

## **Justification for HBCA's Inclusion on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register of World Significant Documentary Heritage**

*The Hudson's Bay Company archives records spanning the first 250 years of its history, 1670-1920, have been included in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Memory of the World Registry of documentary heritage of exceptional value.*

### **World Significance**

The Hudson's Bay Company dealt with the problems of operating over vast distances and a diversity of conditions through diligently recording information. Its records cover a broad spectrum and include ledgers, letters, post and medical journals, ships logs, maps, paintings, photographs and scientific data, and census records, vocabularies of Aboriginal languages, hunting practices and business activities. These records illuminate important aspects of Canadian social and cultural history. Their continuity is unparalleled, allowing historians and researchers to check and compare positions and points of view from all ends of the corporate perspective of one company (through the records of the London Headquarters, North American regional headquarters and isolated trading posts across North America).

### **Time**

The Hudson's Bay Company's records document the history of the HBC since its inception in 1670 tracing the history of the fur trade, North American exploration, the development of Canada as a nation and the growth of HBC's Canadian business (retail, wholesale, property and natural resources) into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Place**

The records document the Company's operations spanning two continents and three nations. The HBC operated fur trade posts and agencies from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island and from the St. Lawrence to the Arctic. In the 1800s the HBC also traded in the American Pacific Northwest; its Snake Country Expeditions may have reached as far south as Spanish territory in what is now Texas. It also had posts in Alaska and Hawaii. In the 1920s there were HBC posts in the Russian Far East.

### **People**

The records document communications between the London directors and North American employees, suppliers, manufacturers of goods, and government officials. They demonstrate the challenges of operating a large business over a vast territory from a remote headquarters and the communication channels and relationships that were necessary to achieve success. They reveal the activities of fur traders in conducting business with various Aboriginal tribes throughout North America, the unions between European fur traders and their native wives that resulted from this contact and the role that HBC played in formalizing these relationships in the absence of a government or religious institutions. They provide in some cases the only evidence of First Nations and Métis occupation, material culture, exchanges and their contribution to shaping the economic and political fabric of Canada. The records document the loneliness and hardships experienced by HBC employees working in isolated locations under rugged conditions and harsh climates, of the spread of disease and its impact on Aboriginal populations and the Company's operations. They demonstrate the changing landscape

as the fur trade gave way to settlement, the development of agriculture and retail business, the emergence of towns and cities which grew up around Hudson's Bay Company trading posts and meeting places and the emerging need for government and courts systems as civilization advanced. The records reveal the recruitment and selection process of hiring employees and in some cases details of their life before and after their service with the HBC.

### **Use**

The records have been used to support a broad range of research and study including the history of North American Aboriginal nations for documenting native rights and land claims in the courts, the evolution of business methods and accounting practices, retail history, mapping and exploration, photography, environment and climate, genealogy, medicine and disease, mathematics, astronomy, biology, zoology, geology, polar studies, shipping history and navigation, natural history, law, English literature, art history, and sociology. The types of researchers accessing the records include academics, family historians, Aboriginal groups, students, lawyers, government researchers and history enthusiasts. They contribute to books, articles, films, television productions, videos, CD-ROMs, Websites and exhibitions.

### **Preservation**

The accumulation of HBC records is in itself a miracle of preservation considering the nature and geography of the business. The records were kept at its London headquarters and at isolated North America fur trade posts scattered hundreds and thousands of kilometres apart. They survived rain storms and floods, blizzards and subzero temperatures. They were transported by canoe and York boat across turbulent rivers and lakes, overland through mountain passes and endless prairie by pack horses, Red River cart and dog sleds. They endured trans-Atlantic journeys to their eventual destination, the Company's London headquarters. These challenging circumstances make it all the more astonishing that such a comprehensive daily record of their business activities was created and preserved.