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 fact that American furs have come to the fore as a fur-selling country. Ever since the white man first stepped upon our soil, no country has shipped to the world's largest fur-producing countries, but until the present war gave Europe something else 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 lots offered is there anything like the conditions of days before the war. American buyers and American furs no longer play the small role they formerly did in Europe. Submarines is one of the chief reasons. It has caused a scarcity of ocean freight space, which has in turn caused a scarcity of furs on cagoons. Then the war and the revolution have played havoc with Russia, and it is said that furs are scarce and prices are high. The great fair at Nikolai-Novgorod, that ancient Russian town which for years has been known as the Mecca of furs 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 not conspicuous in their absence. Prices on furs such as sable, ermine, broadtail, caracul, and kolinsky range from 250 to 400 per cent. Other Continental centers either were obliged to abandon their furs charming for lack of buyers, or to reduce them 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 all parts of the world. The reasons are that at the forthcoming sales, which will begin in New York on the Friday, the receipts from Russian furs will not be as large as expected. 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 garments, especially for the Aviation Section, the chances are that the coming sales will see considerable activity as well as buying for our own Federal account.

One of the features of the Governor's award was a picture of a Russian bear, which was sold for $7.50 this time as a seller, concern 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 at the tariff. The change in that direction is a 29 per cent. ad valorem. The necessity for taking all this trouble to getting the pelts in the best condition has been removed, and into garments naturally had a detrimental effect on the prices they brought in both Russia and America. It is possible that furs have been handled in this country, and the Government is a frequent seller of sealskins.

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 dyers, 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 Russian fur dyers resulted in the dyer's having to pay $100,000 damages for fur spoiled in process as a badly dyed sable stuff.

And yet this dyer bought the trouble-making colors at $100 a pound, a price, according to a prominent fur broker, which averages between $15 and $20 a pound, and which is very expensive. A number of Russian skins were bought by a man, who, after having them dyed by various dyers, complained that he was not satisfied with the color. It is said that the skins were bought at $100 a dekkin, which is, roughly, the usual price for a kolinsky.

Another instance of the popular fur 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 come from Russia, also can be made to resemble sable.

Alaska sealskins are coming to the front again after a period of more lenient duties, 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 deal- ers is on a smaller scale than has been done in recent years, but even so the demand for silver fox is greater than for many other grades selling more freely than the more expensive ones.

That other "royal fur," ermine, also

New York Rivals Paris in Designing Coats of rich Fur. This is the Picture of a $10,000 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 so great as to extend the reduced shipment of skins from the United States.

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That other "royal fur," ermine, also

American-Made Ermine Stole and Muff. Worth $250. 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 said to be very plentiful, and is selling freely in spite of the advanced price.

The available supplies are meagre, especially the larger sizes. Not much is heard of "weasels" these days. In the more popular-priced fur, 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, and is sold at $25 a piece in blue, and colors. The best of these skins come from Alaska and Russia. As for other furs, they are bringing high prices.

Blue fox is good, though high. Alaska, Russia, Norway, and China have a hold on the hides of it. The skin of the gray fox, which is by no means rare, is about the weakest member of the fox family, but it is in demand for some of the cheaper grades, making up a hat for ladies and a man's fur coat, and much attention to it just now. Cross fox is in a fairly strong position, particularly some of the best Canadian and American. Not many Australian fox pelts are coming in, and the same is true of Japanese. Mink is to have a big season. Dyed 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 most fashionable, are from the muskrat in the natural state. After a process known as plucking, which leaves only the skin and Hair, it is dyed to a dark reddish brown, dyed so closely to resemble sealskin as to deceive a casual observer. There has been a lot of talk that the market stands practically deuced of fine pelts suitable for seal dyings. Mink also lately has developed for Northwestern skunk skins, and Eastern hares have participated in it. This fur, which has a fur for bear, in the only natural black fur, is being used in quantities for the manufacture of sets, as well as for trimming coats and suits for men and women. It is also seen as contrasting on coats of other fur.

An instance of the 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 the states to Maine, and the fur is used extensively for garments, especially the fur coats. It is coming from the fur market, and is used more or less for trimming women's garments, and in the form of high-priced fur bags, for men. The fur of the nutria is also used for this purpose, as well as trimmings and in coats. The nutria, especially the soft varieties, is obtained in 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 beardskins that are commercially known in this country are skin, especially the larger ones. It is said to be a little better of it. This is a favorite fur for motor coats. It is also used for muff and cap, and it makes a very good substitute for the beaver, which is supplied by this country and Canada, is meeting with fair success. It is also used for more or less for trimming women's garments, and in the form of high-priced fur bags, for men.

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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 on routine 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 that might ordinarily be supposed.

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