

# Les Pays Den Haut

by Isaac Walters

## The Tapabord Hat in New France: A Cold Weather Alternative

As the temperatures outside are falling and my excitement for winter and winter trekking increases, I find my thoughts turning to my historic gear and clothing. What do I need to change, fix, replace, and try? In the past I have experimented with wearing various types of head coverings, but I quickly replaced them all with a good tuque. As much as I love the tuque and as common as it is for a *canadien* in the *pays d'en haut*, I find that I still need to experiment with other options.

I have decided again to try out a tapabord (perhaps due to my increased interest in the 17<sup>th</sup> century). In making this decision, I had to reexamine what the tapabord was, the commonality of its use in New France, and how I should make one (as I sold off the last one I had made since I did not wear it). With all of this now done, it is time to share the info with all of you.

The tapabord hat is a very versatile hat and is very similar to the classic Elmer Fudd hat or winter outdoorsmen cap made by Kromer™. It is a wool cap with a brim and flaps that cover the ears and back of the head. This flap, when not in use, can fold up around the cap. This cap seems to have been brought to France from England around



The author in his reproduction of a 17th century tapabord.

the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and quickly spread to use in France's colonies as well. In their *Encyclopedie*, Diderot and Alembert refer to it as a traveler's cap [*bonnet de voyageur*] and

show two images of one. Also in *L'Encyclopedie*, we see it referred to as a "Type of *bonnet à l'angloise* [English cap] that one wears at sea, & with flaps that can be let down on the shoulders." (1)



**A Micmac Indian wearing a tapabord.  
Probably from LeClercq**

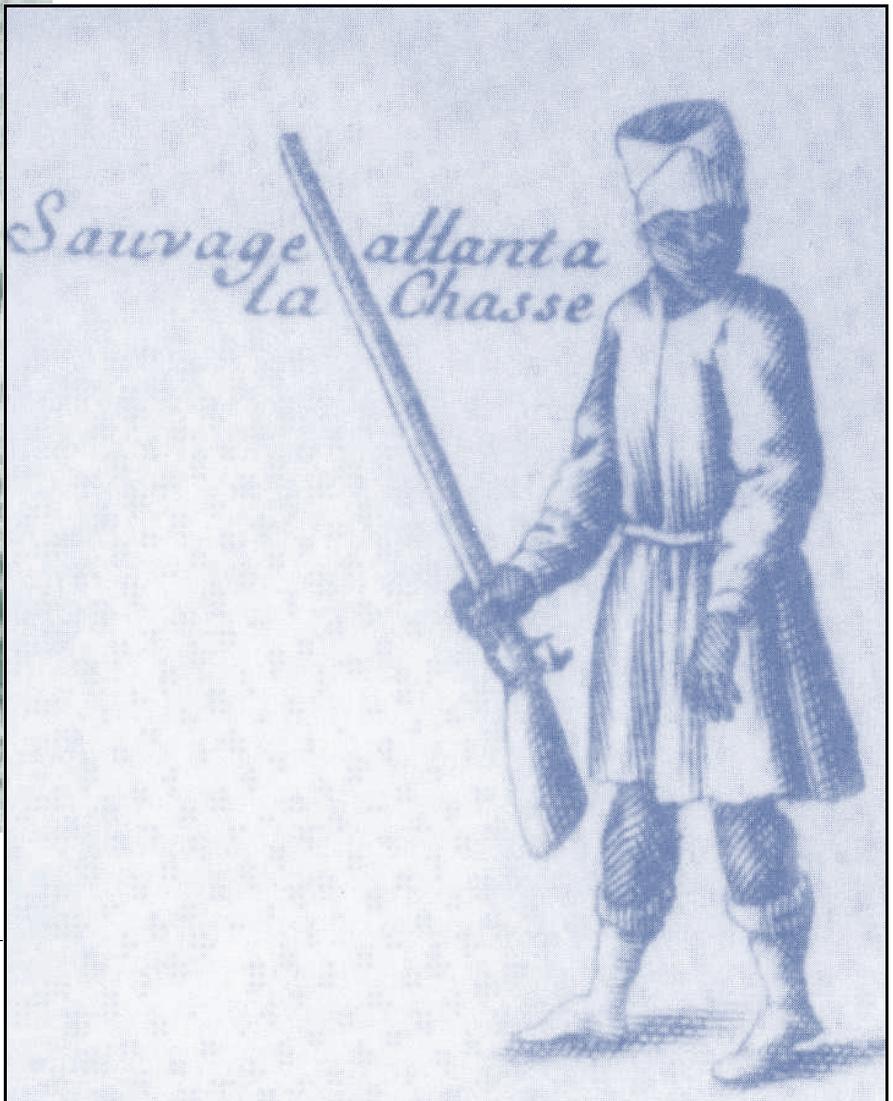
*A tapabord cap is a cap of English style which is also called a bourguignotte at sea. It is a cap worn during the day and at night, of which the brim is pulled down to the shoulders to protect against wind and sunburn. It is also called a Boukinkan because this type of cap was brought into France in the time of Louis XII by the English who were members of the retinue of the Duke of Boukinkan (Buckingham).” (3) (4)*

So who was it that wore this “English-style” cap in France’s colonies in North America? From the documented record, it seems that they were worn by nearly

everyone... Canadian *habitants*, soldiers, priests, and even the Indians.

Researcher Francis Back, in searching post-mortem inventories of 25 Montrealers that died between 1651 and 1663 found that tapabord caps were among the most common hats owned by these men. (5) In March of 1709 the *Mercure Galant*, a French gazette publishing between 1672-1724, stated that *Canadiens* “seldom wear hats but tapabords” (6) In 1686 each man of the deTroyes expedition against the British in the Hudson’s Bay (consisting of 30 soldiers and 70 *habitants*) were issued tapabord caps. (7)

A couple years later 32 caps were issued at the King’s store in Montreal for men serving at Forts Frontenac and Niagara. Meanwhile, the King’s store in Rochefort (France) was notified that a supply of hats had been



**A Native going Hunting from an engraving in LaHontan. He seems to be wearing a tapabord.**

Here are some other quotes explaining what the tapabord was.

*“A cap of the countryside, the brim of which is lowered to protect against bad...weather.” (2)*



The famous "Canadian Going to War on Snowshoes" A possible tapabord.

priests too. When Quebec was attacked in 1690 by the Phipps expedition, it was reported that, "Sieur Francheville, the priest, took a blue capot, a tapabord cap, and a gun of good condition, and placed himself at the head of his parishioners." (10)

So with the past quotes and archival documents and images, we can conclude that a considerable number of French in Canada and the Great Lakes were wearing tapabords, but this article of headwear did not just stop at these cultural boundaries. Native allies of the French also are found wearing them in both the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. LeMercier, in his relation of 1652-53 mentions that six tapabords were presented, along with capots, to a delegation of Iroquois Leaders.

*"The last present was composed of six hooded cloaks [capots], or cassocks of a certain kind, six riding-caps [tapabords], and two large porcelain collars; these were presented to the six Ambassadors to protect them against the inclemency of the weather on their journey, and to lighten the fatigues which they must undergo on the way."* (11)

Later in the Relations (1658) it is mentioned that the natives like European hats, the men liking tapabords and the women liking tuques [*bonnet de nuit de laine rouge*]. During the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the tapabord certainly seems to become a common item of trade to the natives. Prices are mentioned early on and by 1683 the rate of exchange was set at 1 for 1 beaver. (12) This trade continues through the

requested for the soldiers at Ft. Naxouat (Acadia) instead of the tapabords that were issued in the past. (8) Even the famous LaPotherie engraving of the Canadian Militiaman going to war on snowshoes pictures what most likely is a tapabord. In the texts that accompany the image and relate the story of the expedition to the North, it is mentioned that tapabords were worn by a number of the men. (9)

Not only did soldiers and *habitants* wear tapabords but possibly



Two images of a tapabord from Diderot and d'Alembert's *L'Encyclopedie*.



A group of Micmac Indians (probably from LeClercq). Some of them are wearing what appears to be tapabords.

French Regime. In documents from the 1720s through the 1740s the merchant Monière's records indicate a number of tapabords being sent to trading posts. These post range from Detroit and La Baie [Green Bay, WI] to as far north and west as the post at Rainy Lake. Many of these tapabords are mentioned as being edged with tape/ binding. (13) Tapabords are also seen in a number of images like those by Father LeClercq and an image of a native going hunting [*sauvage allant a la Chasse*] pictured in an engraving by LaHontan. (14)

So whether you portray a Frenchman, *canadien*, priest, soldier, or French-allied native between 1650-1750, a tapabord is likely an option for you. After the fall of New France, it is hard to say whether this form of headwear continued to be used. It seems that the tapabord was more popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and into the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The further we move into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the less and less we see tapabords. British trade lists seem devoid of this garment and post-mortem inventories seem to show few to no tapabords as well. Even with the increase of images drawn and painted of *canadiens* in British Canada we see little evidence of them being worn. As of the present, I am afraid the tapabord became a victim of the changing fashion and/or the changing government in Canada. What we do know

*Advances faites a 65 habitants  
Partis du Montreal ala Sine-Mark  
pour la somme de 115<sup>l</sup> 15<sup>s</sup> a Chacun  
Scauoir*

1	Capot de drap pour	.....	12, --
3	Chemises a 50 <sup>s</sup>	.....	7. 10.
1	Couverts	.....	16, --
1	pre de souliers a	.....	5, --
2	pres Souliers fauages	.....	2, --
1	pre de mitaines	.....	2, --
2	moustairis d'Indienne	.....	3, --
2 <sup>de</sup>	de Caba	.....	4, --
2	Couteaux et 2 peignes	.....	1. 5,
1	Tapabord	.....	3, --
Et en argent d'advances			.....
			<u>115. 15<sup>s</sup> a Chacun</u>

A detail of the dispensation of goods for the deTroyes expedition.

continued on as a very *canadien* garment was the tuque.

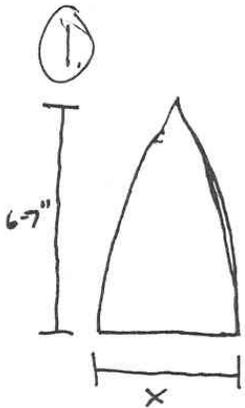
**IW**

**Works Cited:**

- 1) Diderot et d'Alembert, Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des art, et des métiers. Vol. III p. 259.
- 2) Oudin, Antoine. Dictionnaire Italien et François. Guillaume de Luyne, Paris 1681.
- 3) Furetière, Antoine, Dictionnaire Universal des Sciences et des Arts, Arnoud et Renier Leers, La Haye et Rotterdam, editions of 1690,1701, 1728 in 3 Volumes.
- 4) Author's Note: Louis XIII reigned 1610-1643
- 5) Back, Francis " Garde-robe des Montrealistes " in LANDRY, Yves (dir.), Pour le Christ et pour le Roi / La vie au temps des premiers Montrealais, Libre Expression / Art Global, Montreal, 1992.
- 6) Mercure Galant Mars 1709, p. 56. Quoted in: Back, Francis. "The Dress of the First Voyageurs, 1650-1715" Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly, Summer 2000.
- 7) Archives nationales du Canada, Fonds des Colonies. Series C11A. Correspondance générale; Canada. MG1-C11A. 1686, Mars. 01.
- 8) Archives nationales du Canada, Referenced in Kent, Tim. Ft. Pontchartrain at Detroit Vol. II. Silver Fox Enterprises, 2001. p.596.
- 9) La Potherie, Claude-Charles Roy, Sieur de Bacqueville. Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale. (Paris: Nion et Didot, 1722).
- 10) Kent LeBlant, Robert. Histoire de la Nouvelle France, Tome 1er, Les source Narratives du Début du XVIII Siècle et Le Recueil de Gédéon de Catalogne. p. 212. Also found in Kent.
- 11) Thwaites, Reuben Gold ed. The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Vol. 40. Burrows Brothers, Cleveland 1901. pp.187-88.
- 12) Kent. Pontchartrain at Detroit. p.596.
- 13) Gérin-Lajoie, Marie ed. Montreal Merchant Record Project, Research Files Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.
- 14) A Detail from Village des Sauvages de Canada, an engraving in Nouveaux voyages de M. le baron de Lahontan dans l'Amerique, The Hague, 1703.

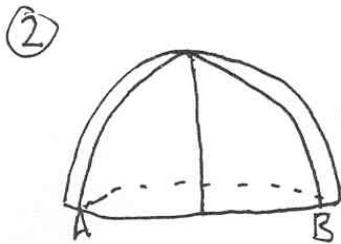
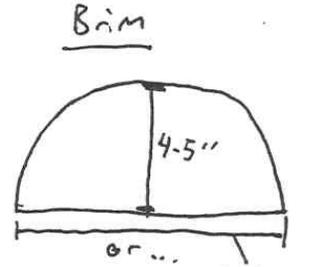
# Tapabard Instructions...

or how I made mine

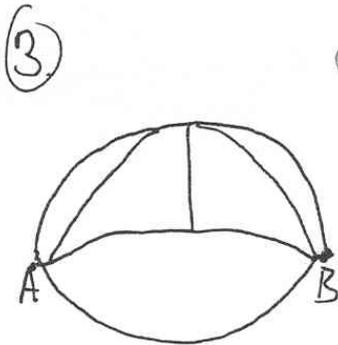
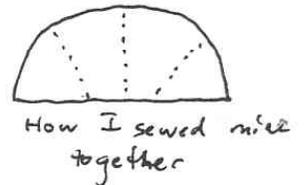


- ① - cut 6 panels
- $x = \frac{\text{head circumference}}{6} + \frac{1}{2}''$  for seam

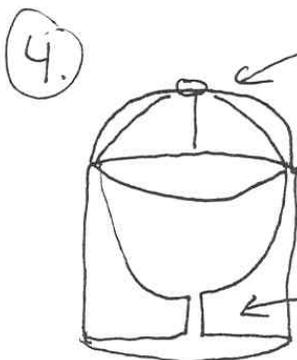
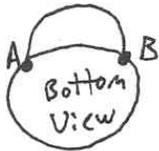
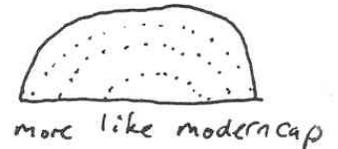
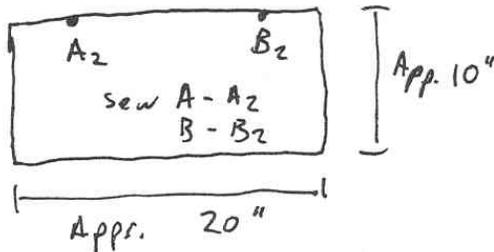
- ② - sew panels together to form cap
- I used a welt of another color to contrast between panels



- cut dotted line
- ③ - add brim along line (brim is made or two pieces of wool sewn together to create stiffness)



- ④ - add a rectangular piece to bottom and trim to desired shape / size after sewing in place



- Add Cloth covered button to top

Add a button or ties to bottom