

Hudson Bay Company

The Fur Trade

Two centuries before Confederation a pair of resourceful Frenchmen named [Radisson and des Groseilliers](#) discovered a wealth of fur in the interior of the continent - north and west of the Great Lakes - accessible via the great inland sea that is Hudson Bay. Despite their success French and American interests would not back them. It took the vision and connections of [Prince Rupert](#), cousin of [King Charles II](#), to acquire the [Royal Charter](#) which, in May, 1670 granted the lands of the Hudson Bay watershed to "the Governor and [Company of Adventurers](#) of England trading into Hudson Bay."

Its first century of operation found HBC firmly ensconced in a few forts and posts around the shores of James and Hudson Bays. Natives brought furs annually to these locations to barter for manufactured goods such as knives, kettles, beads, needles, and [blankets](#). By the late 18th c. competition forced HBC to expand into the interior. A string of posts grew up along the great river networks of the west foreshadowing the modern cities that would succeed them: Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton.

In 1821 HBC merged with its most successful rival, the [North West Company](#) based in Montreal. The resulting commercial enterprise now spanned the continent - all the way to the Pacific Northwest (modern-day Oregon, Washington and British Columbia) and the North (Alaska, the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut). The merger also set the pattern of the Company's growth, being the first of a series of notable acquisitions.



HBC Klondike gold rush era advertisement
HBCA D.26/34 fo. 21d

The Rise of Retail

By the end of the 19th c. changing fashion tastes contributed to the fur trade losing importance. Western settlement and the Gold Rush quickly introduced a new type of client to HBC - one that shopped with cash and not with skins. With the Deed of Surrender in 1870 between HBC and Canada, HBC yielded sovereignty over its traditional territories to the new country. The retail era had begun. The Company's focus began to shift as it concentrated on transforming trading posts into saleshops, stocked with a wider variety of goods than ever before.

In 1912, following advice from one of its directors who was with Harrods department store in London, HBC began an aggressive modernization program. The resulting "original six" Hudson's Bay Company department stores, in [Victoria](#), [Vancouver](#), [Edmonton](#), [Calgary](#), [Saskatoon](#) and [Winnipeg](#), are the legacy of this period.

Retail expansion across the country would finally be achieved by a series of strategic acquisitions: Cairns (Saskatoon: 1921), [Morgan's](#) (Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto: 1960) and Freiman's (Ottawa: 1972).

Diversification

The growth of retail spurred HBC into a wide variety of commercial pursuits. [Liquor](#), canned salmon, coffee, tea and tobacco were all lines that supplemented traditional fur and retail and helped to establish a thriving wholesale business. Large holdings of land negotiated as part of the Deed of Surrender took the Company into real estate. The sale of homesteads to newly-arrived settlers would later evolve into a full-scale interest in commercial property holdings and development. Shipping and natural resources, particularly oil and gas, were other important sidelines.



HBC store, Temagami, Ontario,
Bear Island, 1941
HBCA 1987/363-T-9/100

Focus on Retail

In 1970, coincident with its 300th anniversary, HBC became a Canadian corporation. The pace of retail acquisition increased with takeovers of [Zellers / Fields](#) (1978), [Simpsons](#) (1978), and Robinson's (1979). However, the economic downturn of the 1980s left the Company with major debt and caused HBC to rethink its priorities and, like many other firms, return to its core business. Non-strategic business assets such as the Fur Trade, Wholesale and Northern Stores departments were sold in 1987 as was the Company's last natural resources holding, Roxy Petroleum. Strategic expansion to strengthen its share of the market continued with the acquisition of Towers/Bonimart (1990), [Woodward's](#) (1993), and Kmart Canada (1998).

Since then HBC has explored new shopping channels and ways of doing business. Club Z, the Company's first customer loyalty program, was launched in 1986. In 2001 it was superseded by HBC Rewards. Specialty arrived with the opening of Home Outfitters in 1999. Online shopping was introduced with the launch of hbc.com in 2000. And the off-price segment of the market was covered by Designer Depot / Style Depot, which operated from 2004 - 2008. In 2003 HBC Signature, a private brand inspired by the Company's unique heritage, was introduced. And in 2005 HBC was chosen Premier National Partner of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. The partnership, which runs from 2005 until 2020, makes HBC the Official Department Store Sponsor and General Merchandise Department Store Operator in Canada.

In Canada, HBC operates Hudson's Bay, Canada's largest department store with 90 locations, unsurpassed in its fashion, beauty, home and accessory designers and brands, as well as thebay.com. HBC also operates Home Outfitters, Canada's largest home specialty superstore with 69 locations across the country. In the United States, HBC operates Lord & Taylor, a department store with 48 full-line store locations throughout the northeastern United States and in two major cities in

the Midwest, and lordandtaylor.com. With approximately 29,000 Associates in Canada and the U.S., Hudson's Bay Company banners provide stylish, quality merchandise at great value, with a dedicated focus on service excellence. The Hudson's Bay Company trades on the Toronto Stock Exchange under the symbol "HBC".

The 21st century finds HBC well into its fourth century of retailing in Canada. Proof positive, if any were needed, of the aptness of HBC's proud claim:

<http://www.hbcheritage.ca/hbcheritage/history/overview>

Edmonton



Jasper Avenue in Edmonton,
with Hbc store clearly marked,
1890

HBCA 1987/363-E-611/1

William Tomison of Hbc founded Fort Edmonton in the fall of 1795 at the junction of the North Saskatchewan and Sturgeon Rivers, "virtually next door" to the [North West Company](#) (NWC) post Fort Augustus, which had been established only a few months earlier. Both companies wanted to capitalize on an area so rich in furs - particularly beaver - that one journal writer said "*Women and Children kill them with sticks and hatchets.*" Tomison named the site Edmonton after an estate in England owned by Hbc Deputy Governor, Sir James Winter Lake.

Initially both posts produced excellent returns; in 1797 alone 12,512 [made beaver](#) were traded at Fort Edmonton. But by 1800 the volume of furs traded started to drop and a shortage of firewood led both companies to relocate in 1802 to a river flat about 30 kilometres upstream that had been used as a camping and meeting place by the First Naitons for thousands of years. This area, now known as the Rosedale Flats in central Edmonton, was used until 1830 with one brief interruption. Between 1810 and 1813 sites located some 80 km downstream near the confluence of Wabamun Creek and the Saskatchewan were tried but finally abandoned. After the amalgamation of the Hbc and NWC in 1821, the name Fort Augustus was abandoned and operations were centralized at Fort Edmonton.



Hbc Edmonton store on Jasper
Avenue, 1894
HBCA 1987/363-E-600/11

Fort Edmonton was selected as the district headquarters for the North Saskatchewan region. Under Chief Factor John Rowand it became one of the largest and most important posts in what would become Alberta. An administrative centre, warehouse and storage facility, it was also a place where trade and other goods were manufactured by tradesmen as well as a source of provisions for other posts. Fort Edmonton was a "meat" post: much of the pemmican and dried and fresh buffalo meat consumed by fur traders came from there. It also produced the [York boats](#) used to transport fur and trade goods to and from the Bay.

Floods in 1825 and 1830 damaged this fourth fort and it soon became apparent to Chief Factor Rowand that a higher site was needed. In 1830, the post was relocated a few hundred feet upstream and halfway up the bank - where the provincial Legislature now stands. Hbc occupied the Fort until completion of the Legislature required the demolition of the last of its buildings in 1915.

By that time, however, Hbc's focus was on the growing retail trade. The first Hbc saleshop had opened in 1890, a year before the arrival of the railroad. In 1892 Edmonton was incorporated as a town with 400 people. By 1894 the free standing 1890 store was rebuilt at Jasper Avenue and 103rd Street. It consisted of a single retail floor with living quarters upstairs for the manager, his family and an assistant. In 1904 Edmonton became a city and in 1905 a brand new the three-storey brick store opened at the Jasper Avenue location - the same year that the growing city of over 7,000 became the capital of the new province of Alberta. The upper floor was used as offices and storage. In 1913 further construction added a fourth floor as well as a five-storey warehouse attached to the northwest corner along 103rd Street.



Hbc Edmonton store at Jasper
Avenue and 102nd Street, ca.
1940

In 1926, a one floor extension was added to the store which now spanned the entire frontage between 102nd Street and 103rd Street along Jasper Avenue. In 1939 the Company boldly invested \$1,000,000 in its future in Edmonton. The new two level plus basement store covered the block along Jasper Avenue, opening on November 14, 1939. In 1948, more office and merchandising space was required, and a third floor was added. In 1956 the building expanded its three floors to the north on property that was previously a livery stable. Final size - an impressive 470,000 square feet. In 1989 the Hudson's Bay Company sold the Edmonton store to Stewart Green Properties. The building underwent extensive renovations and Hbc's leased portion became 118,000 square feet of selling space on the west side of the building with an "open mall" concept for the remainder of the area. The City of Edmonton designated the building as Class "A" on its historic resource building register at the time of the refit.

After almost a century of growth and expansion, the Bay store moved to the new Edmonton Centre in 1993, into space previously occupied by [Woodward's](#). Woodward's had opened its first store in Edmonton in 1926. This store moved in the new Edmonton Centre upon its completion in 1974. When Hbc took over Woodward's in 1993, the Edmonton Centre store was refitted and opened to the public as the Bay on August 11, 1993. In 1995, Hbc announced it was closing the Jasper Avenue store and leaving the location it had occupied for the last 100 years.

In 2002 the Bay moved again, this time as part of the redevelopment of the Edmonton Centre and the Eaton Centre into the new Edmonton City Centre. Edmonton City Centre occupies four city blocks located between 100th & 103rd Street and 102nd & 103rd Avenue. In May, 2002 the Bay opened a new 178,000 square foot, two-level store anchoring the west end of the shopping centre, in premises formerly occupied by Eaton's. Meanwhile the Bay's former premises were redeveloped to house a 36,000 square foot Home Outfitters as well as several other retail outlets.