

Currency of exchange

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This silver trade beaver was used by the Hudson's Bay Company to trade with the natives. With a stone (?) in the center.

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Period 1st quarter of the 19th century

Materials glass?, metal, silver

Technique cut, incised, welded

Measurements 16 x 10 cm

Historical context

Founded on May 2, 1670, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) is the oldest joint-stock company in the English-speaking world. Ironically, it was two Frenchmen who were behind its creation: the voyageurs and adventurers Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médart Chouart des Groseillers. Without French support for their project, they proposed to Prince Rupert, cousin of the King of England, the creation of a company to trade furs with the natives in the Hudson Bay basin. The British Crown accepted the project, granting the HBC a Royal Charter and exclusive rights to trade furs in a territory to be known as Rupert's Land.

To facilitate trade between the voyageurs hired by the HBC and native hunters, a system of payment was gradually put in place. In exchange for furs, merchants and voyageurs used small decorative silver objects made by silversmiths in Montreal, Quebec and elsewhere. The beaver pictured here is one such object, used as currency in exchange for furs. Decorated with a stone in its center, it is the work of Montreal silversmith Charles Arnoldi (1779-1817).

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