

# Enter America as Chief Fur Trader

## Foreign Countries Formerly Ran the Business of Selling Pelts, but New York and St. Louis Are Now the Leading Markets

NOT the least interesting of many commercial changes due to the war is the way the United States has come to the fore as a fur-selling country. Ever since the white man first came here America has ranked among the world's largest fur-producing countries, but until the present war gave Europe something more serious to think about we played second fiddle in the selling end of the business.

Auction sales of furs are still being held in London, but neither in attendance nor in the size and quality of the offerings do they resemble the sales of the days before the war. American buyers and American furs no longer play the parts they formerly did in England. The submarine is one of the chief reasons. It has caused a scarcity of ocean freight space and a big jump in war risk insurance on cargoes. Then the war and the revolution have played havoc with Russia, both as a seller of furs and as a producer. The great fair at Nijni-Novgorod, that ancient Russian town which for years has been a Mecca of fur buyers from all over the world, was held this year, as usual, but the attendance, while large, was almost entirely made up of Russian buyers. Some French and English purchasers were seen, but Americans were conspicuous chiefly by their absence. Prices on such furs as sable, ermine, broadtail, caracul, and kolinsky showed advances ranging from 200 to 400 per cent. Other Continental fur centres either were obliged to abandon their activities altogether or to carry them on on such a small scale that they attracted little, if any, attention.

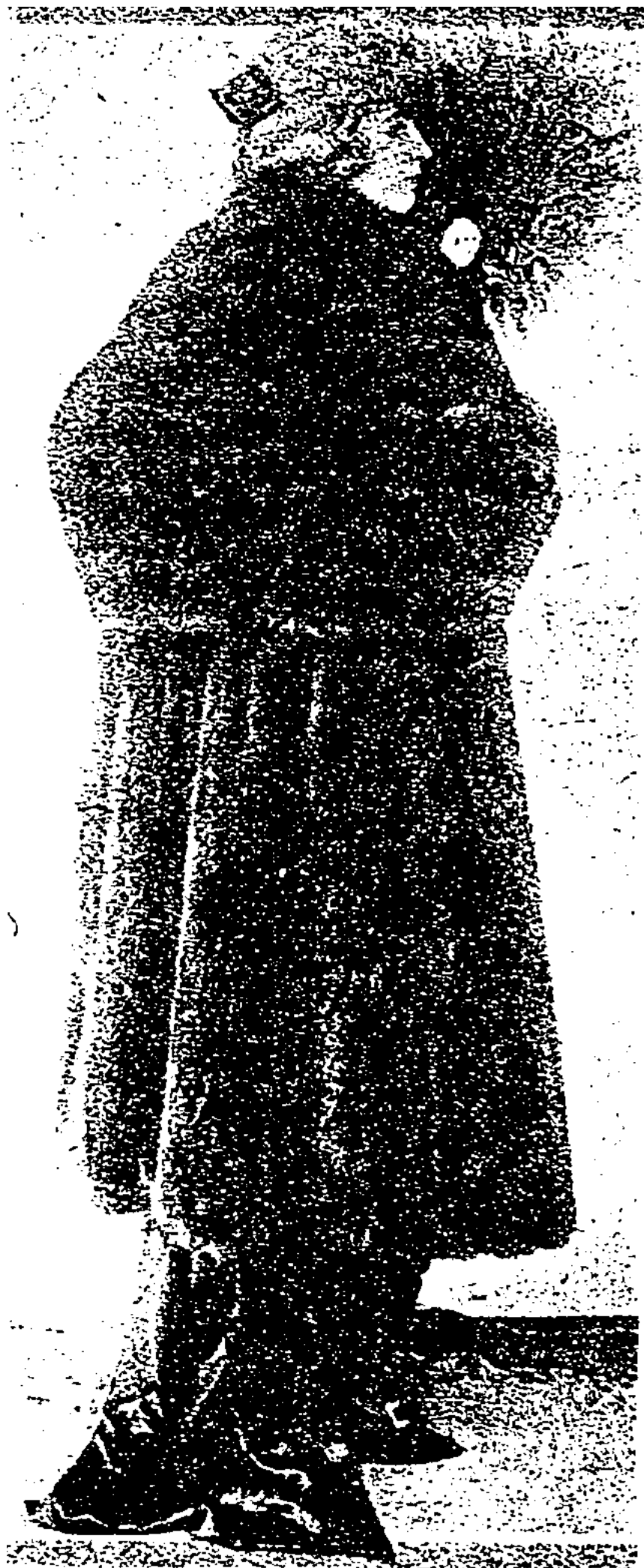
The result has been that this country markets a large portion of the world's furs. This marketing has taken the form of great auction sales in New York and St. Louis three times a year, at which millions of dollars' worth of furs in the raw state are sold to buyers who come from practically all parts of the world. The chances are that at the forthcoming sales, which will begin in New York on Oct. 15 and in St. Louis on Oct. 8, buyers from Germany will be missing for the first time since these cities began their competition with London.

While the great bulk of the buying at the American sales is for civilian purposes, the purchases ranging all the way from Russian sables at dazzling sums to the skins of ordinary house cats at trivial prices, not a little of it is done by the nations at war. At the January sale in New York, for instance, the heaviest buyers of bearskins were Englishmen. It was reliably reported at the time that the pelts were to be made into hats for wear by certain branches of the British army. With the American Government already in the market for fur or fur-lined garments, especially for use by the Aviation Section, the chances are that the coming sales will see considerable direct or indirect buying for our own Federal account.

One of the features of the Government's participation in the fur business, this time as a seller, concerns sealskins. For a long time previous to the beginning of hostilities sealskins had to be sent to Europe for finishing, later to be returned to this country and re-entered in the dressed state at a customs tax of 20 per cent. ad valorem. The necessity for taking all this trouble in getting the skins put into condition for cutting up into garments naturally had a detrimental effect on the prices they brought in the raw state. Now, however, the finishing can be done in this country, and the Government is a frequent seller of sealskins at the St. Louis sale.

But while it has helped the United States reach a prominent place among the fur-selling countries of the world,

the war has not been altogether a blessing in that respect. Considerable trouble is still being had with dyes, though it is gradually being eliminated. It is said of kolinsky, and the skins used in imitation of it, that they are selling slowly on account of the difficulty of having them properly dyed, though it is predicted that this condition will be temporary. One of the notable instances of trouble with fur dyes resulted in the dyer's having to pay \$50,000 damages for furs spoiled in process as a result of inferior color stuffs. And yet this dyer bought the trouble-making colors at \$100 a pound,



Joel Fester.  
New York Rivals Paris in Designing  
Coats of Rich Fur. This Is the Picture  
of a \$12,000 Coat of Hudson Bay  
Sable. Containing 115 Skins.

when their normal price before the war was 50 cents a pound.

Another way in which the war has affected the fur situation has been to cut down the supplies of skins received from other countries. This difficulty has been offset to an extent by the reduced shipments of skins from the United States. However, as a result of depleted supplies, prices have advanced sharply, particularly on skins of animals not native of this country. The law of supply and demand has had a hand in the increases, but it has been ably aided by Fashion, which is figuratively crying for furs and still more furs. Proof that the women of the country are responding to the cry is seen in the fact that, despite the higher prices, the fur trade as a whole is enjoying one of the best seasons it has ever had. A factor in this prosperity is the increased skill of American manufacturers and fashion artists. So marked has been this increase that it may truly be said now that New York rivals Paris in the designing of rich furs.

Strangely enough, among the most popular furs this season is the most expensive of all, Russian sable, the "royal fur." In various forms of made-up goods the sables are literally worth a

King's ransom. In the form of stoles, containing from fifteen to eighteen carefully matched skins, they have sold at prices ranging from \$10,000 to \$18,000. Within the last year or two a long coat made of the finest Russian sable skins, for which the markets of the world were combed, sold for \$75,000. With the present chaotic state of Russia, fur merchants are unwilling to venture a prediction as to the probable price of sables six months or a year from now.

Another of the popular furs of the moment is the marten, also known as Hudson Bay sable. It is Canada's offering to compete with Russian sable, and it is meeting with an exceptional demand for all grades at advanced prices. Some of the best skins, fur merchants say, so closely resemble Russian sable that only an expert can tell the difference between them. Kolinsky, which comes from Russia, also can be made to resemble sable.

Alaska sealskins are coming to the front again after a period of more or less dullness, and give promise of enjoying more popularity than for a long time. The position of silver fox, on the other hand, is somewhat uncertain. The present buying of these furs by dealers is only fair, with the cheaper grades selling more freely than the more expensive ones.

That other "royal fur," ermine, also



Joel Fester.  
American-Made Ermine Stole and Muff.  
Worth \$950.

runs into money very quickly. It is not a rare thing to see an opera cloak of ermine that has cost its owner \$10,000 or thereabout. The little animal which supplies this fur is better known, perhaps, as the weasel. It is found in the United States, Canada, and Russia. The best skins come from Russia. It is much in favor this Fall, and is selling freely in spite of the advanced prices. The available supplies are meagre, especially the larger sizes. Not much is heard of rabbit "ermine" these days.

In the more popular-priced furs, the fox group is to be well placed this Fall and Winter. Red fox is one of the prominent factors in the trade at present, a great deal of it being used in scarfs and

muffs, both in the natural state and dyed. The white fox also is to be seen a great deal, natural and dyed in taupe, blue, and other colors. The best of these skins come from Alaska and Russia. As with many other furs, they are bringing high prices.

Blue fox is good, though high. Alaska, Russia, Greenland, and the Kodiak Islands produce the bulk of it. The skin of the gray fox, which is by no means rare, is about the weakest member of the fox group, in a business sense. Aside from a fair demand for some of the cheaper grades, neither merchant nor consumer is paying much attention to it just now. Cross fox is in a fairly strong position, particularly some of the best Canadian and American skins. Not many Australian fox pelts are coming in, and the same is true of Japanese fox. Muskrat is to have a big season. Dyed and sold under the trade name of Hudson seal, it will certainly repeat its success of recent seasons, made up into coats. Also coats of natural muskrat are well placed in fashion's plans. The darker skins, which are the best ones, are especially to be seen in the natural state. After a process known as plucking, which leaves only the soft, short under hairs, muskrat can be dyed so closely to resemble sealskin as to deceive the average person. So popular has it been of late that the market stands practically denuded of fine pelts suitable for seal dyeing.

A good sale lately has developed for Northwestern skunk skins, and Eastern skins have participated in it. This fur, which, save for bear, is the only natural black fur, is being used in quantities for the manufacture of sets, as well as for trimming fabric coats and suits for women. It is also seen as contrasting trimming on coats of other fur.

Save for the finer Eastern skins, the movement of mink in grade circles is not rapid just now. The United States is a great source of these skins, as is Canada. In this country mink are trapped all the way from Louisiana to Maine. Mink also comes out of Russia and China, but skins from those countries are not so valuable as the American.

Raccoon is another fur that shows promise as material for coats. It is generally active in a trade sense, but the pelts suitable for coats appear to have the better of it. This is a favorite fur for motor coats. It is also used for muff and scarf sets, and frequently is dyed to simulate skunk. Beaver, which is supplied by this country and Canada, is meeting with fair success. It will be used more or less for trimming women's garments, and in the form of high-priced felt hats for men. The fur of the nutria also is used for this purpose, as well as trimmings and in coats. The nutria comes mostly from South America, and, warmth for weight considered, its fur is among the best in the market for coats. Save for the polar bear of the arctic regions, the bearskins that are commercially known in this country are either obtained here or in Canada. At present there is not much demand for them, though the skins of cubs and thim-pelted, silky "adult" skins are bought when they can be had and are used either in sets or for trimming purposes.

The badger, which comes principally from this country and Canada, is having rather an uncertain time of it for the present. Badger hairs often are cemented into other skins to enhance their beauty—a process known as "pointing." Lynx, which can be used natural or dyed, is selling slowly, too. The best lynx pelts come from Canada, though shipments of them are frequently forwarded from Alaska.

Present supplies of fisher skins are

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small, and with a good trade demand for them prices are mounting. Today these are selling higher than for years. The finer grades, from Northeastern Canada, do not remain unsold long after marketing. Wolverine skins, which come from the Northwestern part of this country and from Canada, are not so much sought as fisher, but as they also are in scant supply they are by no means cheap. Wolf is apparently scheduled for a good season. It is taken quite generally, and the finest skins are fetching extreme prices. The United States, Canada and Russia supply the bulk. Otter is something of an uncertain factor, though it is bringing better prices than at the beginning of the year.

The supply of opossum comes chiefly from America and Australia, though shipping conditions are limiting the number of skins received from the Antipodes. While not setting the trade afire, opossum pelts have been in better demand of late. It may not be generally known that the best mole skins come from Scotland, and that those from Holland run the Scotch variety a close second. A new basis of prices for mole has been established lately, and they appear to be taking on a new lease of life. They will be seen in coats and sets, and also as trimmings. Leopard skins are fairly active from a trade point of view. Not only are they used for rugs, but women who go in for extreme modes in dress frequently have them made up into coats.

While squirrel skins are abundant in this country, both in the market and on the backs of their owners, the American type is for the most part of limited commercial value. The best pelts come from Russia, and they are used both in the natural and dyed state.

Last, but not least, comes a considerable collection of cat furs. These range all the way from wild cat down to the most peaceful of tabbies, touching en route such skins as civet cat, Chinese civet cat, ringtail cat, and leopard cat. While black cats of the house type are traditionally regarded as unlucky, the superstition does not hold with the fur trade. In fact, the best prices are obtained for pure black skins, which are scarcer than might ordinarily be supposed.

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