

4.

Exploration
to Exploitation

UNIT FOUR: Exploration to Exploitation

INTRODUCTION FOR THE TEACHER

Key Topics

Colonization, fur trade, early Chicago

Objectives

Students will

- a. define the nature of exploration as part of a political and economic system
- b. investigate the complex nature of the commercial relationships in the fur trade
- c. analyze primary sources such as firsthand accounts, invoices, letters
- d. develop research questions

Summary

This unit stresses the interplay between economic dominance and political dominance of the area. By exploring the establishment of the fur trade, and the necessary infrastructure to support it, students will learn the fundamental role that controlling natural resources and having the means of transporting them play in colonization. The lives of a varied group of fur traders and agents are also explored.

State Goals and Standards Met in Unit 4

State Goal 1: A, C

State Goal 5: A, B

State Goal 14: D, F

State Goal 15, A

State Goal 16, A, C, D

State Goal 17: C, D

State Goal 18: A, B, C

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PORTAGES

1. What do you think the word “empire” means? Compare your definition to the dictionary definition. Are there empires today?
2. You have discovered a “new” land. Make a list of everything you find out about it and write a letter or journal entry. Once that has been done, determine the kind of economic, political, and social relations you would like to have with inhabitants of this land. Will you exchange or take resources? Will they be of equal value? Who has the power in the relations—you or them—or is it equal?

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LESSON 1

Chicago as the Transfer Point

From 1680 to 1832, the Illinois Country and the Chicago area developed from a frontier rich in natural resources and inhabited by Native peoples to a growing agricultural, transportation and industrial powerhouse populated chiefly by Europeans. During this period, the area was dominated in turn by four groups: Native Americans, the French, British and American empires. One of the main engines of this development was the Fur Trade which heavily utilized the Chicago Portage Route.

The ability to travel is an important part of the domination and exploitation of the resources of a region. People and goods must be able to move from place to place. Before highways, airplanes, and trains this was a real challenge. Like the “fireplace” in Harry Potter, and the “rabbit hole” in Alice and Wonderland, the Chicago Portage was a gateway—a transfer point—across the rich Illinois country and the last link in an inland waterway between the east coast of North America and the Gulf of Mexico.

Beginning in the 16th century, the French sought to claim and settle the area in North America which is now Canada. In the late 17th century the French Empire explored the interior, rather than the coasts of this continent: First came the explorers and missionaries like Louis Jolliet and Father Jacques Marquette who established relationships with the Indians and mapped the area. Soon after came profiteers and agents of the king like Robert Cavalier Sieur de la Salle to claim land for France and develop the Illinois Country. There was great demand in Europe for furs, especially beaver, which made good waterproof materials for hats and other garments. The Illinois Country was rich in beaver and the Native Americans knew how to trap them.

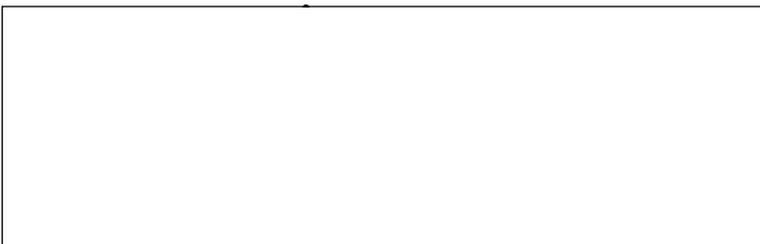
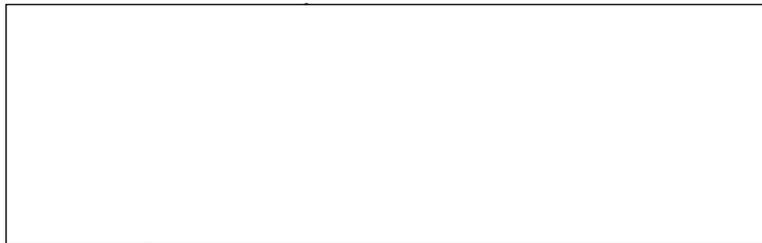
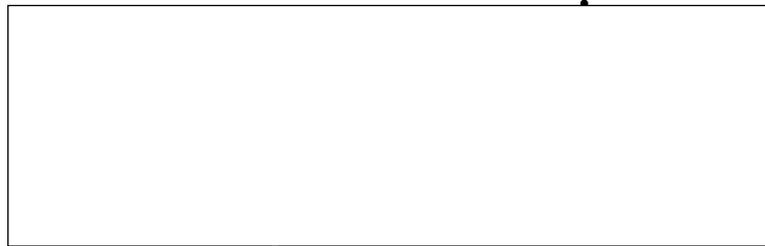
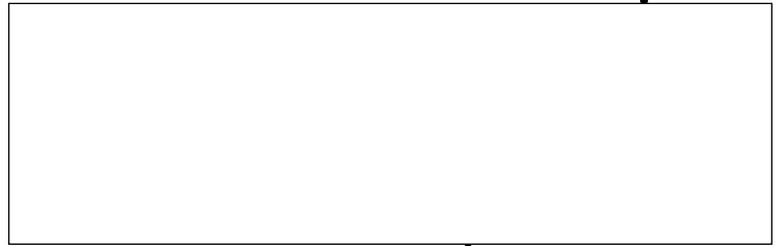
According to the historian Louise Kellogg, the Illinois country moved from “exploration to exploitation.” From the time it was “discovered” by Jolliet and Marquette to the Black Hawk war of 1832, the Chicago Portage region attracted the attention of Europeans. Empires competed not only for dominion over the land but for access to the resources and trading rights which meant riches for THEIR people. The French were particularly good at forming alliances with the Native American groups and they pursued the trade in furs and built settlements primarily in Central and Southern Illinois since Native peoples around the portage were hostile to the Europeans. “Ownership” passed to the English after the “French-Indian War” in 1763 and then to the new American nation after the Revolution in 1783. However, it was not until the defeat of the English in 1794 at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in Ohio and the subsequent Treaty of Greenville in 1795 that American gained formal control of the area.

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ACTIVITY

Create a timeline for the Illinois Country from roughly 1650 to 1832. Plug in the dates as you move through this unit. Divide the timeline into four periods – Native American, French, English, American. Tell why you placed your periods where you chose in relation to the dates and events you show. Do you need more information? Does one period lack dates? Why? What questions strike you as interesting to ask?



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PRIMARY SOURCE

LaSalle Observes the Territory

Relation of the Discoveries and Voyages of Cavalier de la Salle, 1679 to 1681; The Official Narrative.
Translated by Melville B. Anderson, (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1901) pp. 81-85.
Available at www.americanjourneys.org/aj-122.

"Many other kinds of animals are found in these vast plains of Louisiana; stags, roe deer, beavers, otters, are common. In the season are seen herds of two hundred and even four hundred wild cattle; bustards, swans, turtle-doves, turkeys, paroquets, partridges, and many other birds are very numerous. There is an abundance of fish, and the soil is extraordinarily fertile. It is a country of boundless prairies, interspersed with forests of high trees, where all sorts of timber for building may be had, among the rest excellent oak, solid like that of France and very different from the Canadian oak. The trees, which are of enormous size and height, would furnish the very best timber for ship-building. There are also in the forests several kinds of fruit-trees, and wild grape-vines producing clusters a foot and a half in length, which ripen perfectly, and of which very good wine is made. Open fields are to be seen covered with very good hemp, growing naturally to the height of six or seven feet. In fine, the experiments tried by M. de La Salle in the Miami region, upon his return from his second journey, have proved that the soil is capable of producing all sorts of fruits, grasses, and grain, in much greater abundance than the best lands of Europe. The air is very temperate and wholesome. The country is watered by an infinite number of lakes, rivers, and brooks, the greater part navigable. There is little or no inconvenience from mosquitoes or other pests. There are mines of coal, slate, and iron; the bits of pure red copper found in many places lead to the conclusion that there are mines of it; and perhaps deposits of other metals and minerals will some day be discovered, since already there has been found in the Iroquois country a spring of salt, alum, and sulphur."

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PRIMARY SOURCE

The British Assess the Region

From "Reasons for Establishing a Colony in Illinois, 1761" in Clarence W. Alvord, and Clarence E. Carter, editors, *The New Regime, 1765-1767* (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Historical Library, 1916), pp. 248-51.

The following document is excerpted from a letter written by Governor William Franklin of New Jersey, a holder in the Mississippi Land Company, to Sir William Johnson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Great Britain.

"The Country of the Illinois on the Mississippi is generally allowed to be the most fertile and pleasant part of the Western territory now in possession of the English in North America. ... The lands in Louisiana produce Tobacco... and rice and indigo... Those articles with Skins and Furs are the principal Commodities which N. America has produced to any great Extent for European Consumption. But were the lands on the Mississippi well settled we should be enabled to supply all Europe with those commodities and at a far cheaper Rate than they could be afforded from any other Country. But what is of the utmost consequence to Great Britain, no Country is better adapted than this for the raising of Hemp, Flax and Silk... Great Britain might also be furnished from thence with Cotton, Copper, Iron, Pot Ash, Wine, Salt-petre and a great Variety of valuable Medicinal Drugs and other Articles which, with those mentioned before, make the Balance of Trade against the Nation, & drain it of its Treasure.

"From the Illinois we might likewise carry on a more extensive & advantageous Furr-Trade, with the numerous Indian Nations which reside near the Lakes & the different Branches of the Mississippi than was ever known since the first Settlement of America: supplying them with British Manufactures to a vast Amount.

VOCABULARY

allowed
thought

commodities
things for sale

tedious
boring

thence
there

"Nor will the French be able to rival us in this Trade, as we can transport our goods through Pennsylvania & Virginia to that Country cheaper than can be done from New Orleans, up the Mississippi. This is now the only passage the French have left and being all the way against the stream is extremely difficult and tedious. Whereas the English now have a ready communication from Virginia to Fort Pitt on the Ohio and from thence have Water Carriage with the Stream to the Mississippi; and when they have disposed of their Goods to the Indians in that Country they may easily transport the commodities they receive in return down the Mississippi to Mobile, and from thence ship them to England....

"A Question arises,—What will be the most efficacious Means of supporting these Posts, so distant from every British Settlement, & yet so necessary to maintain the British Interest amongst the numerous Indian Nations—which inhabit that & the adjacent Country?

"It is answered—That there is no way so effectual as to settle a Colony at the Illinois, under a good Civil Government. ... If we have not a Colony on the Spot, to support the Posts we are now possessed of in that Country, the French who have a Fort & an increasing settlement on the opposite Shore of the Mississippi, will have it in their Power, by means of their Influence with the Indians, to intercept our Supplies, interrupt our Trade, & ultimately cut off all Communication between the Illinois & the present English Colonies."

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QUESTIONS

1. What are England's commercial interests in Illinois? How do they differ from those referred to by LaSalle?
2. Explain how the English think that geography will be in their favor over the French given their commercial activity.
3. Why must the English ship their commodities out of Mobile and not New Orleans? How will they get commodities to Mobile?
4. What are the motives behind the settlement impulse?
5. In what ways are a global economic system revealed?

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ACTIVITY

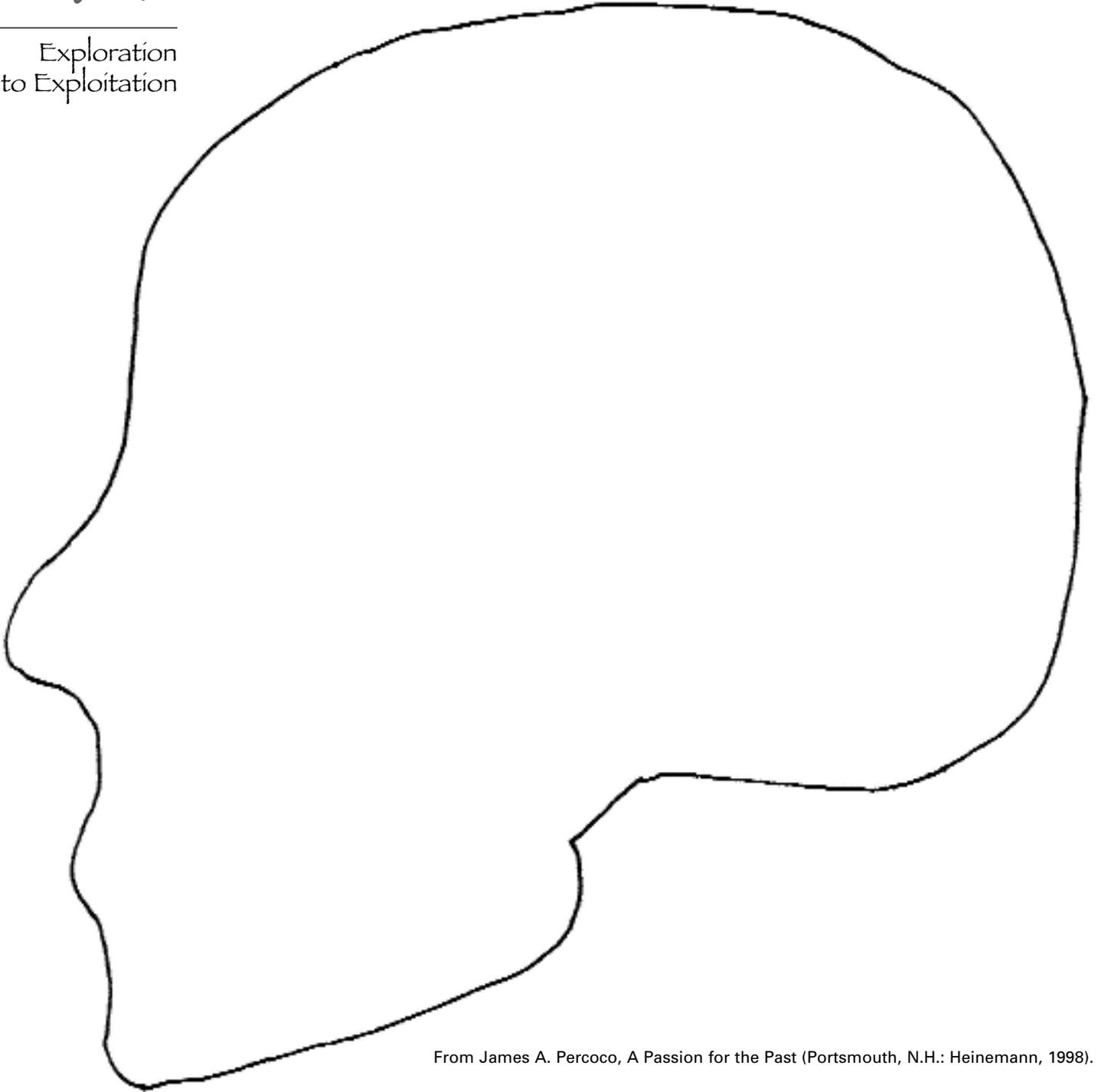
Make a Historical Head based on the thoughts of LaSalle or Franklin or consider the Native American perspective.

Here's how:

1. Review one of the documents. Look for key ideas, implicit questions and possible dreams. Try to imagine what he was seeing.
2. Record those thoughts and images within the head.
3. Present your Historical Heads. Compare and contrast. What main thoughts or images reoccur? Why?

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From James A. Percoco, *A Passion for the Past* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998).

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LESSON 2 Business of Fur Trading

From the French to the Americans the fur trade developed in the following way: The Indians did the trapping, then traded the furs to agents of the fur company for tobacco, clothing, tools, rum, guns and other manufactured or processed items. The storehouses and buildings where the trade often took place were called “factories” and were usually close by a fort (the word “post” is used for both). Those who paddled the canoes to and from the Indian territories were *voyageurs*, and *coureurs des bois*; those who ran the “posts” were called traders, factors or agents of the fur company. These posts were supplied with trade goods usually from a central location. For years Michilimackinac in northern Michigan was the place where goods from Europe were distributed to traders who paddled them to Chicago and Milwaukee and other posts.

The commercial “arrangement” developed into a complex web of interdependent relationships principally between Native Americans and Europeans. Relationships exist between individuals and also on a nation to nation basis. The following primary source documents provide insights into the character of the fur trade business. While interrogating the material, keep in mind the following questions and be prepared to cite evidence from the primary sources. After completing the unit, address the questions below in an essay, project, or classroom discussion.

- In what ways do the relationships with individual Native Americans seem based on equality? In what ways do they seem based on exploitation?
- In what ways do the relationships among French, British and American empires seem based on equality? In what ways are they based on domination?
- In what ways have we seen that the relationships between the empires and the Native Americans based on equality and coexistence? In what ways are they based on domination and conflict?
- What is the difference between the “micro”, person to person, relationships and the “macro”, nation to nation relationships? Why?

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PRIMARY SOURCE

Madame La Framboise, Fur Trader

From: Henry H. Hurlbut, *Chicago Antiquities* (Chicago: Printed by Author, 1881) 33.

“Madame Madeline la Framboise was a half-breed Ottawa woman, whom her husband, Francis,—a brother of Alexander la Framboise, who had a trading post at Milwaukee as early as 1785—had taught to read and write. He was killed, writes Mrs. E. T. Baird, of Green Bay, in the winter of 1809-10, at his trading wigwam near the present site of Grand Haven, Michigan,— an Indian shooting him dead while on his knees at prayer. Other accounts are to the effect that he was killed by Winnebagoes, while trading on the upper Wisconsin. His wife successfully prosecuted the fur trade after his death. She was of tall, commanding form, agreeable manners and excellent deportment; and highly esteemed by both whites and Indians. She was for many years in the company’s employ and “accustomed to visit the various trading posts, looking after the doings of clerks and employes(sic).” Her chief station, as agent of the American Fur Company, was at the site of Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she erected a trading hut, the first building in Kent county, and was on very friendly terms with the Ottawas and Ojibwas. She was, on account of her great age, superseded as agent for the company by Rix Robinson, in 1821. In 1876, traces of the la Framboise cabin were yet visible, being treasured by the people of Grand Rapids as the oldest historic relics.”

VOCABULARY

half breed

someone of a mixed marriage, usually Native American and European

prosecuted

did

deportment

behavior

employ

labor force

superseded

replaced

relics

historical objects representing a past age

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QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Madame Framboise was accepted and respected by the Native Americans?
2. Without some kind of “evidence” the story of Madame Framboise is just that—a story. List the kinds of sources used in the above account. How credible is it? What other kinds of sources might a historian use to verify the story of Madame Framboise?
3. After reading the above document, what can you say about the conditions of a fur trader’s life?
4. What other questions do you have concerning Madame Framboise’s life?

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PRIMARY SOURCE

Narrative of Andrew J. Vieau

Thompson M. Maxwell, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1888) 223-4. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

The fur trade business required not only trading with the Native Americans for furs, but also equipping the posts with goods for trading and transporting both furs and goods, to and from the main depot at Mackinaw Island (Michilimackinac), hundreds of miles by canoe from Chicago. Andrew Vieau describes his father's life as a fur trader.

"My father remained at his post during the winter of 1795-96; and, indeed, every winter thereafter for two or three years. Several members of our family were born there,— Joseph, Louis, Amable, Charles, Nicholas, and Peter. Each spring, after packing up the winter's peltries and buying all the maple sugar obtainable from the Indians, father would start out with his family and goods on his return to Mackinaw, after leaving a clerk in charge of the post, to superintend the planting of potatoes and corn and the purchase of what were called "summer" furs. These were the "red skin," or summer skin, of the deer; this was the only summer fur that was good for anything, for all other animals shed their hair during that season. Upon his return down the lake, father would stop at his various jack-knife posts and collect their furs and maple sugar, and often relieve the men stationed there, by substituting others for them. This trip to Mackinaw would, with fair weather, take about a month. He would set out on his return, in August, distributing goods to the lake-shore posts, and stay at Milwaukee until May again.

"After disposing of his interests to Juneau, in 1819, my father was equipped by Michael Dousman, of Chicago, and for several years traded at his old post on the Menomonee river, near the bluff. He was an active man, very prompt and precise in his business dealings and sociable in his manner, so that he commanded much influence with the Pottawatomies. In the winter of 1832-33, the small-pox scourge ran through the Indian population of the state. Father and his crew were busy throughout the winter in burying the natives, who died off like sheep with foot-rot. With a crooked stick inserted under a dead Indian's chin they would haul the infected corpse into a shallow pit dug for its reception and give it a hasty burial. In this work, and in assisting the poor wretches who survived, my father lost much time and money; while of course none of the Indians who lived over were capable of paying their debts to the traders. This winter ruined my father almost completely; and in 1836, aged 74 years, he removed to his homestead in Green Bay, where his father in-law, Joseph le Roy, still lived."

VOCABULARY

half Jack knife (posts)
small trading posts

Scourge
disease

Wretches
miserable individuals

Debts
that which is owed

Homestead
primitive, agricultural
or rural home

Peltries
animal skins and furs

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ACTIVITIES

1. Construct a timeline or create a comic book version from Vieau's narrative.
2. List or draw a picture of the goods carried and the seasons of the year.

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PRIMARY SOURCE

A Fur Trade Scandal

Henry H. Hurlbut, *Chicago Antiquities* (Chicago: H. H. Hurlbut, 1881) 147.

In American State Papers, vi. (Indian Affairs, ii.), pp.360, 361, there is an extract from a letter by Matthew Irwin, U.S. factor at Green Bay, to Thomas L. McKenney, superintendent of Indian trade, as follows:

“October 6, 1821.— Mr. [James] Kinzie, son to the Indian sub-agent at Chicago [John], and agent for the American Fur Company, has been detected in selling large quantities of whisky to the Indians, at or near Milwalky of Lake Michigan; in consequence of which, the Indian agent at Chicago directed him to close his concerns at Milwalky in sixty days, and then leave the place. Some Indians from that place represented to me that they would be badly off for a trader, should Mr. Kinzie leave them; in consequence of which, I engaged Mr. Vieau, a citizen of the United States, and a professed Indian trader, to repair there for the purpose of supplying the wants of the Indians. I have supplied him with \$2,228.25 worth of goods, and have agreed to allow him \$200 from the time of his departure till his return next spring, with an allowance of some coarse clothing and subsistence. Two boatmen and two boys will receive, altogether, \$200, with some coarse clothing and subsistence. Mr. Vieau is well known here for his integrity, and possesses property enough here to cover the whole amount with which I have entrusted him.”—Ed.

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ACTIVITY

Be the investigator: Mr. Irwin says that the Native Americans felt they would miss the trader when Mr. Kinzie was withdrawn. Why do you think that was so? Why could they not return to the lives they were living before the Europeans came?

Mr. Irwin's letter describes a Mr. Vieau who replaced Mr. Kinzie in the Milwaukee area. How does this memory fit with the timeline described by Mr. Vieau's son in the excerpt covered earlier in this unit?

Contrast the relationship of Vieau with the Indians and the relationship of James Kinzie to the Indians. How would you explain any differences?

What additional evidence might we be able to find to get a clearer picture of this situation?

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PRIMARY SOURCE

A Traders' Plea

Letter from John Askin in Thompson M. Maxwell, *Wisconsin Historical Collections* (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society Collections, 1888), pp. 223-4. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago.

Michilimackinac
June 22nd, 1778

Messers. Todd & McGill, Montreal,

My Canoes are now arrived & have brought everything in good order & agreeable to the invoice, except in Bale No. 7: a small white Shirt in lieu of a large Ruffled, Bale No. 3: wants a Shirt of Russia Sheeting, a pair of Russia Trousers & a pair of Oxhide Shoes, No. 4 also wants a Shirt of Russia Sheeting.

The things from England are really well chosen & please me much, however a fiddle which I had mentioned in that memord is left out, & tho' such an omition can be of no consiquence to persons who can supply the want of the next Shop, it is so different here, that I would not for ten Guineas it had not come, please purchase one for me at Montreal without fail, let the price be about 6 Pounds, Hallifax. I sent you a memord this Spring in which a fiddle was mentioned, that one is also to come, its for an other person, please not to forget a quantity of strings for the fiddles.

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QUESTIONS

What does Askin's letter reveal about the life of a fur trader? If you were at a post in the hinterlands in the early 19th century, what would you want to bring to keep yourself amused? What would you bring today?

After reading all the primary sources in this lesson, consider: Why would anyone want a life in the fur trade given the hardships?

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LESSON 3 Fur Trade Accounting

The fur trade began in the 16th century between the Native American nations and the French. This complex, interdependent relationship changed over time with the entrance of each new empire. The following primary sources are official business documents from the fur traders James Kinzie and a "La Drouine." These invoices, though they may reflect the waning of the fur trade in the Midwest region, also give insights into the character of this commercial arrangement.

Chicago Outfit 1826

Chicago Outfit July 4th 1826 Cr

✓ 15 Raccoon good	25	\$ 2.50
✓ 2 " inf ^r	15	0.30
✓ 110 Rats	30	30
✓ 6 Skittins	6	0.36
✓ 2 Badgers	12 1/2	0.25
✓ 1 Mink	30	0.30
		<u>\$ 33.71</u>
3 5 Red Deer 9 H.	26	<u>2.34</u>
		<u>36.05</u>

James Kinzie Cr

54 prime Rats — 28 \$15.12

James Kinzie Account Book, American Fur Trade Company Papers,
Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Chicago Outfit July 4th 1826

10 Racoons Good	25	2.50	
2 Racoons infr	15		.30
100 rats	30		30.00
6 kittens	6		.36
2 badgers	12.5		.25
1 mink	.30		.30
			<u>\$ 33.71</u>
3 red deer 9 lbs	26c-		2.34
			<u>36.05</u>

James Kinzie Co.
54 prime Rats - 28 15.12

Goods Traded

1 gro London Scots Glantering	640	
2 doz Country made Socks	400	8
1" Scalping Knives	170	850
1" Womens Scissors ea	137	227 364
1 Gro Iron Jews Harps	160	
1/2 doz English Playing Cards	600	3
1 Paper Ink Powder	12	
1 Quire Footscap Paper Plain	45	

August 4th 1804

Furs Obtained Plus

Transcription of fur
invoices from James
Kinzie Account Book,
American Fur Trade Co.
Papers. Courtesy of the
Chicago Historical
Society.

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QUESTIONS

1. Check the math on the invoice of furs. Is it correct?
2. What accounts for the relative worth of each animal?
3. After examining these documents list five questions that occur to you about the nature of this transaction of both goods and fur. For example, what is a jew's harp and who was going to play 144 of them!?
4. Review and discuss the questions posed at the beginning of this unit.

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PRIMARY SOURCE

Thomas M. Maxwell, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society Collections, 1888). Courtesy of the Newberry Library Chicago.

Here is a detailed account from a Wisconsin agent of the American Fur Company, the same company that controlled trade in the Illinois country.

*Account Book for Drouine
Lac du Flambeau, 4th August 1804*

										Plus
<i>August 4th, 1804</i>										
<i>Sent to Ouisconsaint by Bazinet, the following goods:</i>										
1	Piece common Blue cloth									15
3	Blankets	3	points	@	5	plus	each			36
9	do	2 1/2	do	@	4	do	do			6
2	do	2	do	@	3	do	do			4
2	do	1 1/2	do	@	2	do	do			10
2	Capots of	4	Ells	@	5	do	do			8
2	do	3 1/2	do	@	4	do	do			2 1/2
1	do	2 1/2	do	@	2 1/2	do	do			2
1	do	2	do	@	2	do	do			1 1/2
1	do	1 1/2	do	@	1 1/2	do	do			6
3	Rolls of braid			@	2	do	do			6
1	Package porcelain Beads				3	plus				.3
1	lb Vermilion				3	do				2
1	silk handkerchief				2	do				5
1	Piece of ribbon				5	do				3
1	Dozen Large Knives			@	4	for 1 plus				15
15	lbs. Beaver Shot			@	1	plus per lb.				.10
10	lbs. bullets			@	1	do do				36
18	Brasses of tobacco			@	2	plus per brasse				10
2	Carrots		do	@	5	plus each				25
2	1/2 kegs of mixed rum			@	10	do do				6
6	lbs. of powder			@	1	do do				259
<i>Return</i>										
<i>August 10th, 1804</i>										
222	Deer skins			@	2	for 1 plus				111
1	Bear skin									2
90	Muskrat skins				2	10 for 1 plus				9
3	Otter skins			@	2	plus each				6
1	Beaver skin				1					1
	For meat pounded for pemmican									5
	For quarters of meat									5
	Given on credit to various Savages for									15
	Given a commission for									50
<i>Goods brought back</i>										
3	Blankets of 3 Points			@	5	plus each				15
										219

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LESSON 4

Determining the End of the Fur Trade

Many historians say the fur trade in the Northern Illinois area ended by 1832. What might have been the factors that caused that? Use your evidence to establish your idea and tell the story.

Consider the factors involved in the fur trade:

- Animals with fur, especially beaver
- Native Americans to trap them
- Europeans, especially French, to trade for them and take them to agents of the Fur Company

What was happening with each of these factors in Chicago of 1832-33?

Available Evidence

1. Consider this excerpt from an index of American Fur Company letters from Sept 2 of 1841:

“Regret unfavorable prospects for deer and raccoons in London. Quantity of fine deer skins is constantly diminishing. Rage for summer robes for garments continues; hope the company can have the fashion adopted in the East.”

2. In the fall of 1833, following the Black Hawk War, chiefs of a number of tribes in the Midwest gathered in Chicago to sign a treaty which would remove their peoples to the country west of the Mississippi River. Charles LaTrobe, an English traveler, witnessed the event:

“When within five miles of Chicago we came to the first Indian encampment. Five thousand Indians were said to be collected around this little upstart village for the prosecution of the treaty, by which they were to cede (give up) their lands in Michigan and Illinois... The General Government of the United States in pursuance of the scheme of removing the whole Indian population westward of the Mississippi, had empowered certain gentlemen to frame a treaty with these tribes to settle the terms upon which the cession of their reservations in these states should be made. A preliminary council had been held with the chiefs some days before our arrival. The principal commissioner had opened it, as we learned, by stating that as their Great Father in Washington had heard that they wished to sell their land., he had sent commissioners to treat (deal) with them. The Indians promptly answered by their organ (interpreter) ‘that their Great Father in Washington must have seen a bad bird which had told him a lie; for, far from wishing to sell their land they wished to keep it’. The commissioner, nothing daunted, replied that “nevertheless, as they had come together for a council they must take the matter into consideration.”

(Source: Andreas p123)

3. Review the 1826 invoice of furs received by James Kinzie. What do you notice that may indicate why the fur trade was ending?

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LESSON 5

First Settlers

Historians often look to “firsts” because they often indicate that a major change has happened. Each question, though similar, means something a little different. Discuss the different meanings hidden in these questions.

1. Who was the first resident of Chicago?
2. Who was the first resident of the area that was to become Chicago?
3. Who was the first non-Indian resident of the area that was to become Chicago?
4. Who was the first permanent resident of the area that was to become Chicago?
5. Who was the first non-Indian permanent resident of the area that was to become Chicago?

Searching for Jean Baptiste Du Sable

A.T. Andreas, *History of Cook County, Illinois* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1884) 67.

Because such “firsts” usually become important only in hindsight, often there is not a lot of documentation about them. In 1779, the British commander at Michilimackinac reported:

“Baptiste Point DuSable, a handsome Negro, well educated and settled at Eschikagou; but much in the French interest”.

Jean Point Baptiste Du Sable is generally recognized as the first permanent non-Indian resident of the area that was to become Chicago. Du Sable, born of a white French father and Afro-Caribbean mother was a fur trader and explorer. He settled for a time among the Pottawatomies near the Chicago Portage Route. He built his cabin on the North Bank of the Chicago River, where it turned south near its mouth, and at the head of a point of sand which extended thence between the river and lake. He is remembered this way by Augustin Grignon, a fur trader himself:

“At a very early period there was a Negro lived there named Baptiste Point DuSable. My brother, Perish Grignon, visited Chicago about 1794 and told me Point DuSable was a large man...a trader, pretty wealthy and drank freely. I know not what became of him.”

DuSable resided in that cabin about 17 years. He sold the cabin to a trader named LeMai who later sold it to John Kinzie, one of Chicago’s first prominent businessmen. It was located near the present site of 401 North Michigan. After some improvements the Dusable/Kinzie House was described this way by Mrs. John Kinzie as

“...a long low building with a piazza extending along its front, a range of four or five rooms. A broad green space was enclosed between it and the river, and shaded by a row of Lombardy poplars. Two immense cottonwood trees stood in the rear of the building. A fine well cultivated garden extended to the north of the dwelling and surrounding it were various buildings appertaining the establishment , - dairy, bake-house, lodging-house, for the Frenchmen and the stables.”

4.

Exploration to Exploitation

LESSON 6

Recovering the Past: First Buildings

Historians search for evidence so that they can understand what happened in the past. Some of the evidence will be primary source documents (such as the business documents and journal entries used in this unit), and some will be secondary sources, building on the work of previous historians. Another kind of evidence is “physical evidence” especially old buildings. (Remember the evidence of Madame Framboise’s dwellings?)

Along with the “first” settlers, historians are often involved with archeologists in finding, documenting or recreating the first structures. Chief among these would be forts, commercial establishments, and homes. What kinds of evidence might be used to locate these forgotten or destroyed buildings? In early histories such as *Andreas* (1884) eyewitness testimony was available as “evidence” of the past.

There is no record or even tradition that a fort ever stood at the mouth of the Chicago River prior to 1803. Tradition says one was built by a French trader named Garay, upon the North Branch and that the branch was named Gary Creek. It is probable that forts, or more probably stockades, as places for the storage of furs were erected at the mouths of many rivers near portages. The earthworks around the remains of one of these are said to exist on the north side of the “sag”, before alluded to in the town of Palos, Cook County and its ruins are described by Dr. V. A. Boyer of Chicago:

I have many times visited when on hunting excursions the remains of an old fort, located in the town of Palos... The remains of the fort situated north of the sag and near the crossing were on elevated timber land, commanding a view of the surrounding country. ... I first saw it in 1833 and since then have visited it often in company of other persons, some of whom are still living... It seems probable that it was the work of French fur traders or explorers as there were trees nearly a century old growing in its environs. It was evidently the work of an enlightened people, skilled in the science of warfare....

(Andreas, 56)

4.

Exploration to Exploitation

ACTIVITIES

The DuSable/Kinzie Place

1. Using the details on page 25 draw a picture of the DuSable/Kinzie House, as you imagine it looked. Find other images of the DuSable/Kinzie House in books and compare. Where might you find these sources?
2. Be the Historian! Because the house existed into the 19th century and was owned by John Kinzie, one of Chicago's most prominent Euro-American businessmen, we know exactly where it stood. Does it still stand? What happened to it? What is there now? Create a project describing early Chicago life through the history of this structure. What additional sites related to early Chicago might be found in the city?

Placing Fort Dearborn in the Story

After the Battle of Fallen Timbers, in which the Indian Confederacy was defeated, the Treaty of Greenville (1795) gave small pieces of land for forts at the mouth of several rivers, including the Chicago River. This fort at the Chicago Portage was built by the Americans and called Fort Dearborn. It was constructed to establish American authority in the Portage and did so for a number of years. Then in 1812, England and America went to war. Potawatomi and other tribes in the Chicago area saw a great opportunity to regain their lost land and attacked Fort Dearborn. In the battle that occurred soldiers, women and children were killed and the fort was burned down, later to be rebuilt.

1. Research the Fort Dearborn "Massacre" and examine the language we use to describe the event. List three details of the story you would like to explain further.
2. Investigate the several "lives" of Fort Dearborn 1803-1857. Put together a display of images and compare them. Fort Dearborn was erected in 1803, burned down by Indians in 1812 and rebuilt in 1816 where it stood until 1857 when it was demolished. Today an exact model of Fort Dearborn is featured at Chicago Historical Society and bronze markers are set in the sidewalk of Michigan Avenue where it once stood. What kinds of evidence would historians have used to create the model and the marker?

4.

Exploration
to Exploitation

LESSON 7

Women and the Chicago Portage

How does the history of the fur trade, frontier, and early urbanization change when women's lives are brought into the picture? Evidence shows that female traders, usually widows, worked in the region and were probably the first Euro-American women present. Marriage between French men and Native American women were common—either for romance, convenience or social and economic reasons, and as the United States took control of the area more men from the Northeast moved to the region bringing their wives. So no simple conclusion can be made about how women experienced and impacted the frontier: women's experiences would be as varied as the women themselves—by their race, class, and the setting in which they lived. Even though women's experiences differed from one another, similarities still existed which made their experiences different than men.

4.

Exploration to Exploitation

PRIMARY SOURCES

The following excerpts from primary sources reflect the lives of four different women:

Mrs. Juliette Kinzie and Mrs. Lawton

Wau Bun: The "Early Day" in the North-West (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1901; first published 1856 by D.B. Cooke) 180.

Juliette Kinzie, Connecticut-born wife of John H. Kinzie, left one of the most interesting accounts of early Chicago in her book *Wau Bun*. She and her husband John, son of John and Eleanor Kinzie—two of the original Euro-American settlers—first stayed at Fort Winnebago in Wisconsin and then permanently moved to Chicago in 1833. The account below is about their stop at a trading post on their way to visit family in Chicago in 1831, where she described her encounter with Mrs. Lawton [Laughton] who lives with her husband at a trading post on the Chicago Portage route.

"It was almost dark when we reached Lawton's [Laughton]. The aux Plaines [Desplaines] river was frozen, and the house was on the other side. By loud shouting we brought a man out of the building. And he succeeded in cutting the ice, and bringing a canoe over to us; but not until it had become difficult to distinguish objects in the darkness.

"A very comfortable house was Lawton's, after we did reach it—carpeted and with a warm stove in fact, quite in civilized style. Mr. Weeks, the man who brought us across was the major-domo, during the temporary absence of Mr. Lawton.

"Mrs. Lawton was a young woman, and not ill looking. She complained bitterly of the loneliness of her condition, and having been "brought out here into the woods; which was a thing she had not expected when she came from the East." We did not ask her with what expectations she had come to a wild unsettled country; but we tried to comfort her with the assurance that things would grow better in a few years. She said she 'did not mean to wait for that.' She should go back to her family in the East, if Mr. Lawton did not invite some of her young friends to come and stay with her to make it agreeable.

"We could hardly believe on rising the following morning that only twelve miles of prairie intervened between us and the Chicago of our Desire, as I could not but name it.... We could look across the extended plain and on its farthest verge were visible two tall trees which my husband pointed out to me as the planting of his own hand when he was a boy...."

Mrs. Smith

Chicago Democrat, January 28, 1834.

"Mrs. Smith, wife of a Mr. Smith residing at Blue Island, who left this place 2d of January (which was the coldest day we have experienced this winter) for her home, and when within a mile and a half of her dwelling, she sank benumbed and exhausted to rise no more. When found, she was dreadfully mangled and torn to pieces by the wolves. She has left a husband and five children to mourn her untimely end."

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Another version of this tragedy appeared fifty years later. Besides time, why might the two accounts differ?

George H. Woodruff, *History of Will County* (W. LeBaron: Chicago, 1878) 496.

"A sad story was told us by Mrs. Stevens, who, though but a little girl of fifteen or sixteen of age at the time, remembers the occurrence distinctly. It was of a family who had settled near the present village of Blue Island, and during this deep snow their provisions became exhausted, and the husband and father started for the settlements to procure fresh supplies. Being unavoidably detained by the snow, the last crumb disappeared, and the mother, in the very face of starvation, started for Chicago, as is supposed, to get food for her children, and got lost on the prairie and was either frozen to death or killed by wolves. The former supposition is probably the correct one, and after freezing was devoured by wolves, as nothing was ever found but her bones, which were recognized by her shoes. Her children were discovered by some chance passer-by when almost starved to death, and were taken and cared for by the few kind-hearted people in the country at the time. The husband's return was a sad one. His wife dead and eaten by wolves, and his children cared for by strangers, it would almost seem that he had little left to live or care for."

4.

Exploration to Exploitation

Mrs. Almira Willcox

"Life in Chicago Seventy Years Ago: Experiences of Mrs. Charles A. Taylor, Daughter of Mrs. Almira Willcox of Detroit, Mich., in 1832-'33-'34. Compiled from her Diary by Mrs. Julia Willcox Tenney" Chicago Tribune, September 20, 1903, 46.

"Glad as we were to have the troops to protect us, we soon found that with the soldiers had come a still more deadly foe. Asiatic cholera had made its appearance on the boat coming to Fort Dearborn.... Though pronounced 'a brave,' I took wise advice, gathered up a few utensils, some food, warm clothing, and bedding, and with half a dozen other women Julia and I were rowed up the north branch of the Chicago river to a shanty which had been abandoned by a discouraged squatter.

"That gruesome picnic lasted several days. Our hearts were full of fears for the members of our families at home. At last another boat arrived, bringing husbands and friends with needed supplies.

"In a week returned to the old life, to find the disease had spread among the citizens. Several had been ill, a few died.

"Our friend and fellow townsman, Mr. Philo Carpenter, who came in July 1832, was nurse and doctor. He administered liberal doses of calomel, used his penknife as a lancet, and thus saved several lives.

"Our minds were solemnized by these events. Many among us wished for the regular observance of the Sabbath, to which we had been accustomed in our eastern homes. Julia longed for her Sunday school. So I decided to teach a class in the little parlor of our log tavern."

Mrs. Victoire (Mirandeu) Porthier

Andreas, History of Cook County, 105.

Mrs. Porthier was born in Chicago around 1800/01 and lived in Chicago until 1835; she was the family servant to both the Kinzies and Wolcotts. Andreas verifies her 1883 oral history noting that "She...retains a vivid and clear recollection of the very early times in Chicago, where are deemed of historic value, as they were given at two different interviews, between which sufficient time had elapsed to test the reliability of her recollection. Without prompting on the part of the interviewer, she corroborated all statements made at the first."

"My mother was an Ottawa woman; my father was a Frenchman. He was a good scholar, a very handsome man, and had many books. He taught us to speak Indian of the tribe and mother. We had no schools nor education. I never learned to read or write. My father had his house in Milwaukee, where he traded with the Indians and did some blacksmithing for them, and for other trades. He fixed guns and traps for them...."

4.

Exploration to Exploitation

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Compare and contrast the lives of Juliette Kinzie, Mrs. Lawton, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Porthier, and Madame La Framboise. How might a person's race and class position influence their experience on the frontier?
2. What similar kinds of concerns might these women have had which would differentiate them from their male counterparts?
3. Pretend you are one of the women who appeared in this unit. Write a letter to your family back east about your new life.
4. Select one of the women from this unit and write a set of questions you would ask her if you could interview her.
5. If you lived in the Northeast and were given the choice to move west to Chicago would you go? Cite the pros and cons.
6. Some say Kinzie was romantic and elitist, others say she is sympathetic. Read *Wau Bun* for yourself and arrive at your own conclusions. What might have compelled her to write this book—one of the earliest personal recollections of Chicago published.
7. Check the census for Chicago to find out the ratio of men to women over the course of the 19th century. What other sources could you look for to find the presence of women?
8. Investigate Laughton [Lawton] Brothers trading post. What kind of social and economic role did it play in the fur trade? Bernardus and David first settled in the area called "Hardscrabble," (now part of Bridgeport) and then established a trading post and tavern along the Chicago Portage route in 1828 in present-day Riverside. (See map in Unit 1.) Primary sources, among them this passage in *Wau Bun*, leave plentiful evidence of the trading post but several archeological teams have searched for physical remains from the site with no success. Why might archeologists have a hard time finding objects?
9. Find out more about Native American women's lives.