

**THE FUR TRADERS OF THE
COLUMBIA RIVER AND
THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS**

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The fur traders of the Columbia river and the Rocky mountains by Washington Irving

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WASHINGTON IRVING

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Buffalo bringing their hides to St. Paul in the early days

The writer desires to thank you sincerely for the many kindnesses and favors extended to him through past seasons, and to offer this book in the hope that its perusal may afford you some entertainment, and as an advertisement that he will call on you as usual this season with a finer, larger, and more elaborate line of "Gordon" furs than ever before.

Wishing you a happy and prosperous year, he begs to remain,

Yours with much esteem,

H. E. Whaley

February 1st, 1908.

IN 1838, or about the time the events chronicled in this book were brought to a close, the village of St. Paul was founded on the east bank of the Mississippi, six miles below its confluence with the St. Peter,—now the Minnesota River,—where Fort Snelling was and is still located, and at the highest point navigable for steamboats. The village was established for the purpose of trading with the Indians and trappers for furs.

The town grew and prospered. The great accumulations of furs from the West and Southwest were brought by boat on the St. Peter and vast amounts of supplies were sent by the same route to the Indians, trappers, U. S. soldiers, and the many venturesome settlers who began a few years later to find their way into that wilderness.

From the far North, via old Fort Gary (now Winnipeg) and Pembina, where Selkirk located his colony two hundred years before, the furs were brought by caravans of Red River carts, often one

hundred in a single caravan. These carts were a strong, wide, two wheeled affair made entirely of wood, the wheels from five to seven feet in diameter, and were drawn by oxen. Thousands of bales of rich and beautiful furs were brought to St. Paul from the great forests north and east of the village toward and beyond Lake Superior. Thus, St. Paul practically became the primary depot for all the furs native to the North and West and from here they were shipped to all parts of the world by steamboat until the advent of railroads.

In the meantime St. Paul had grown to be a large jobbing and manufacturing center, supplying the great Northwest with most of its merchandise. Among the many furs and pelts sent to St. Paul in those days, one of the most useful as well as most plentiful was that of the buffalo. Every year thousands upon thousands of Indian dressed robes were sent to and shipped therefrom. It was not an uncommon thing to see the levees (steamboat landings) covered for acres with bales of

buffalo skins awaiting shipment, like the cotton bales on the levees at New Orleans. The skins were used almost wholly for sleigh robes and men's overcoats.

In 1871 Mr. Richards Gordon, senior member of the firm of Gordon & Ferguson, a young firm engaged in the wholesale Hat and Cap business in St. Paul, conceived the idea of establishing a factory to line the robes and make up the coats *at very first hands and right on their native heath*. They were successful and soon others followed them, and again others. St. Paul made buffalo coats *cheaper and better than any other place*. This soon became known; the business grew and grew. All kinds of furs were added and used, and one could buy anything from the rough buffalo coat to the finest sealskin sacque.

When, in 1884, the buffalo became extinct, the trade found that St. Paul manufacturers had already put other furs to use and were making finer and better coats and garments than ever. Now, the country *looks to St. Paul* principally for its

supply. That is why St. Paul manufacturers can dare to buy materials and can build garments in so much vaster quantities, and better and cheaper today than anywhere else. *Gordon & Ferguson are still the leaders in the business.*

As the center of the men's-fur trade became absolutely settled here, Gordon & Ferguson developed the manufacture of ladies' furs of all kinds in equal proportions. Now they use not only the finest native skins, but skins of every kind from all over the world.

When the recent great demand for automobile-fur-garments appeared, Gordon & Ferguson were almost the only manufacturers in the United States with a variety of furs and enough of every variety to meet the wants of the people in that direction.

Every item of their fur business is under the immediate supervision and care of Mr. C. L. Kluckhohn, the secretary of the company, who began with them a young boy, thirty-five years ago.

H. E. WHALEY.



From Gibson's Souvenir of St. Paul

ST. PAUL, TODAY
Gordon E. Ferguson fur dressing and dyeing establishment in the foreground