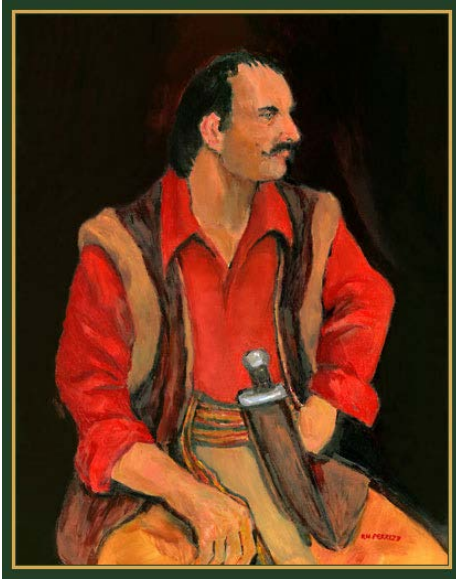


Médard Chouart des Groseilliers, explorer, fur trader (1618-1696)



The date of des Groseilliers's arrival to Canada is unknown, but it is likely that he came to Canada in 1641. From 1645-1646 he worked for Jesuits in Huron country. At this time he became proficient in the skills attributed to a *coureur des bois*—proficiency as a guide, surviving and traveling through the woods, and fur trading to name a few.

In 1647 he married his first wife, Helene Abraham, whose father's land became famous as the Plains of Abraham. In 1653 he married a second wife—Marguerite Hayet, a widow, and the sister of Pierre-Esprit Radisson, with whom he would have a long and productive professional relationship.

A year later, Radisson joined his experienced brother in law des Groseilliers in the fur trade. In 1659, they spent the winter in Sioux country, southwest of Lake Superior, and it was during this time that the two were told of Hudson Bay and the near limitless population of beaver that called it home. They collected many beaver pelts during this mission and in the spring traveled to Montreal, where their furs were confiscated due to their expedition having not been sanctioned by the companies that laid claim to that geographic region.

Following this debacle Radisson and des Groseilliers decided to operate based out of New England and did so from 1662 to 1664. During this time they tried to convince financial backers to cover the cost of their proposed expedition to Hudson Bay, but when ice forced them to turn back from their voyage, their supporters no longer saw the value in financing their expedition. In 1664 they were persuaded that financial backers in London would be more receptive to their proposal, and they set sail there in 1665. When they arrived they arranged to meet with rich and powerful Londoners, and proposed to them a plan to bypass the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes to reach the west, and instead to reach the West by navigating to Hudson's Bay, of which they had been informed in the Sioux territory years before.

Radisson and des Groseilliers began planning an expedition to prove that this path to the West was practical and possible, and set sail in 1668. Des Groseilliers led with a vessel called the *Nonsuch* while Radisson commanded the *Eaglet*, which was forced to turn back from the voyage. Radisson therefore remained in England while des Groseilliers completed the voyage. The *Nonsuch* successfully traversed Hudson Bay, wintered in James Bay, and returned to England in October 1669 with a cargo of fur that served as proof that the fur trading path to the West through Hudson Bay could be profitable.

As a result of the success that des Groseillier and Radisson's expedition to Hudson Bay experienced, the British government chartered Hudson's Bay Company on May 2, 1670. After the company was chartered, Radisson was sent back to North America to establish the company's Nelson River post and served as a senior guide, translator and travel adviser, while des Groseillier returned home to live in Trois Rivières.

For reasons unknown, in 1674 Radisson and des Groseilliers became dissatisfied by HBC and defected to the French fur trade after being made a lucrative offer from France to do so. Radisson was never fully trusted by his employers and eventually joined and served the French Navy from 1677 to 1679 while des Groseilliers continued establishing HBC trading posts along James Bay.

In 1682 both men were hired by French rival to HBC the *Compagnie Du Nord* to challenge the English monopoly of fur trading in Hudson's Bay. They traveled down the Nelson River and destroyed the HBC post on Nelson

River that Radisson had helped to create. He then created a new post called Fort Bourbon for the Compagnie Du Nord and left it in the command of his nephew & des Groseillier's son. Des Groseillier then built a French post at the mouth of the Hayes River for the Compagnie du Nord. English complaints of the destruction of their posts by Des Groseilliers and his companions as well as evasion of the French tax on furs again led him into legal trouble with both Canada and France. After unsuccessfully pleading a tax evasion case in Paris (1684) he returned to New France and seemingly retired. As with his brother in law and friend Pierre-Esprit Radisson, Médard Chouart des Groseilliers is an important contributor to Canadian history because his exploits opened up the West to the fur trade and resulted in the foundation of the Hudson's Bay Company.