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FACTSHEET - TRADE AT PORT-ROYAL

Pierre Dugua de Mons, the leader of the expedition, was given a monopoly on the fur trade in Acadia by the king of France, Henry IV. He did not receive any money from the king. He was expected to finance the needs of the colony through the sale of furs acquired in trade with the First Nations people of the area.

All of the trapping, curing, tanning and preparation of the hides was done by the Mi'kmaq. The French acquired the furs through a bartering system where they traded European goods in exchange for the pelts. The main fur that the French were interested in acquiring was the beaver. The fur of the beaver was used to make hats. There are two layers of fur on a beaver. Once the furs arrived in France, the long outer "guard hair" would be shaved off. Underneath there is a shorter layer of hair that would be shaved off as well. This short hair has microscopic hooks which makes it stick together with ease. This short hair would be heated, wetted and pressed to make felt. Out of this felt, the hat makers would fabricate felted beaver hats which were water proof and very popular among the gentlemen in France at the time.

Although beaver was the most popular of the furs, other types were acquired in trade as well. Otter, fox, timber wolf, racoon, muskrat, lynx and bear furs were popular as were seal skins and moose and caribou hides. All of the fur was kept in a storehouse during the winter. When a supply ship arrived in the summer, the furs were loaded on the vessel and shipped back to France. With the sale of the cargo of furs, Pierre Dugua could pay the salaries of the men hired on the expedition as well as supply the provisions needed to sustain the colony. Hopefully, after all the expenses were taken care of, there would be a profit for Sieur de Mons' company.

In return for the furs, the French traded European goods to the Mi'kmaq. Among the most popular items were copper and iron pots. These were very prized items because they conduct heat very easily and greatly facilitated the task of cooking. The Mi'kmaq had the ability to make tools out of stone and bones but they would often trade for iron tools such as knives, axe heads, arrow heads and fish hooks. Woolen blankets, linen and beads (for decorative purposes) were also exchanged. Another popular trade item was bread. The Mi'kmaq were not an agricultural people; they



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hunted and gathered their food. The French grew grains and they would grind them to make bread for their own needs as well as to trade with the Mi'kmaq.

A strong alliance was formed between the French and the Mi'kmaq through the fur trade. This alliance would endure throughout the later French-English conflict for control of Acadia. From this alliance, the French learned many of the survival skills necessary for adaptation and survival in Acadia.



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