The Nonsuch was the ketch that sailed into Hudson Bay in 1668-1669 under Zachariah Gillam, in the first trading voyage for what was to become the Hudson's Bay Company two years later. Originally built as a merchant ship in 1650, and later the Royal Navy ketch HMS Nonsuch, the vessel was sold to Sir William Warren in 1667. The name means "none such", i.e. "unequalled". The ship was at the time considered smaller than many others but was specifically selected because of her small size so that when she Nonsuch set out for Hudson Bay from Gravesend, England, on 3 June 1668. On board were Sieur des Groseilliers and a small crew commanded by Zachariah Gillam. The ship anchored off the mouth of a river the explorers named rivière de Rupert, at the southern tip of James Bay, on 29 September. A second boat, the Eaglet, with Pierre Radisson aboard, was forced to turn back. The two French traders had persuaded Prince Rupert and a group of English investors to fund the voyage. They hoped to prove that the vast fur resources of interior North America could be tapped via Hudson Bay. Did you know?  Nonsuch GalleryA virtual tour of a replica of the 17th century British sailing vessel Nonsuch at The Manitoba Museum. Recommended.

The Nonsuch replica: the Hudson’s Bay Company, commemoration, and local identity at the Manitoba Museum

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Abstract:
In December 1974, the Manitoba Museum celebrated the grand opening of a new gallery. It was a highly anticipated event in Winnipeg, advertised for years leading up to it by the Winnipeg Free Press. The gallery, housing a full-sized replica of a 17th century ship, was one of the first of its kind in Canada: a diorama gallery that immersed the visitor in the sights, sounds, and smells of another place, and transported them across time and space to Deptford, England in 1668. The replica, called Nonsuch, was a period-accurate recreation of a ship that had sailed three centuries earlier into Hudson Bay, on an expedition for the English crown to determine the viability of a northern fur trade that would bypass the existing system of taxation in New France and open the area north of the Great Lakes to an English trade monopoly. This successful voyage resulted in the creation of the Hudson’s Bay Company with the granting of a royal charter for a parcel of land that encompassed 40% of what is now Canada. The reconstruction of the Nonsuch in the 1960s was part of the Company’s 300th anniversary celebrations, and was used in the hopes of strengthening the emotional connection between the Company and Canadian citizens. The Nonsuch replica has since been used by the Company and the Manitoba Museum to continue this project of commemoration and collective identity, situating the Company as an important character in the origin story of the country. This thesis traces the journey of the Nonsuch, from the 17th century to the present, and examines the critical roles the replica and Gallery have played in the construction and maintenance of local heritage and identity in Manitoba.

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