Unit 8 - Canada Today

History of Canada

Historians believe that the __First Nations__, native people of Canada who are related to Asians, arrived about __12,000__ years ago. They migrated to North America across the __Bering Land Bridge__ joining Siberia and Alaska. Siberia is in northeast __Asia__, so these very first inhabitants were from Asia.

The __Inuit__ are also a group of very early inhabitants of Canada. They are not considered First Nations people, though. These First Nations and the Inuit lived off the land by __hunting animals__ and __fishing__. They hunted whales and __seals__, __caribou__, and fish.

Many years later, the __Vikings__ landed in eastern Canada. This was about __1000__ years ago. These Scandinavian Vikings, also called Norse, or __Norsemen__, were the earliest __European__ explorers.

__Leif Eriksson__ was an early Viking who founded the island called __Newfoundland__. The Norse stayed in the area for several years to rest, hunt, and trade with the Inuit before returning to Europe. Almost __500__ years passed before Europeans took up interest again in sailing across the __Atlantic__. They were looking for an __all-water__ route to Asia by traveling along the north coast of North America, called the __Northwest Passage__. During this second wave of exploration, __John Cabot__, an Italian who moved to England, was the first to explore Canada in __1497__ when he landed in __Nova Scotia___. In 1498 Cabot set sail a second time in stormy weather and was __never seen again___. In 1534, Frenchman Jacques Cartier sailed from France to Canada, up the __St. Lawrence River__ Cartier founded the present day city of __Montreal__.

Many European fishing boats fished in the __Grand Banks__, an area of Newfoundland that was teeming with fish.

The King of France then sent __Samuel de Champlain__ to start a colony in Canada in the early __1600s__. __Quebec__ was the beginning of the first French colony in North America. It was called __New France__. 
Early French settlers came to what was known as "Lower Canada", in present-day Quebec. The area above the St. Lawrence River is called Upper Canada - its name reflects its position closer to the headwaters of the St. Lawrence River.

A third group of early Canadian inhabitants is the Métis - a people of mixed ancestry - an Indian mother and European father (usually French). The early French settlers established colonies in Canada and remained there for many years. They married the native Indian women and their children are called Métis.

**The Fur Trade**

Europeans traded knives, kettles, and beads with the Indians for their fur beaver pelts. The First Nations and Inuit were instrumental in the success of the fur trade. Without their knowledge and technology, many European explorers would not have survived. Hats made from beaver fur were all the rage back home in Europe! Beavers were becoming extinct in Europe. Beaver hats were not made from the thick outer fur of the pelt, but from the barbed, fibrous under-fur. This fur was mashed, pounded, rolled, and turned into felt.

Trading posts were created to make trading easier. Most of the traders who ran the Canadian trading posts were French. New France (Quebec) dominated the fur trade. It was not long before England saw how much money could be made in the fur trade. The competition between the French and English was fierce. They both wanted to be in control of the land and its resources. So, in 1670 the British government established the Hudson Bay Co. They established posts all along the Hudson Bay, and were very successful. They had three objectives:

1. Find western passage to Pacific
2. To acquire land around the Hudson Bay
3. To regulate & control the fur trade

Since Hudson’s Bay was the only company allowed to trade fur, they had no competition.

In the late 1600s and early 1700s Britain and France frequently fought over land and competed for the fur trade. The French claimed all of Canada for King Louis XIV and the British claimed all of it for the monarchy. These conflicting claims led to nearly two centuries of war for ownership of the country. Even today, there is still evidence of that French claim. Quebec is the only French-speaking province in Canada. The beaver hat remained a fashion necessity in Europe for over 200 years. The fur trade ended in 1850 when silk hats became the rage.