

REVILLON: THE STORY OF A LEGENDARY COMPANY

by Phyllis Barr

Note:

Previous columns have dealt with protecting the records which document a company's "corporate memory," using "corporate memory" as a marketing tool, and leveraging anniversary celebrations. This fall, in conjunction with the opening of the Revillon Boutique at 717 Fifth Avenue and Town & Country's 150th anniversary, there was an exhibit portraying the history of Revillon, including photographs from the Revillon and Town & Country archives. Revillon has been advertising in Town & Country for many decades. This column tells the story of Revillon and marketers who were far ahead of their time - Louis Victor Revillon and Victor Revillon.



BEGINNINGS

During the French Revolution, Louis-Victor's father, Count Louis-Victor d'Apraval, decided, wisely, to change the family name to that of a commoner. He moved from Paris to the country and became a farmer.

Young Louis-Victor decided that farming was not his calling. In 1823, he went to Paris and worked with a cousin who had a fur house. He learned his trade well and was able to buy a fur company sixteen years later. He was a man of innovation and vision whose ideas about marketing changed the way fur was regarded by creating fur fashion.

Revillon, New York, 1951

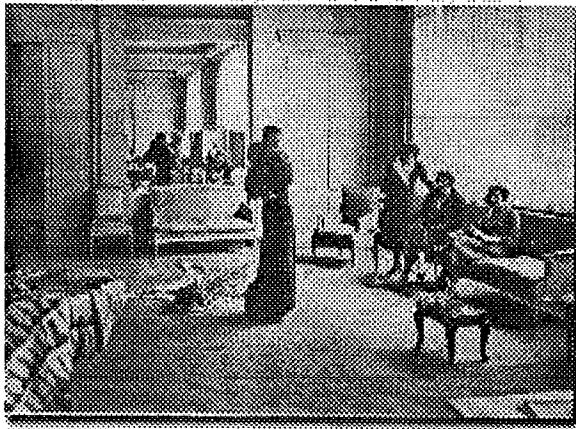
REVILLON CREATES FUR FASHION

Louis-Victor Revillon revolutionized fur design. He created a market for furs that appealed to new consumers in addition to those in the upper-class who were the usual customers. He took fur beyond its practical use of providing warmth by using new and different types of furs and designing a variety of fashionable styles.

In what was probably the first fur fashion show, he sent women wearing the latest designs to the Longchamps Race Track. He persuaded stores to include Revillon's furs in their catalogues and sell them in their stores. Fur to Louis-Victor was "fashion." He made Paris the fur capital of the world.

Revillon Paris, 1932





REVILLON AROUND THE WORLD

Revillon then brought its furs to America, opening a succession of stores and boutiques in New York City to join those in France, England, Germany and Russia, ultimately having boutiques in department stores nationwide. Revillon was very much a family company. Victor Revillon, Louis-Victor's grandson, made many trips to America. His children also worked for the company as did other family members.

Victor also carried forth Revillon Freres' plan to break the monopoly of the Hudson Bay Company which had been founded in 1669. Eventually Revillon had 125 trading posts across Canada. It bought ships, hired pilots and guides, and established numerous ports. Revillon even built a "supermarket" for the traders in Edmonton, Canada where they and others could find and buy all sorts of goods needed for daily life. The company also set up trading posts in Siberia. Revillon became the first French global company.

Revillon's pre-eminence in fur went beyond design and fashion. The company pioneered fur care with the first cold storage system.

REVILLON TODAY

Today Revillon has new boutiques at Fifth Avenue and 56th Street in New York, and in Chicago, Beverly Hills, Washington, D.C. (at Saks Jandel) and Palm Beach, which join its boutiques in Paris. The company has diversified and extended its line to include pret-a-porter, leathersgoods, accessories, fragrance, fine jewelry and watches and men's furnishings.

Revillon plans to open fifteen more boutiques over the next several years in various parts of the world. The company is now part of the French conglomerate Cora-Revillon.

Few companies have endured and prospered as long as Revillon and Town & Country nor had such a long relationship. Although very much of the present, they offer examples of the power and pull of "corporate memory" in a time of great change.

To learn more about how to market your corporate memory, see <http://www.buzznyc.com/barr>.

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Revillon File

MOOSONEE, ONTARIO

Moosonee is a community of 2000 on the west side of the Moose River just a short distance from James Bay. The Ontario Northland Railway, winds it's way through northern wilderness as the Polar Bear Express, comes to an end in Moosonee. Moosonee was first settled by the Revillon Freres fur traders in 1903 and today a museum details their exploits, however, the Hudson Bay Company had established a post at Moose Factory, a small island not far from Moosonee, in the mid 1600's.

Highlights of a visit to Moosonee include the Interpretive Centres of both the Northern College (the James Bay Education Centre) and the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Rail Car and Revillon Freres Museum, tours provided by Two Bay Enterprises and freighter canoe rides to historic Moose Factory or Shipsands Island Waterfowl Sanctuary.

If you plan to stay overnight, there are excellent accommodations available but reservations in advance are recommended as they are limited.

You may also snowmobile to Moosonee / Moose Factory in the Winter! The Wilderness Trail to the Edge of the Arctic provides the challenge for expert riders that the groomed trails cannot. Hiring a guide is highly recommended.

*FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL THE COCHRANE TOURIST ASSOCIATION AT
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[Stephanie Wright](#)*



Nanook.....Nyla
from *Nanook of the North* (Revillon Freres, 1922).

These photos are from the Silents Majority collection.

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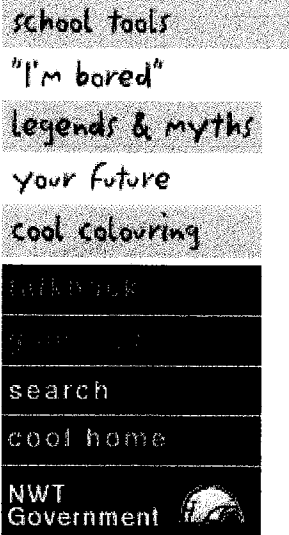


Photo courtesy National Archives of Canada



PEOPLE
of the Northwest
Territories

Traders/Trappers

Many explorers traded with the people of the north during their expeditions. However, it was the Company of Gentlemen Adventurers Trading into Hudson Bay, known as the Hudson Bay Company, that truly changed the North.

Between 1670 and the 1950s, the HBC established trading posts from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Ocean. They sought precious furs, including beaver in the areas south of the treeline and the white fox in the Arctic.

The North West Company, the Revillon Freres, Canalaska Company, and a host of independent traders (including a number of Dene and Inuit entrepreneurs like Steven Angulalik) joined the HBC in penetrating almost every corner of the North. They encouraged people - Dene and Inuit alike- to establish traplines and bring furs to the posts. The furs were traded for goods like steel knives, cloth, rifles, ammunition, flour, lard, needles and thread, metal cooking pots and a variety of other items.

This changed the way of life forever. Suddenly, people were not only hunting to feed their families and a few dogs. They were also trying to obtain large quantities of furs to trade for items they had never seen before, such as sewing machines and copper wash kettles, for example.

The introduction of the rifle alone had far-reaching consequences across the North. People no longer had to get within a few feet of

their prey and could hunt far more efficiently.

Today, trapping is an important source of income for many families that live in the bush or in small communities. Since we have no agriculture and limited business development, trapping is the only way for some people to earn any cash.

Some of the historic trading companies still exist today. The Hudson Bay Company has department stores in southern Canada. The North West Company operates the Northern Stores throughout the North. Revillon Freres sells high fashion fur coats in southern Canada.

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The Best Moving Pictures of 1922-23

Nanook of the North

By Robert E. Sherwood (1923)

Produced by Revillon Freres.-Directed and photographed by Robert J. Flaherty, F.R.G.S.-Distributed by Pathe.-Released June 11th, 1922.

There have been many fine travel pictures, many gorgeous "scenics," but there has been only one that deserves to be called great. That one is *Nanook of the North*. It stands alone, literally in a class by itself. Indeed, no list of the best pictures, of this year or of all the years in the brief history of the movies, could be considered complete without it.

The potential value of the movies as an educational medium is frequently stressed by men of prominence and triteness; and as a result, the word "educational" in connection with a motion picture has become almost synonymous with dullness, dryness and boredom.

The screen is no blackboard, and the prime test of every film that is projected on its surface is that it shall be interesting to the spectator. It may be teeming with genuine instructive value, it may contain what is generally called a "message," but if it fails to hold the audience's attention, the value and the message will be lost.

Robert J. Flaherty realized this when he produced *Nanook of the North*. He wanted to make a picture of Eskimo life (and, to the average mind, there is no character that is colder or less enthralling than an Eskimo), and he wanted to record the tremendous vitality, the relentless force, of the Arctic. He knew that there was good material here, but he also knew that this material would be worthless unless he presented it in an interesting way. He appreciated the fact that mere photographs of Eskimos in their various daily activities would be hopelessly dull if he treated his subject as instruction instead of as drama.

The backbone of every motion picture is the continuity- and by this I do not mean the plot. *Nanook of the North* had no plot whatsoever, and struggled along very well without it, but it did have continuity. The arrangement of scenes was sound and logical and consistent.

Mr. Flaherty selected one character, Nanook himself, to serve as the protagonist of his drama. Nanook was the center of all the action, and upon him was the camera focused. In this way Mr. Flaherty achieved the personal touch. Another producer, attempting to do the same thing, would have been content to photograph *A Native Spearing Fish* or *Another Native Building His Igloo*. Moreover, he would have kept himself in the foreground, as is the way of all travelogue rollers. Mr. Flaherty made Nanook his hero- and a fine, stalwart hero he was.

Nanook of the North, however, was not all Nanook. There was a co-star in the title role, and that was the North. The North was the villain of the piece, the dread force against which Nanook and his kind must continually battle. So Mr. Flaherty showed us Nanook, fighting sturdily to obtain food, and warmth and shelter, and he showed us the North hitting back with its gales, its blizzards and its terrible, bitter cold.

Here was drama, rendered far more vital than any trumped-up drama could ever be by the fact that it was all real. Nanook was no playboy, enacting a part which would be forgotten as soon as the greasepaint had been rubbed off; he was himself an Eskimo, struggling to survive. The North was no mechanical affair of

wind machines and paper snow; it was the North, cruel and incredibly strong.

The production of this remarkable picture was no light task. Mr. Flaherty had to spend years with the Eskimos so that he could learn to understand them. Otherwise, he could not have made a faithful reflection of their emotions, their philosophy and their endless privations. He had to select from among them those who were best qualified to tell the story of their race. He had to do his photography, his developing and his printing under terribly adverse conditions. He had no studio, no artificial lights and only the crudest of laboratories.

In the preface to this book, I say that the motion picture represents the combined talents of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of different people. But *Nanook of the North* is the notable exception to that rule; it was essentially a one-man job.

Of the difficulties which confronted him in producing *Nanook of the North*, Mr. Flaherty writes as follows:

"The film *Nanook of the North* is a by-product- if I may use the term- of a long series of explorations in the north which I carried on in behalf of Sir William Mackenzie from 1910 to 1916. Much of the exploration was done with Eskimos. I have been on long journeys for months at a time with only two or three Eskimos as my companions. This experience gave me an insight into their lives and a deep regard for them.

"In 1913 I went north with a large outfit- an exploring ship with lumber and material for a wintering base and food for eight men for two years. A motion picture outfit was incorporated. I hoped that the results from it might help defray some of the costs of what were now beginning to be expensive explorations. I had no preliminary motion picture experience, other than some two weeks with a motion picture camera demonstrator just before leaving. We wintered in Baffin Land on this expedition, which was of a year and four months' duration, and during those intervals while I was not seriously engaged in exploratory work, a film was compiled of some of the Eskimos who lived with us. Naturally the results were indifferent, But as I was undertaking another expedition in another part of the north I secured more negative and chemicals, with the idea of building up this first film.

"On this expedition I wintered on the Belcher Islands, which I had re-discovered and explored. Again, between explorations as it were, I continued with the film work and added to the first film very materially. After a lot of hardship, which involved the loss of a launch and the wrecking of our cruising boat, we secured a remarkable film on a small island ninety miles out at sea, of walrus hunting. This picture particularly, and some interesting stuff of native life, together with scenes showing the dismasting of the Laddie, our exploring ship, which owing to our condition was broken up and used for fuel, formed the nucleus of what I hoped would be a good picture. After wintering a year on the islands, the Laddie's skipper, a Moose Factory half-breed, and myself, finally got out to civilization along with my notes, maps and the above-mentioned film.

"I had just completed editing the film in Toronto when, through gross carelessness of my own, the negative caught fire, and I was minus all (some thirty thousand feet of film). The editing print, however, was not burned, and this was shown to some private groups several times, just long enough, in fact, to enable me to realize that it was no good. I knew then that the reason I had missed out was that the whole thing was episodic. But I did see that if I were to take a single character and make him typify the Eskimos as I had known them so long and well, the results

Robert E. Sherwood, "Nanook of the North," in The Best Moving Pictures of 1922-23, Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923, pages 3-8.

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