

History of the Fur Trade

The fur trade in North America began during the 1500s when Europeans explored the eastern coast. Native Americans traded furs, deer hides, and meat for iron tools, wool blankets, colorful cloth, and guns. The first North American fur trading post was established at Quebec in 1608.

The fur trade became North America's primary business. It was dominated by France until 1760. Numerous cities such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis started as trading posts.

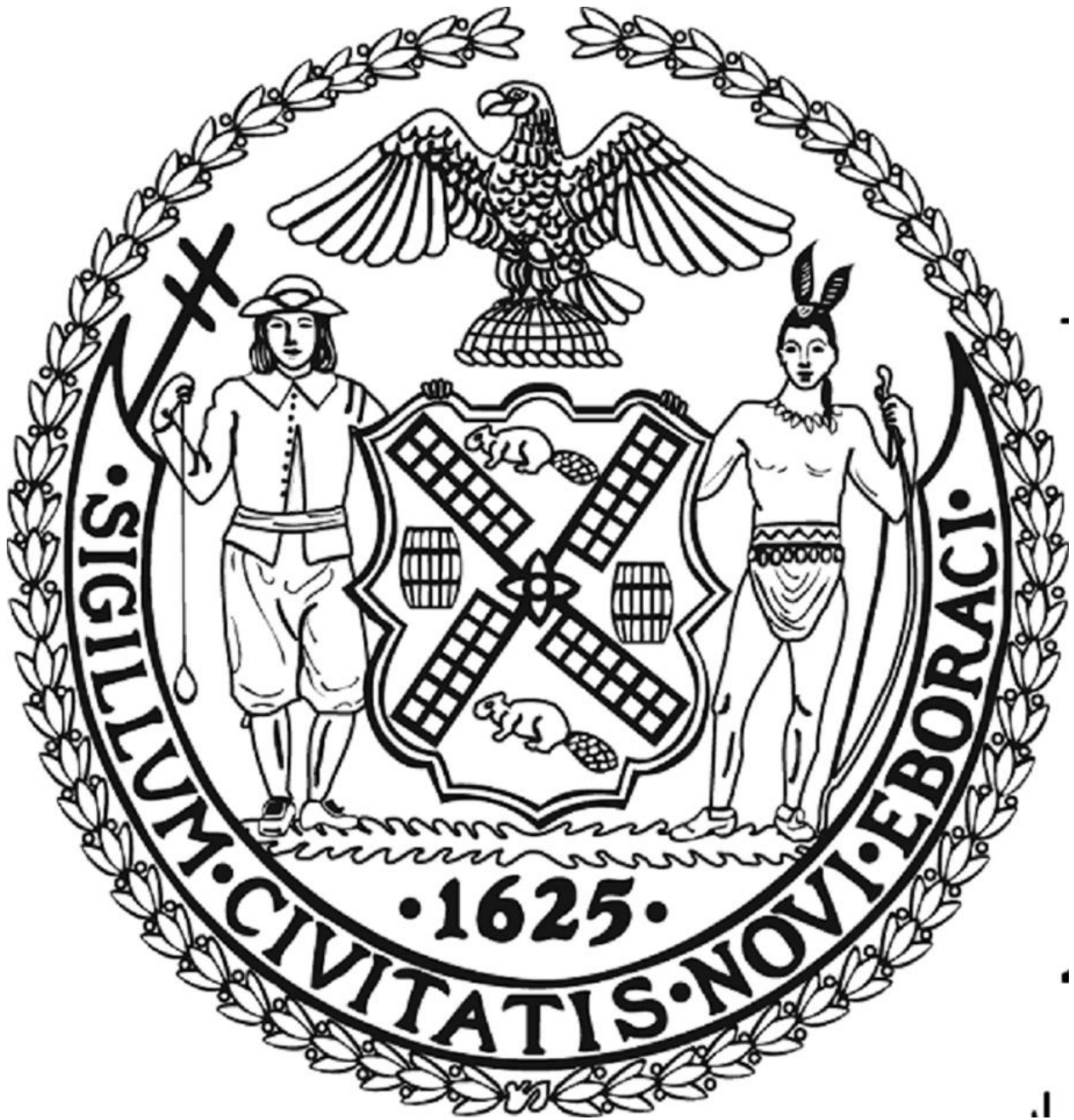
Although many species were traded, the beaver was the most sought after. Mountain Man trapper/adventurers explored and sought beavers farther and farther west.

European nations struggled for control of land and native trade. The British gained control of the fur trade in 1760 after winning the French and Indian War. In 1816 the United States took control when Congress made it illegal for foreigners to trade in this country.

The fur trade declined over time, reaching a low in 1850. Habitat destruction and unregulated killing made most species of wildlife scarce. Everyone competed for the same wildlife resource. The government did not regulate seasons or methods that could be used to take wildlife.

Widespread habitat loss played a key role in the decline of furbearers. Ponds and wetlands were drained, forests were cleared, and prairies were plowed under. Steel traps did not play a major role in the decline of furbearers. They were not mass produced or widely available until the late 1800s.

Sportsmen, hunters, trappers, anglers, and many others saw the decline of wildlife as a serious issue during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Forward thinking conservationists saw the need to preserve wildlife and their habitat. Their efforts resulted in the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation. It was and still is paid for by sportsman dollars; License fees, the Pittman-Robertson Act, and the Dingell-Johnson Act.



The importance of trade with the existing Native Americans, primarily with beavers, is reflected in this Seal for New Amsterdam, (later renamed New York).