

## **HBCA Information Sheet: Glossary of Terms**

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There are many terms found in Hudson's Bay Company records that are specific to the company's operations. Their definitions are useful to know in using these records. A list of common terms has been compiled below, using the following sources:

Avis, Walter S., ed. *A Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*.  
Toronto: W.J. Gage Ltd, 1967.

Briggs, Elizabeth and Anne Morton. *Biographical Resources at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives*. Vol. 1, Winnipeg: Westgarth, 1996.

Words or phrases in bold within definitions are also defined in the glossary.

**Canadian** – An individual or organization that came from “Canada,” which, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries usually meant Lower Canada, the area that later became part of the province of Quebec. The main opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company was the North West Company, a Montreal-based firm that hired its servants from the local population, and HBC officers and servants sometimes referred to this company and its employees as “Canadian.” The HBC also hired some of its own “Canadian” servants.

**C<sup>r</sup>** – In accounts books, this abbreviation refers to “credits” against an account, usually in the form of wages. See also **D<sup>r</sup>**.

**Deed of Surrender** – In 1869, the HBC signed an agreement with the Dominion of Canada by which the company surrendered control of the territory known as **Rupert's Land** to the new Canadian government. The territory had been controlled by the HBC since its **Royal Charter of 1670**.

**Deed Poll** – The Deed Polls of 1821, 1834 and 1871 were the legal instruments which determined the number of commissioned officers of the HBC and their share in the profits of the fur trade.

**Department** – The HBC was first organized into geographical Departments: the Northern, Southern, Montreal and Columbia (later Western) Departments. By the end of the nineteenth century, the company was organized into departments according to its business interests: the Fur Trade, Land and Salesshops (later Stores) Departments.

**districts** – The HBC divided its fur trade administration into districts. In the beginning, the districts were all administered by a “governor” at one of the **factories** along Hudson Bay. Around 1813 or 1814, this system changed with the establishment of districts with inland headquarters in the charge of a district master. District names, boundaries and headquarters altered over time.

**D<sup>r</sup>** – In account books, this abbreviation refers to “debits” against an account. See also **C<sup>r</sup>**.

**factory** – A fur-trading post, especially a larger one from which furs were shipped to England, such as York Factory. Sometimes “factory” was used in place of “fort.” York Factory, therefore, was also known at times as York Fort.

**fo.** – An abbreviation of folio. A folio is a leaf or sheet of paper, numbered only on the front. The reverse of the sheet, or “dorse,” is not numbered. (Ledgers, where a folio is the two opposite pages, are an exception.) When most documents are prepared for microfilming in HBCA, they are foliated. The number ‘1’ is placed in the upper right corner of the first right-hand page, the reverse is not numbered, the second right-hand page is numbered ‘2’ and so on. The reverse side of folio 1 is known as folio 1d. ‘d’ is the abbreviation for dorse.

**fos.** – An abbreviation of folios.

**furlough** – A leave of absence, usually granted to HBC employees after the termination of one contract and before beginning a new contract. As an “extended vacation,” a furlough allowed employees to return home (most HBC employees were from Britain, especially from Scotland).

**General Courts of Proprietors** – Annual general meetings held in London where the proprietors (or stockholders) elected the HBC Governor and members of the governing committee.

**Indian debt** – Credit extended to Aboriginal hunters and trappers in the form of supplies to be paid for out of the coming year’s catch.

**made beaver** – A unit of exchange equivalent to the value of one prime beaver pelt, used in buying furs and bartering provisions.

**outfit** – An outfit (sometimes referred to as a fur trading outfit) ran from June 1<sup>st</sup> of one year to May 31<sup>st</sup> of the next, and was the time period around which the HBC’s trade was structured. Often employee contracts ran according to the outfit year, beginning on June 1<sup>st</sup> and ending on May 31<sup>st</sup>.

**packet** – A parcel or package of instructions, correspondence or other documents. Packets were sent on HBC ships to fur-trading posts each spring from the Governor and Committee in London. Packets were transported in packet boxes, which were wooden boxes that could be locked for security.

**parish** – Often a category found in HBC employee records. Traditionally, a parish was an ecclesiastical district, a subdivision of a diocese having its own clergyman, usually a rector or vicar. In the nineteenth century, a parish was also a district organized for poor law administration. Where known, HBC officials entered the name of the parish in its traditional British ecclesiastical meaning, but if the parish was not known, the town, county or country from which the employee came may have been entered instead. For employees born in North America, the parish may be described by such phrases as Hudson’s Bay, Indian Country (or Indian Territory), Native or **Rupert’s Land**. Most of these individuals were of mixed European and Aboriginal ancestry.

**Pro Pelle Cutem** – A Latin expression meaning “A skin for a skin.” This is the HBC’s motto, which is printed on its crest. It could refer to the idea that the company was a fair

trader, or to the fact that company employees risked their “skins” in their quest for the beaver skin. A further interpretation is that in acquiring beaver pelts, the HBC acquired the whole beaver skin in order to obtain the desired thick under skin of the beaver, which was the portion of the skin used in making hats.

**Red River Settlement** – The colony established by Lord Selkirk in the valley of the Red River in Manitoba in 1812. Sometimes abbreviated as R.R.S.

**Royal Charter of 1670** – In 1670, King Charles II of England granted a royal charter to a group of English gentlemen, granting them exclusive trading rights in the Hudson Bay watershed, the territory that was called **Rupert’s Land**.

**Rupert’s Land** – The territory granted to the HBC by its **Royal Charter of 1670** and incorporated into the Dominion of Canada in 1870, after the **Deed of Surrender** of 1869. It was the area drained by the rivers flowing into Hudson Bay: northern Ontario, Québec, the southern Northwest Territories, southern Alberta, most of Saskatchewan, and all of Manitoba, including the valley of the Red River south to Lake Traverse in the United States. The name honours the HBC’s first Governor, Prince Rupert.

**servant** – A servant was an employee of the Hudson’s Bay Company who was obligated to give service to the company under the terms of a contract signed by both parties.

**York boat** – An inland freight boat used to transport furs and other goods, named after York Factory, one of the HBC’s most significant fur-trading posts. The largest of these boats could be up to 40 feet long and 10 feet wide. York boats were shallow, with a square sail and oars pulled by eight oarsmen, capable of carrying upwards of 75 packs averaging 40 kilograms (90lbs) a piece.