



THE FUR TRADE

The trade in furs is very old. The North American beaver was one of the most popular furs traded around the world for 300 years.

People in Europe loved hats made out of beaver. They loved them so much that beavers almost became extinct in Europe. When Europeans came to North America they found lots of beavers. They also found that Native Americans were very good at trapping beaver and were willing to trade goods for them. Most of the Europeans who traded furs were French men.

Many men became very rich trading furs. John Jacob Astor formed the American Fur Company in 1822 and soon became America's first millionaire.

William Henry Ashley formed the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1822. He didn't use Native Americans to trap beaver. He hired young men to go west to the Rocky Mountains and trap beaver for him. Once a year, Mr. Ashley met with the young men in the Rocky Mountains. He brought them money and trade goods. They gave him the beaver pelts they had collected. This was called a rendezvous and the young men soon became known as "Mountain Men." Fur trading lasted until 1834. Then, silk hats became popular and no one wanted to wear a beaver hat anymore.