

HBCA Information Sheet: Animal Population Studies

The Hudson's Bay Company was involved in the acquisition and sale of furs for over 300 years throughout a large part of North America. The Hudson's Bay Company Archives contains extensive records of this activity. As one beaver skin, for example, represents one beaver, the fur records in the HBCA are a valuable source for the study of animal populations. The two pioneers in the use and interpretation of HBC records for this purpose were Charles Gordon Hewitt (1885-1920) and Charles Elton (1900-1991).

Note: The records listed below are those most often used in animal population studies. They do not represent all the records in the HBCA which document the acquisition and selling of furs. Most of the records listed are microfilmed and can be ordered through our Microfilm Loan Program.

Governor and Committee Records from London

Title	Dates	Location Codes	Microfilm Reel(s)
Governor and Committee fur sales books	1736-1810	A.48/1-7	474-475
Fur trade importation books	1799-1913	A.53	488
Summaries of fur trade catalogues	1876-1916	A.55	953

These records list the variety, quantity and price of furs that were sent to London for sale. The records also indicate the factory from which the furs were shipped by the factory's post mark. For example, the initials "MR" indicates that the furs were shipped from Moose River, and "YF" from York Factory.

The Governor and Committee records also contain a folder of statistical analyses of fur trade accounts (location code A.63/8). It contains quantities and prices of furs and related commodities sold at the London auctions. ***Microfilm copy available on Reel 1392.***

District Fur Returns

Series	Dates	Location Codes	Microfilm Reel(s)
Montreal Department district fur returns	1845-1865	B.134/h	1M812
Southern Department district fur returns	1825-1871	B.135/h	1M812
Northern Department district fur returns	1821-1892	B.239/h	1M812-1M813
Western Department district fur returns	1849-1864	B.226/h	1M812
Columbia District fur returns	1844-1849	B.223/h	1M812

District fur returns were kept and compiled by the departmental headquarters in Rupert's Land. District headquarters submitted information on the types and quantity of fur consignments, as well as the size and weight of each animal. The returns also list the number of animals that were traded at particular posts in the districts for each outfit year.

Other records of furs shipped from York Factory include Northern Department fur invoice books, 1829-1865 (location code B.239/o/1-62; Reels 1M826-1M830) and Fur invoice books and ledgers, 1819-1820, 1877-1878, 1882 (location code A.52/1, 5 & 6; Reels 487,942).

Records of Individual Posts

Records of furs collected at individual posts can be found in the account books created by the posts and district headquarters. For some posts, records of furs are also in various miscellaneous records series.

Post account books are arranged chronologically rather than by the type of book. Records of furs are noted in a variety of ways such as "Fur Returns", "Fur Packing Accounts", and "Fur Receipt Books". Search the Keystone Archives Descriptive Database under 'Listings' by using such terms as 'Albany fur' or 'fur packing'.

Fur Trade Department Records – Individual Posts

Fur returns for individual posts, 1925-1931, are available in the schedules attached to the series entitled Fur trade accounts sent to the Governor and Committee (location code A.76/43-54). These are available on microfilm reels 1368-1373. For the years 1932-1950, fur returns for individual posts are available in the series entitled Fur Trade Department history record sheets (summarized accounts) (location code RG3/35). Microfilm copy available on microfilm reels 1392-1394.

Other Repositories

Charles Elton's HBC research material, Elton Library of the Department of Zoology Library, Oxford University.

Sir James Douglas papers, British Columbia Archives (ledger entitled "Fur Trade Returns for Columbia and New Caledonia Districts", 1825-1857).

Select Bibliography

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