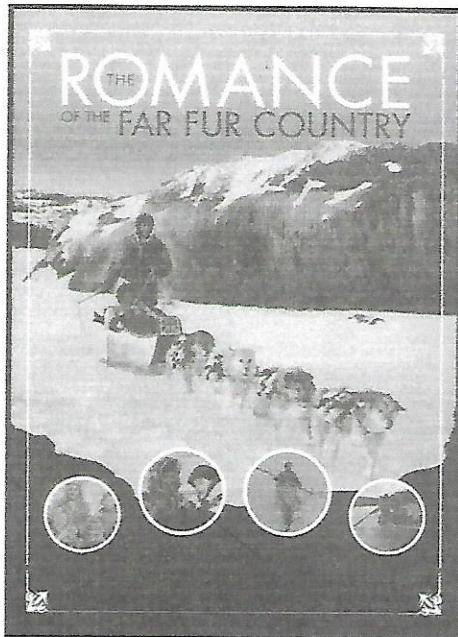


The Romance of the Far Fur North

By Scot H. Dahms



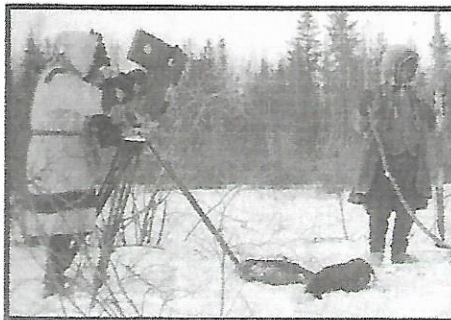
In 1919, Hudson Bay Company (HBC) filmed a documentary in Canada to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the company in 1920. The silent film showed unique footage of the lives of Arctic fur trappers. The film crew crossed Canada capturing extraordinary footage in the most inhospitable conditions imaginable. The film crew lugged their equipment by foot, sled, canoe and ice breaker. At the time, HBC led the international fur trade and owned large parts of Canada.

Along with the film, HBC released a written history of the company with a gramophone recording of the history as well. They also commissioned a magazine named "The Beaver" to actively chronicle the company's activities in the north. The Beaver's name was recently changed to Canada's History. There were also celebrations planned across Canada and London.

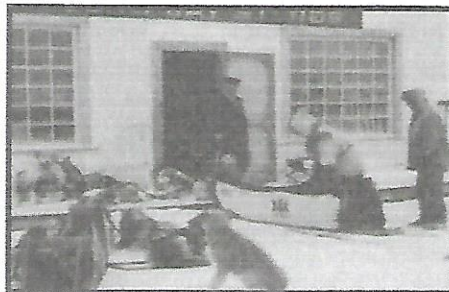


Icebreaker

In July 1919, the HBC ice-breaker RMS Nascopie departed from Montreal toward the Arctic Circle with two cameramen, Harold Wycoff and Bill Dare. HBC had commissioned a New York film company to do the recording. The film crew's directive was to capture the company's workings and commercial land holdings. These holdings once covered one twelfth of the earth's surface. HBC wanted to sell the land and were looking for people to settle on it. The HBC executives said the film should advertise the company and its lands without appearing to do so. HBC also sent the most experienced company men to be the chaperones and escorts for the cameramen.



In northern Alberta, the film crew visited Fort Chipewyan and filmed Aboriginal trappers on the trapline. In this area, the film crew travelled by dogsled over a frozen river. The camera caught a sled tipping with crates of film equipment throw into the snow. On the Abitibi River in northern Ontario, they filmed from canoes. The film crew ran rapids, portaged hills and camped in the wilderness.

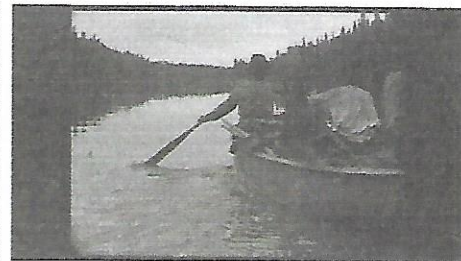


Store

The film was completed in January of 1920 and the film was taken to New

York for editing. The film crew captured 75,000 feet of film equivalent to eight hours of viewing time. The first draft was four hours long and was later cut down to two hours.

On May 23, 1920, the two hour film premiered in Allen Theatre at Winnipeg, which was the company's Canadian headquarters. The Winnipeg audience was a mix of HBC clerks, shoppers and one hundred First Nations people dressed in traditional clothing. The First Nations community interacted with the film calling out "get your gun" or "shoot him" when animals appeared on the screen as they were not familiar with European theater eti-



quette.

The film was later released across Western Canada and in London. A live orchestra accompanied the film and the theaters were usually filled. One Canadian newspaper said the film showed "Scenes Never Shown Anywhere Before". A British version was screened in London. This version included footage of women wearing expensive furs spliced between scenes of Inuit hunters and fur trade posts.

The film faded from the public view. In 1956, the film, in more than 20 reels, was given to the National Film Archive in London, England for safe keeping. In the 1980s, a safety print was made but the footage had only been watched by a few people.

In 2011, the film was transferred to HBC Archives in Winnipeg. In January 2012, footage from the film played in Edmonton. From there, the film was shown in the communities where it was filmed. People recognized their family members, their landscapes and their lost traditions. In 2014, a second film was made called On the Trail of the Far Fur Country.

This film told the tale of getting the finished film back to these remote locations and the responses that the audiences had to it 95 years later.



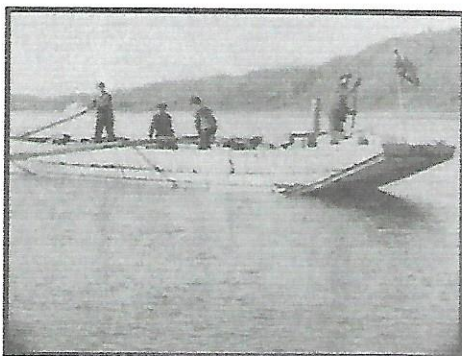
Cameraman



Cabin



Far Fur Country
1919 Kayak camera



Boat

I ordered both films and enjoyed them. The Romance of the Far Fur North is a black and white silent film which was recreated from the actual footage filmed in 1919. On the Trail of the Far Fur North is a documentary showing the original footage plus modern footage showing how the communities look today. If you are interested in ordering the films, I recommend watching the Romance first to see what was shown in 1920 and the Trail second to fill in all the background information. If you only order one, I recommend ordering the Trail.

The Winnipeg Film Group has offered the members of the North American Trap Collectors Association a coupon for \$5 off the purchase of either individual DVD or the combo for each member. To utilize the coupon, the member must use the online store and use the special coupon code of "traps". The offer expires 31 December 2016. The online store website address is <https://www.winnipegfilmgroup.com/product/the-far-fur-country-dvd-combo-pack/>

References:

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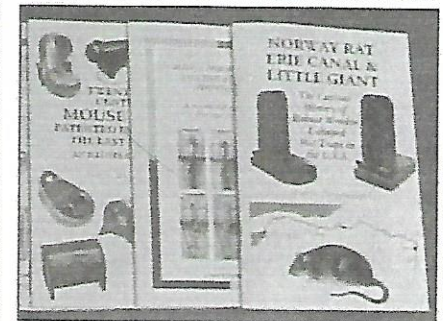
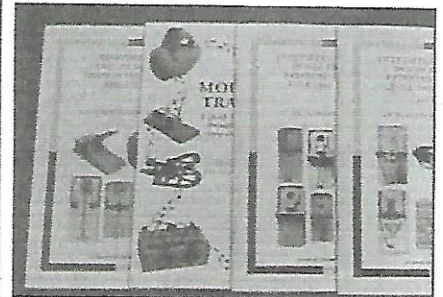
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