usually responsible for trapping and hunting the animals of the fur trade. The most expensive pelts were ones that had been previously slept on by the natives because oils from the body made the pelt softer. They then traded with European or later American traders who then sold the furs to Europe.



After a beaver was trapped, it was skinned, its hide stretched, cleaned of remaining meat and fat and then allowed to dry. The hides were not tanned. The dried, oval skin of the beaver was called a pelt.



Included in this kit is an actual beaver pelt. It was trimmed to a smaller size so that it would fit the box.

Possible Questions for Students

1. Have you ever seen an animal pelt before?

Trade Gun

(Picture only)
(Trade Gun Items)

Through much of the 1700's, the flintlock musket was a major trade item and it quickly displaced the bow and arrow as an instrument of hunting and war. The trade gun proved to be one of the trader's best items. It cost the native trader many furs to acquire and then required constant maintenance in that it always needed powder, shot, flints and parts to replace the ones that broke. The gun and its supplies provided the trader with repeat customers.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Does your family go hunting?
2. What do they hunt?
3. What kinds of things would traders use guns for?

Powder Horn

E92.95

(Trade Gun Items)



This is the artifact enclosed in the kit.

This powder horn would have carried gun powder that was needed in the use of a musket. This type of a container was most often made from the horn of a cow or Buffalo.



This is another example.

Possible Questions for Students

1. Where would one find gunpowder?
2. Do you think that a trader would go to a fort to get this kind of item?

Musket Ball & Shot

E97.22 & E97.23

(Trade Gun Items)

The musket ball is a form of ammunition used before the bullet. It was usually made of lead. This musket ball is made for a .75 cal musket. A flintlock loaded with a musket ball was effective in taking large game like deer, elk etc. The musket ball was ideal for hunting beavers for their pelts because it left less scarring on the pelt itself. This was desirable because the quality of the pelt was important.



The small BB-like pellets are called shot and when loaded into a smooth bore musket, allow it to be used as a shotgun. When the musket is loaded with shot it becomes effective at taking small game like squirrels, rabbits, ducks and geese.

Possible Questions For Students

1. Do you know why beaver pelt hunters preferred to use one musket ball instead of lots of small shot?
2. Where do traders go to get supplies like this?

Gunflint

E.97.24 & E 97.25

(Trade Gun Items)

These pieces of flint are part of what makes a gun work. The flint, held in the jaws of the gun's hammer, struck a steel plate called a frizzen on the musket when the trigger was pulled. This caused a spark that ignited a small charge of gunpowder that in turn ignited the main charge which causes the gun to fire. French gunflint was generally an amber color while English gunflint was generally gray colored.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Why do you think that France and Brittan had different kinds of flint?
2. Do you think this might be because of conflicts between the two countries?
3. Do you think there was lots of competition in the fur trade?
4. Can you tell what kind of gunflint is pictured on the right? English or French?

Flint and Steel

E97.26a-b

(Metal Trade Tools)

When flint and steel are struck together, sparks are generated. The sparks were caught on a partially burnt piece of cloth called “char” cloth. Blowing on the sparks caused them to glow brighter and to spread across the char cloth. At this point, the tinder was introduced and the glowing ember was nurtured into flame by continuing to gently blow on it.

Flint



Steel



Possible Questions for Students

1. Why do you think it was important for a trader traveling in the wilderness to be able to create a fire?
2. What kinds of things would a trader use fire for?
3. Do we use fire or heat for similar things today?

Skinning Knife

H69.399

(Metal Trade Tools)



Metal knives were valued trade items. This knife has a rounded tip because it is designed for taking the skin off animals such as deer and beaver. The rounded tip prevents it from cutting into the skin too deeply which would ruin a good hide or pelt.

This is a modern day example of a skinning knife.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Why do you think it was important for traders to carry knives?
2. Can you name some other uses of knives?

Axe Head (aka. "Hawk" head)

E 97.27

(Metal Trade Tools)



This is a common style axe head of the period. It was attached to a wooden handle. Trade axes like this were made to be properly balanced. This way, they could be thrown quite accurately to hit a target. This style of axe is also called a belt axe or tomahawk.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Have you ever seen an axe before?
2. What other uses to axes have?

Metal Awl

E97.28

(Metal Trade Tools)



An awl is a tool used simply to poke holes in things. The common use of an awl were to poke holes in leather when sewing. Sinew (deer tendon) could then be pushed and drawn through holes to secure the seams. Awls were also used to poke holes in birch bark when making a container or on a larger scale, a canoe. Awls of metal replaced awls made of bone.



These are modern day examples of awls.

Possible Questions for Students

1. Who do you think used this tool the most?
2. What do you think it was used for most often?

Fish Hook

E97.29

(Metal Trade Tools)

Produced by blacksmiths, the metal hook replaced fish hooks made of bone and wood. Note: These hooks are similar to modern hooks only there is no hole on the tip of the shank.



Fishhooks were essential to the fur trader. This is because fishhooks were a tool used to catch fish. A fur trapper or trader could be out in the wilderness for an extended period of time. This means he would have needed to provide himself with food. Catching fish with fish hooks was an important source of food for survival.

Possible Questions for Students

1. Have you ever been fishing?
2. Have you ever eaten fish?
3. What kind of bait did you use for fishing?
4. Do you think fur trappers used the same type of bait?

Metal Pot

E88.12a-b

(Metal Trade Tools)



Pots were made of brass, copper, tin and iron. One style of brass kettle was made to contain multiple kettles. This was accomplished by making each kettle a little smaller than the last. This way, the kettles were able to nest within each other so multiple sizes of kettles could more easily be transported for different cooking needs. Not only would a fur trader need to catch food for himself, he would also need to cook it too. This is why the kettle is an important item in the fur trade.

This is an example of modern day nesting pots. These are used by campers in the wilderness today.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Have you ever been camping?
2. How did you cook your food when you went camping?

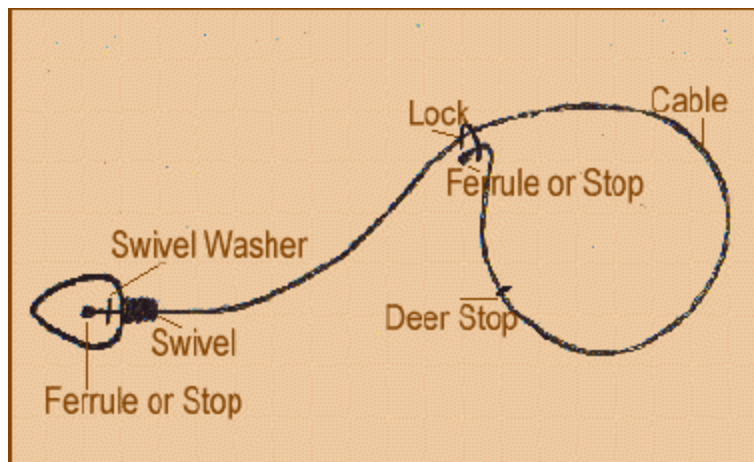
Snare Wire

E97.30

(Metal Trade Tools)



Brass wire was sometimes used for snaring, or capturing animals. Unlike string or cord made from plant, bark, or animal fibers this metal wire was more effective for trapping animals. This is because animals could not chew through the wire.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Do you think that using wire was a good way to catch animals?
- 2.

Glass Chevron Bead

E97.31

(Personal Adornment)



Beads made of glass were an extremely popular trade item. Large beads, similar to this one called a chevron bead, were strung into necklaces. Often times, many strings of these of these large beads were worn by one individual.



Possible Questions for Students

1. Do you have any beads like this?
2. Where did you get them?
3. Where would you find beads like this today?

Glass Seed Beads

E97.32

(Personal Adornment)



Later into the fur trade era, tiny beads like these called seed beads, became popular. These were sewn onto clothing, bags, knife sheaths, etc. for added decoration. They tended to take the place of porcupine quills and moose hair.



These are modern day seed beads.

Possible Questions for Students

1. Are beads used for similar purposes today?
2. Where do you see beads like this?
3. Is anyone in class wearing beads today?

Trade Silver

(Beaver Pendant)
E97.33
(Personal Adornment)



Items of silver, such as brooches, crosses, medallions, arm bands and gorgets were highly valued trade items. Silversmiths soon learned to copy many of the totemic symbols of there Indian customers. This was not because the silversmiths understood the symbolism, but because the silver sold more easily this way.



This is a replication of a trade silver arm band.

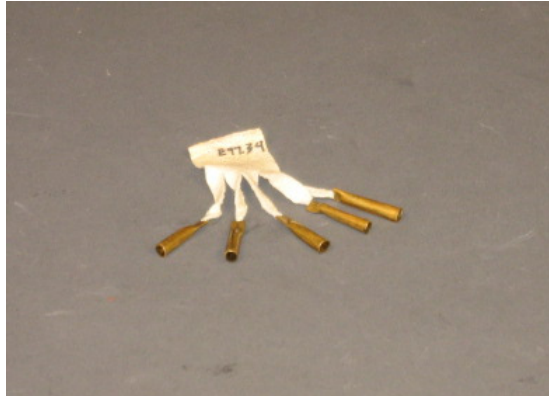
Possible Questions for Students

1. Do you have any silver jewelry?
2. What else is made of silver that you can think of?
3. Is silver still used in buying and selling things in today's world?

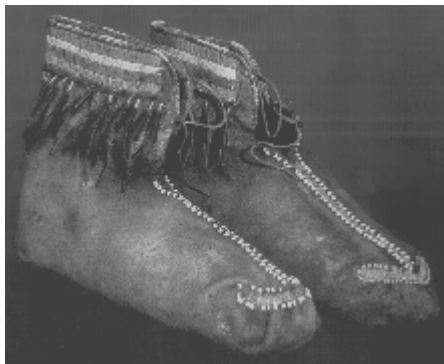
Brass Tinkling Cones

E 97.34

(Personal Adornment)



These small, brass comes were attached to fringe on garments and moccasins. When a person moved, the small cones would contact each other and jingle. These were often made by the Indians themselves by cutting up old brass kettles that were no longer serviceable. These brass comes are attached to a small piece of brain tanned leather to simulate the fringe on a leather garment.



These are two examples of tinkling cones used to decorate clothing.

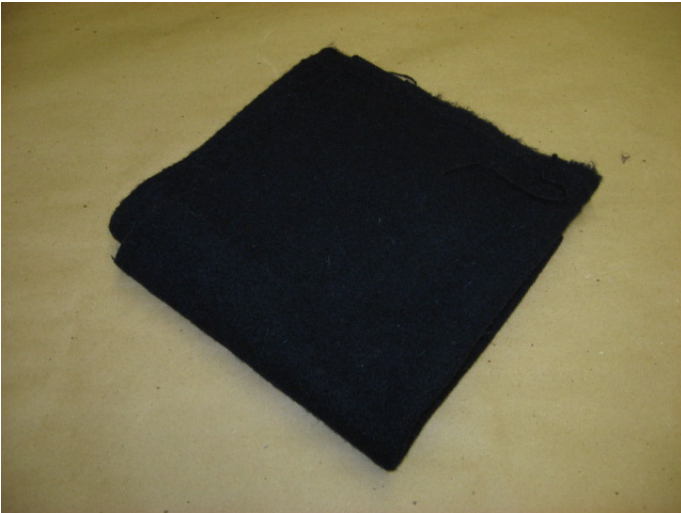
Possible Questions for Students

1. Do you wear things that jingle?
2. What kinds of things?

Trade Cloth & Trade Blanket

E97.35 & E92.105

(Cloth Goods)



The earliest wool trade cloth received in North America came from France and England. Many of the woolens traded in America were made in Stroudwater, Gloucester, England. It was called 'strouding' and was usually dyed scarlet red or dark navy blue.

Blankets made of wool became trademarks of the fur trade era. Many blankets came marked with a series of black lines called points. Initially, each black line or point indicated the number of beaver pelts required in trade for the blanket. Today these points represent the size of the blanket. Blankets were often worn as robes or shawls for added warmth. They were also often cut and stitched into other items such as coats called capotes, leggings to protect the legs, or bags to carry supplies.



Possible Questions for Students

1. When do you use a blanket?
2. Why do you think they were important to traders?

Credits

This School Resource Kit was created by:
Christina Pellerito

We acknowledge the use of materials from the following sources:

<http://www.turtletrack.org>

<http://library.osu.edu>

<http://pages.globetrotter.net>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/antoine-laumet-de-la-mothe-sieur-de-cadillac>

<http://homepages.rootsweb.com>

<http://www.mountainsofstone.com>

<http://www.savvysurvivor.com/snare1.gif>

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

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School Resource Kit Evaluation Form

Name of Kit: _____

Kit Use:

- ___ Mid Tier Lesson
- ___ Student Teaching
- ___ Elementary Classroom (Grade Level _____)
- ___ College Classroom Presentation (Class Number _____)
- ___ High School Classroom (Subject Area _____)
- ___ Other (_____)

1. Did the kit meet your needs? Yes ___; No ___; Comments: _____

2. Was the kit easy to use and understand? Yes ___; No ___; Comments: _____

3. Is there anything not included in this kit that would be useful? Yes ___; No ___;
Comments: _____

4. Was the printed guide easy to use and understand? Yes ___; No ___;
Comments: _____

5. Was the kit in good condition? Yes ___; No ___; Comments: _____

6. Would you use this kit again? Yes ___; No ___; Comments: _____

7. Would you recommend this kit to a colleague? Yes ___; No ___; Comments: _____

8. Is there a topic that you would suggest we develop a loan kit for? If yes, please
include your suggestions: _____

Thank you for your feedback!