

Fort Union Trading Post

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • NORTH DAKOTA

Lithograph of the first detailed sketch of Fort Union, drawn in 1833 by Karl Bodmer, a Swiss artist in the party of the German Prince, Maximilian of Wied, who visited the fort during his travels in the West. Several parties of Indians are encamped on the river plain about the fort while trading their beaver skins.

of Indians are circled on the first print and on the

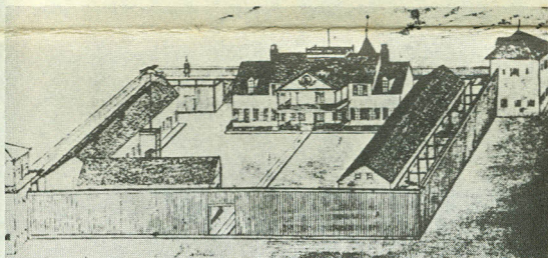


Kenneth McKenzie, "King of the Upper Missouri," founded Fort Union in 1829. As head of the Upper Missouri Outfit, a subsidiary of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, McKenzie set out to gain a monopoly of the upper river's fur trade. He carefully selected the fort's location near the confluence of the Missouri and the fabled Yellowstone. From here, McKenzie planned to trade for beaver skins with the Assiniboin to the north, the Crows along the Yellowstone, and, hopefully, with the unfriendly Blackfeet farther up the Missouri.

Shortly after the fort's establishment, European gentlemen began showing a preference for silk hats, rather than those of beaver felt. Nevertheless, the post thrived. Besides beaver, huge buffalo herds on the plains proved a profitable source of trade. Improved transportation further increased profits—and allowed for the introduction of luxuries at the fort. In 1832, the steamer *Yellowstone* pushed up the muddy Missouri to Fort Union.

As trade developed, outposts followed. Fort Cass became the center of trade among the Crows, while Fort McKenzie got a toehold in Blackfoot country. Although the Indians got the muskets, tools, and blankets they desired, their relations with the traders brought disaster, too. The American traders felt it necessary to use illegal liquor to outwit both fellow competitors and the Hudson's Bay Company to the north. Worse, in 1837, travelers brought smallpox. The disease swept along the Missouri, and thousands of Indians died.

An 1864 sketch of the fort.



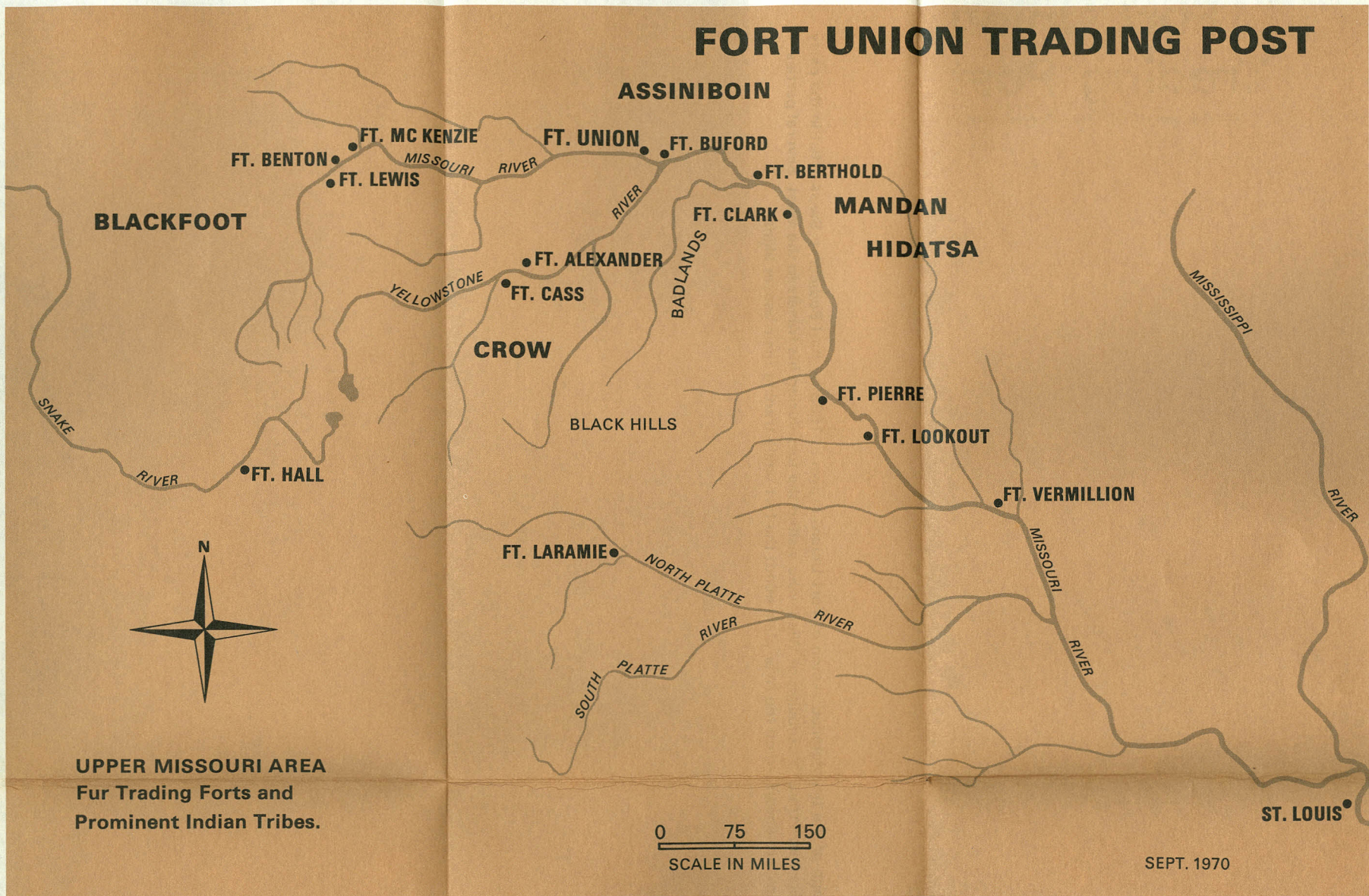
Montana Historical Society

However, Fort Union outlasted such setbacks. It was a substantial, comfortably built post. Stout log palisades, with two stone bastions, guarded the buildings. Inside stood ranges of storehouses and quarters, an Indian trade room, powder magazine, icehouse, and other structures. Opposite the main gate stood the elegant house of the *bourgeois* (chief trader). This handsome white building with its blue and red trim, veranda, balcony, and "widow's walk," stood 1½ stories high.

Many famed men—adventurers, scientists, artists, and priests—visited Fort Union. George Catlin, Prince Maximilian of Wied, Father Pierre De Smet, John Audubon, and John Mix Stanley were among these early visitors who did many paintings of the fort and wrote vivid accounts of life there.

After McKenzie's retirement, other outstanding bourgeois followed. They included Edwin Denig, one of the great ethnologists of the 19th century, and Alexander Culberston, a man greatly interested in helping science.

FORT UNION TRADING POST

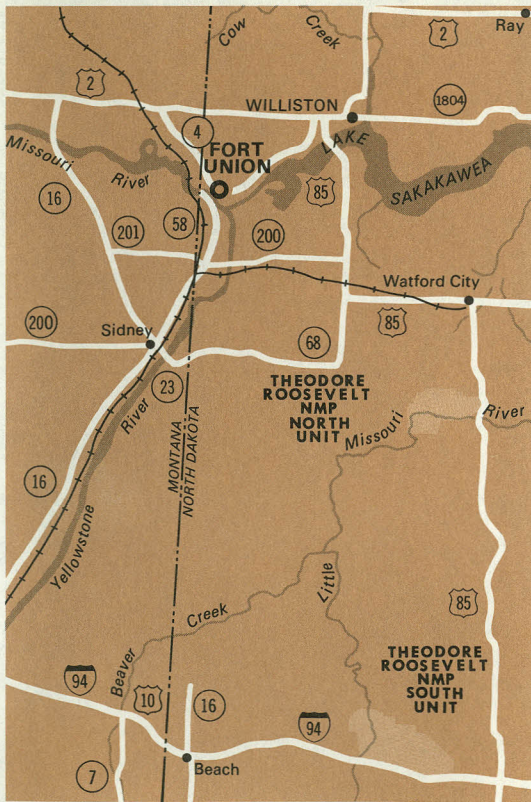


UPPER MISSOURI AREA
Fur Trading Forts and
Prominent Indian Tribes.

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SCALE IN MILES

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ST. LOUIS



THE PARK

When the Civil War started, the Army felt a northern fort was needed and purchased Fort Union Trading Post. By this time, the fur trade was declining and the company concentrated upon transporting people and goods up river to the mining excitement around Fort Benton. Although operating when the Army arrived, Fort Union was aged and the timbers badly decayed. In no time, the Army started building Fort Buford downriver, salvaging what they could by dismantling Fort Union. Today only the original foundations of Fort Union remain.

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site was authorized by act of Congress on June 20, 1966. It is still a development project and has yet to be activated. The site of the fort itself is a gift from the State of North Dakota.

PROGRESS AND PLANS

The National Park Service will reconstruct the fort on the original site and control developments on the surrounding lands to provide an authentic setting.

Historic records are being studied for artists' renditions of the fort as well as written descriptions of it so that the construction will be as authentic as possible. Archaeological studies, begun in the summer of 1968, will continue until enough facts are produced to choose between conflicting data in the historic record.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

Visitors are invited to inspect the area but are asked to leave the site intact and not to remove any stones, artifacts, or other material.

The national historic site can be reached via Williston, N. Dak., which is 25 miles southwest via U.S. 2 and County Road 4.

ADMINISTRATION

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, Medora, ND 58645, is in charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service