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The American Fur Trade: Its Trappers, Traders, and Companies, 1605-1855 (1884)

Hubert Howe Bancroft

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Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832–1918) was one of the foremost and well known American historians and ethnologists who wrote, published and collected works concerning the western United States, Texas, California, Alaska, Mexico, Central America and British Columbia.

Bancroft writes:
"The young republic of the United States, in the flush of her late achievement, did not look with favor on an association of British, such as the Mackinaw Company, tampering with her savages and trading within her borders. In 1795, by treaty with Great Britain, colonial restrictions were removed, and direct trade opened between the United States and Canada, but in 1796 the government established posts along the frontier for the protection of her fur-hunters.

"There were yet others of race kindred to those who managed the great fur associations of the north ready to stake capital, energy, and life on flattering venture. Up to this time, if we except the early efforts on the Atlantic seaboard, there had been no regularly organized fur-trade in the United States, like that in Canada. Beyond the frontier were scattered white trappers, who with the natives sold such furs as they could gather to the nearest country store-keeper; but the genius of Yankee enterprise had not yet penetrated the forest. There had been much to do at home since the London and Plymouth colonists had assumed nationality—fighting, and after that praying, constitution-making, and farming. It was permanent settlement and progress the new confederation wanted instead of sudden wealth; hence they remained at home, where land was yet plentiful and cheap, built school-houses and meeting-houses, and worked early and late. Further than this, they had been poor, and unable to embark in speculative enterprise requiring great capital; and their credit was none of the best abroad. But with a portion of his earnings the coming American appeared, ready to gamble a little."

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