
Six Upper Missouri River Fur Trading Posts: Trends in Organization

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The North American fur trade may be considered one of the primary factors for the development of the dynamic American frontier, the expansion of European interests, the proliferation of stable colonies, and the foundation for American enterprise. For approximately three hundred years, the fur trade existed as an economic, political, and social entity that wielded tremendous influence in both local and global spheres. In 1832, the most profitable year for the fur trade in North America, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company controlled the central Rockies, the British Hudson's Bay Company controlled the Northwest, myriad companies trapped the southern Rockies and the Southwest's Santa Fe Trail, and the American Fur Company controlled the Missouri River.¹

On the Upper Missouri, small parties of traders set up local trading houses or winter camps supplied by regional depots, which maintained stores of provisions and trade goods in addition to warehousing furs and preparing them for shipment. As the buffalo herds moved farther west during the 1830s and Indian communities disappeared or reconfigured themselves following disease epidemics, local trading houses were consolidated into regional posts.² Although most of these posts were built on similar patterns and shared many physical characteristics, variations occurred based on a post's location, function, and

1. William R. Nester, *From Mountain Man to Millionaire: The "Bold and Dashing Life" of Robert Campbell* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 54.

2. David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 64-66.

length of operation. An examination of the historical and archaeological record of six Upper Missouri River posts—Fort Manuel, Fort Floyd, Fort Union, Fort Clark, Fort Pierre Chouteau, and Fort Berthold—reveals more about these differences, particularly the presence of structures and associated features outside the palisade walls. While the descriptions that follow are by no means exhaustive, they help to draw a more complete picture of fur-trade life and the sociocultural dynamics that took place at these locations (Figure 1).

Most American fur-trading posts constructed in the Upper Missouri region shared a basic design that served their functions as collecting and distributing points for furs, trade goods, and supplies. This pattern typically consisted of warehouses, employee quarters, and residences and offices for the post clerk and the post manager, or bourgeois, arranged along the inner perimeters of a square or rectangular palisade. The buildings and stockades were built of locally available wood and stone.³

The Missouri Fur Company constructed Fort Manuel, the first of the six posts examined here, approximately twelve miles upstream from an Arikara village in August 1812. Designated as site 39CO5 in the Smithsonian Institution's River Basin Surveys records, the post was situated on the west side of the Missouri River just below the present boundary between North and South Dakota and was occupied for only a single trading season. It appears that the fort palisade was constructed of whole log posts and was oriented on a northeast-southwest axis (Figure 2). The primary, and virtually only, historical documentation for Fort Manuel comes from John C. Luttig, one of Manuel Lisa's clerks who helped to build and manage the post. His journal documents the construction of a temporary camp, a blacksmith shop, a provision house, a "new house" (possibly the bourgeois' house), a store, chimneys for the buildings, a men's house, and a stockaded en-

3. Stanley A. Ahler, Kenneth L. Kvamme, and Jo Ann C. Kvamme, *Summary Report on 2000 Field Investigations at Fort Clark State Historical Site, 32ME2, Mercer County, North Dakota* (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2000), p. 211. See also William J. Hunt, Jr., "Euro-American Artifacts," in *Archeological Investigations at Fort Clark State Historical Site North Dakota, 1973-2003: Studies at the Fort Clark and Primeau Trading Posts* (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2003).



Figure 1. Map showing locations of six Upper Missouri River fur trading posts

MAP BY KATHRYN M. FEHLIG

closure with at least one bastion and an entrance door.⁴ It is unlikely that any of these structures stood outside the stockade walls. The post was gone when Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, and John James Audubon, the famed naturalist, traveled upriver in 1833 and 1843, respectively, but both men mentioned its location in their journals as they passed the site.⁵

4. John C. Luttig, *Journal of a Fur-Trading Expedition on the Upper Missouri, 1812–1813*, ed. Stella M. Drumm (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, 1964), pp. 67, 68, 76 (quotation), 77, 79, 85, 87, 94, 108, 117; G. Hubert Smith and John Ludwickson, *Fort Manuel: The Archeology of an Upper Missouri Trading Post of 1812–1813*, South Dakota Archeological Society, Special Publication no. 7 (Vermillion: University of South Dakota Archeological Laboratory, 1981), pp. 1–4.

5. Smith and Ludwickson, *Fort Manuel*, p. 3; Maria R. Audubon, ed., *Audubon and His Journals, with Zoological and Other Notes by Elliott Coues* (New York: Dover, 1960), 2:4; Hiram M. Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West, with Introduction and Notes by Stallo Vinton and Sketch of the Author by Dr. Edmond S. Meany* (1935; reprint ed., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 2:956, 967; Maximilian, Prince of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, vol. 22 of *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark, 1906), p. 336.

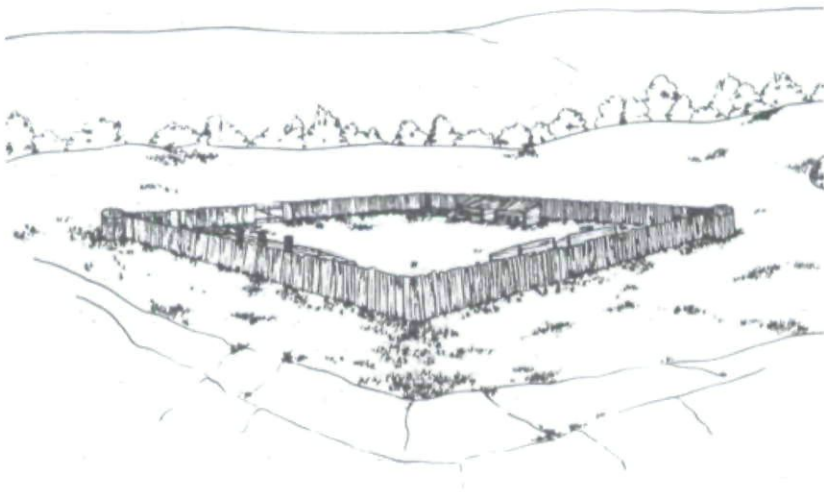


Figure 2. Artist's rendering of Fort Manuel, 1812–1813

Manuel Lisa, the founder of Fort Manuel, was a tenacious businessman who built one of the most successful early fur-trading enterprises on the Upper Missouri despite the complicated political realities at the turn of the nineteenth century. Before it came under United States control following the Louisiana Purchase, the fur-trading center of Saint Louis was presided over by a Spanish governor. Most local business and capital, however, were controlled by the French, many of whom remained in Saint Louis after the territorial transfer. Lisa, a Spaniard, was not well liked by his French competitors in the fur trade, especially the prosperous Chouteau family, from whom he wrested a five-year license in 1802 to trade with the Big Osage and Little Osage Indians. After the Louisiana Purchase rendered the license moot, the United States opened the territory to free trade, and Lisa turned his attention to the Upper Missouri.⁶

Key to Lisa's success was his realization that the established ways of conducting business, developed in the Great Lakes and western Canada and utilizing small parties with temporary trading houses, was ill-suited to the Upper Missouri. To derive maximum profit, large permanent posts had to be established to serve as central depositories for furs and as convenient rendezvous points for both company and independent hunters and trappers, including Indian clients. Fort Manuel was to be Lisa's first stable and profitable outfit on the Upper Missouri, although 1812 was a difficult year for the fur trade in general as local Indians took sides in the War of 1812 to the detriment of trade relations with England, the United States, and each other.⁷

In addition to its physical descriptions of the post, Luttig's journal also illuminates the economic and political state of the territory around Fort Manuel. Building the infrastructure for trade had begun immediately upon the traders' arrival in August 1812, as did the establishment of wintering outfits in regional Indian villages. As at other frontier posts, trade also commenced for horses, food, and local supplies. Within three weeks, furs were being sent down the Missouri to

6. Walter B. Douglas, *Manuel Lisa* (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, 1964), pp. 20-23.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Saint Louis. It does not appear that furs were stockpiled for any significant length of time during the post's short tenure.⁸

From the time of the traders' arrival, there was conflict among the local tribes with whom those at Fort Manuel had trade relations, including the Arikara, Hidatsa, Cheyenne, and Sioux, among others. It appears that the social structures and malleable identities of the regional tribes were still in flux as the Euro-American frontier continued to expand and affect relationships within and between tribes.⁹

Given the potential for conflict, it may seem odd that Fort Manuel was not constructed to withstand any direct assault. Rather, the post palisades represented a physical demarcation of space, a delineation of spheres of activity, political rights, and responsibilities. Commitment to appropriate activities and ideas of ownership on the part of both Indians and traders was loose. Luttig remarks consistently on acts of pilfering, with horses being the primary commodity stolen. In fact, the return of stolen goods became integrated into trade negotiations for both supplies and furs. Some of Luttig's most descriptive entries detail what he considered to be deliberate deceit on the part of both company men and Indian trading partners. In particular, Lisa's chief clerk abhorred employee laziness.¹⁰

Like many seasoned post clerks, Luttig records what must have been highly charged events, such as attacks between Indian tribes and on the post, with little emotion, much as he did with the daily reports of fur returns and the weather. In one amusing entry, however, he departs from his laconic style to express joy at obtaining cats for the post, which provided both companionship and a means to control the ever-present rat and mouse population.¹¹

William Duncan Strong of Columbia University conducted the first archaeological testing of the Fort Manuel site in 1938, but the field data was poorly documented. Based on Strong's data, the fort walls

8. Luttig, *Journal of a Fur-Trading Expedition*, pp. 67, 68, 75.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 133.

were reconstructed in 1941, extending six feet outside of the original stockade to prevent damage to the archaeological remains. This reconstruction was removed entirely by 1952. In 1965 and 1966, G. Hubert Smith of the Smithsonian's River Basin Surveys led a complete excavation of Fort Manuel as part of the effort to mitigate the site's imminent destruction by the Oahe Dam project. No evidence of structures outside the fort was found. In a later summary of the archaeological data, Smith and coauthor John Ludwickson wrote that Fort Manuel had been constructed so that major outstructures could have been built had trade proven profitable. Instead, Fort Manuel was abandoned seven months after its establishment.¹²

Although a definitive cause for the post's demise has yet to be determined, speculation focuses on constant pressure from American Indian attack, a destructive fire for which there is archaeological evidence, and competition from the larger fur-trading outfits that were starting to enter the region. It is also likely that the Indians who relied on the Canadian Hudson's Bay and North West companies and had less need for American trade goods turned against American fur traders during the War of 1812.¹³

Postdating Fort Manuel by fourteen years was Fort Floyd, 32MNI, constructed in 1826–1827 by the Columbia Fur Company in what is now Mountrail County, North Dakota (Figure 3). Fort Floyd was oriented to the topography, situated on a terrace overlooking the Missouri River near the mouth of the White Earth River. It operated for only four years until Fort Union assumed the region's trade with the Assiniboine Indians. The site was first surveyed in 1951 by Smith as part of the River Basin Surveys and then systematically excavated in 1954 by Alan Woolworth and W. Raymond Wood of the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Woolworth and Wood referred to the post as "Kipp's Post" after James Kipp, the man who had supervised its construction. It has only recently been confirmed as the site of Fort

12. Smith and Ludwickson, *Fort Manuel*, pp. 7, 9, 23, 81.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 80–81; *Missouri Gazette*, 5 June 1813, cited in Luttig, *Journal of a Fur-Trading Expedition*, p. 15; R. G. Robertson, *Competitive Struggle: America's Western Fur Trading Posts, 1764–1865* (Boise, Idaho: Tamarack Books, 1999), pp. 160–70; Thomas Thiessen, personal communication, Nov. 2005.

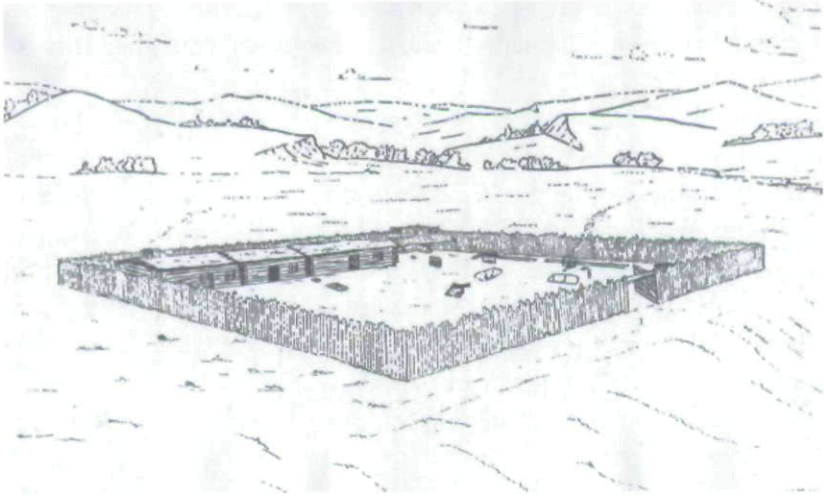


Figure 3. Artist's rendering of Fort Floyd, 1826–1830

Floyd, primarily from analyzing the unpublished journal of Maximilian.¹⁴

There is little historical documentation concerning Fort Floyd, which receives only brief mention in the published journals and travel narratives of Prince Maximilian and trader Charles Larpenteur as well as in other indirect accounts. None of these historical accounts reveal insights into the post's construction or layout. Furthermore, caution must be exercised when researching Fort Floyd, as its history at times has been confused with Fort Union. For instance, archaeologist William Hunt believes that Hiram Chittenden, the noted scholar of the fur trade, misinterpreted historical sources and inferred from them that Fort Union was simply a renamed Fort Floyd.¹⁵ Later histo-

14. Alan R. Woolworth and W. Raymond Wood, "The Archeology of a Small Trading Post (Kipp's Post, 32MN1) in the Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota," *River Basin Surveys Papers, Numbers 15–20*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin no. 176, Paper no. 20 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 239–322; William J. Hunt, Jr., "Fort Floyd: An Enigmatic Nineteenth-Century Trading Post," *North Dakota History* 61 (Summer 1994): 7–20.

15. Hunt, "Fort Floyd," pp. 8–12; Woolworth and Wood, "Archeology of a Small Trading Post," pp. 253–54; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1:329–30; 2:932–33.

rians, in turn, accepted Chittenden's interpretation. Unfortunately, the primary documents from which Chittenden drew his information have since been lost.

Even though the area had been under cultivation for several years, many surface features were still visible at the time of the 1954 excavation, including low hummocks and circular depressions. The fort was completely excavated to ten feet outside the perimeter of the palisade trench. A survey around the outside of the post margins included an area suggested as a possible earth-lodge depression by previous surveyors. Upon testing, Woolworth and Wood found no archaeological evidence for structures outside the palisade. It is possible that the short-lived Fort Floyd, which was abandoned in 1829 or 1830, was considered a test location for future Columbia Fur Company and, shortly thereafter, American Fur Company posts.¹⁶

The largest of the Upper Missouri posts, Fort Union, 32WI17, was located near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. The American Fur Company built Fort Union in 1828 as an administrative post to oversee its satellite operations and turned it into the most elaborately furnished and supplied of the Upper Missouri trading posts. Fort Union was also the longest-lived of the six posts studied here, persisting as an operational American Fur Company post until the United States government purchased and razed it in 1867.¹⁷

Much of what is known about daily life at Fort Union, beyond the information contained in official business logs, documents, and journals, comes from two clerks, Charles Larpenteur and Rudolph Friedrich Kurz. Although both men held the esteemed position of master of the fort gate, they had differing motivations for their presence at Fort Union. Larpenteur, of French ancestry, sought adventure in the West and joined Fort Union upon the transfer of Fort William, a post three miles downriver, to the American Fur Company. Kurz, a Swiss

16. Woolworth and Wood, "Archeology of a Small Trading Post," pp. 248, 255-56; Hunt, "Fort Floyd," p. 20. Relatively little archaeological work has been done on post outbuildings, possibly because little information about them exists in the historical record. Typically, fewer physical remains of these outstructures are present, as well.

17. The history of the post is detailed in Barton H. Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

painter, worked first as a clerk at Fort Berthold I and later at Fort Union in order to indulge his passion for painting romantic images of fur traders, Indians, and other aspects of the American frontier.¹⁸

Larpenteur's association with Fort Union began in the early 1830s and continued until he left to pursue his own trading ventures. A hard-working teetotaler, Larpenteur wrote candidly about what he considered to be licentious behavior on the part of all post residents, including other clerks and, at times, bourgeois. Due to his persistent sobriety, he was given charge of many day-to-day activities at the post, including manning the gate, keeping business logs, doling out employee rations, and managing the post stores.¹⁹

Kurz did not arrive at Fort Union until after Larpenteur's tenure had ended. Rather than detailing the workings of the fur trade, Kurz's writings are rather anthropological in nature; the artist was fascinated by interpersonal and intercultural interactions as well as formal and informal ritual behavior. Kurz depicts, for example, the division of labor by gender and social position in his description of Indian women's use of bull boats to transport durable and consumable items between the post and Indian camps. Other activities described in detail include mourning rituals, food distribution, and preparing for dangers such as fire. He also takes note of the collection of post pets, including a fox and a parrot, and the use of native and western dress for different occasions. In addition, Kurz provides some excellent descriptions of Indian gaming activities. The artist had a predilection for wandering outside the post to hunt, explore, and draw. His recorded observations reveal a keen interest in the wildlife of the region such as the pronghorn antelope and American bison.²⁰

Competition with Fort Union was ever-present but affected the American Fur Company minimally. Even when local tribes went to opposition posts to trade, most Fort Union bourgeois considered

18. Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 54; Rudolph Friederich Kurz, *On the Upper Missouri: The Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz, 1851-1852*, ed. Carla Kelly (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), pp. xvi-xix.

19. Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*; Barbour, *Fort Union*, pp. 235-37.

20. Kurz, *On the Upper Missouri*, pp. 15, 37, 41, 95, 132-33.

them undersupplied and, consequently, likely to disappoint their trading partners. In fact, many Indians were concerned that opposition companies, even the relatively strong Sublette and Campbell, would fail and tried not to alienate the American Fur Company by trading with its competitors.²¹ This desire to ensure a viable trading relationship is, perhaps, a primary reason for the relative safety and stability of the post, which also maintained structures outside the stockade walls.

In contrast to other American Fur Company posts, much activity centered on the post outstructures at Fort Union. The abandoned Fort William, which had been taken down and rebuilt nearby, housed animals, hay, and durable goods. Additionally, the structure was used to house engagés and visiting traders and Indians, thus shifting the focus of community interaction outside of the post proper. When disease periodically arrived at the post—the smallpox epidemic of 1837, for instance—Fort William became a makeshift hospital.²²

Besides Fort William, several other outbuildings and subsidiary structures have been documented in association with Fort Union, which was studied intensively in preparation for its reconstruction in the late 1980s. As a result, the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site has the most documented outstructures, both historically and archaeologically, of all the fort complexes discussed here. These include HS 21, a low building, possibly a pen structure, located outside the east wall; HS 22, a small wooden house situated on the river bank approximately one hundred feet east of the fort; HS 25, a cemetery; HS 28, a fenced area outside the north wall; HS 39, a horse corral located approximately two hundred feet east of the fort; pig pens, also located on the east side; a boatyard on the river to the west; a row of houses located in approximately the same area Fort William had occupied before it was finally dismantled; and a garden located in Gar-

21. Kenneth McKenzie to Samuel Tablock, 11 Mar. 1834, Fort Union Letter Book, 1833–1835, Missouri Historical Society, Saint Louis; John E. Sunder, *Bill Sublette, Mountain Man* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), pp. 132–33; Nester, *From Mountain Man to Millionaire*, p. 89.

22. Barbour, *Fort Union*, p. 60; Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, p. 111.

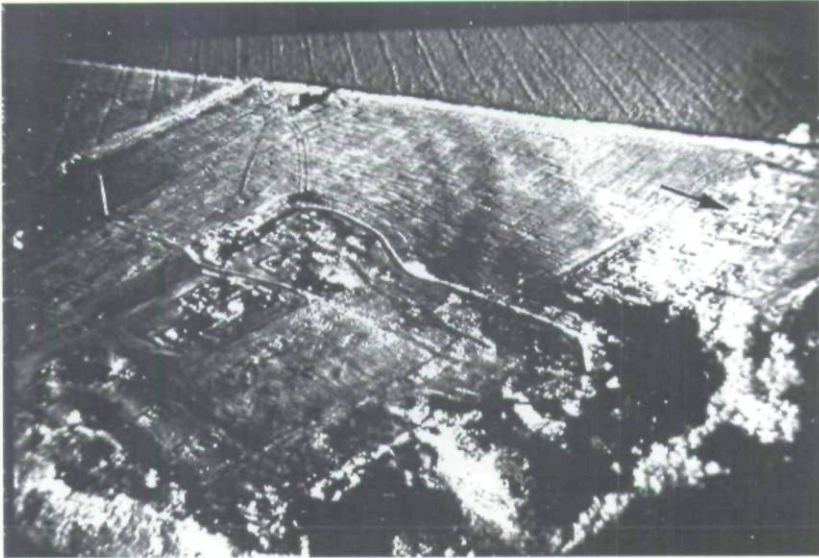


Figure 4. Aerial view of Fort Union with arrow at top right indicating possible location of historic cemetery (HS 25) PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUG SCOTT, MIDWEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL CENTER

den Coulee, a stream valley about a mile east of the fort. These identifications were derived from historical documents.²³

Two sources for additional archaeological data on Fort Union's out-structures also exist. The first is a 1972 aerial photograph (Figure 4) by Douglas Scott that shows a rectangular feature lying southwest of the likely location of Fort William and east of Fort Union. This feature may be HS 25, the historic cemetery, which has not yet undergone archaeological testing. The second source is a late-1850s palisaded sawmill on the north side of the fort, HS 32, that was excavated in 1987. Other physical evidence includes a stain feature and palisade trench to the north of the fort, which may be associated with HS 28. This location also matches an illustration done in 1858 by a Lutheran

23. Erwin M. Thompson, *Fort Union Trading Post Historic Structures Report, Part II, Historical Data Section* (Washington, D. C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1968), pp. 223, 225, 231, 237, 259, 263.

missionary showing what appears to be an open shelter covering a raised walkway directly north of the fort just outside the palisade wall. Other documented features outside the palisade include large post-holes aligned outside of the east palisade (possibly associated with HS 21) and a lime kiln (HS 27) revealed in a cutbank near the fort.²⁴

Fort Clark, 32ME2, now a North Dakota State Historic Site located in Mercer County, was a long-term operation like Fort Union, although it served a different primary purpose. Designed for trade with a specific group of American Indians, Fort Clark was a large, long-term post complex built around 1830 by the American Fur Company in association with a permanent Mandan (later Arikara) earth-lodge village. According to Audubon, it was a small version of Fort Pierre Chouteau. Fort Clark functioned as a fur-trading post until it burned in 1860.²⁵

Much of what is known about the daily operation of Fort Clark comes from the journal of post bourgeois Francis Chardon. The journal begins in June 1834, approximately the third year of Fort Clark's existence, and ends in May 1839, although Chardon's tenure extended through 1842. Chardon inherited the leadership of Fort Clark following the redistribution of men that took place after the American Fur Company purchased the opposition company of Sublette and Campbell. The period was also one of tension between the local Indian tribes. Although the relationship between the local sedentary Mandans and the mobile Sioux was violent, bands of Sioux as well as other groups often arrived at the post to trade.²⁶

24. Ibid.; Lynelle A. Petersen and William J. Hunt, Jr., *Fort Union, The 1986 Excavations* (Lincoln, Nebr.: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, 1988), and *The 1987 Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post: Archeology and Architecture* (Lincoln, Nebr.: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, 1990); T. D. Thiessen, "Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, March-May, 1977," memorandum on file, U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebr.

25. John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 46.

26. Francis A. Chardon, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. xvi, xviii, liii-lv.

Numerous entries in Chardon's journal record daily activities at the post, including the weather, fur returns, visitors, and the number of rats killed each month. Chardon also describes, often in great detail, the position Fort Clark occupied in the operations of the American Fur Company on the Upper Missouri. In addition to facilitating local trade with the Mandans, the post served as a depot for transporting furs, trading goods, support goods, and people between Saint Louis and Fort Union. Many disease vectors that decimated local Indian communities also traveled through Fort Clark due to its position as a vital node in Missouri River transportation.²⁷

Many of the activities, formal and informal, that occurred at other Upper Missouri posts also took place at Fort Clark. Unlike other journal writers, however, Chardon devotes considerable space to describing the pervasive loneliness post managers experienced. Their isolation helps to explain the regularity of traders' visits between American Fur Company posts and opposition posts, as well. It also encouraged the staging of competitions such as horse racing and social events such as dances in addition to the common practice of traders taking Indian wives. Chardon further notes the perpetuation of European practices such as the charivari given to an elderly trader upon his marriage to a teenaged wife.²⁸

By 1858, the fur trade was in a general decline, and Fort Clark was described as being infested with rats, indicating that the American Fur Company was investing little in its maintenance. Upon absorbing the firm of Clark, Primeau and Company two years later, the American Fur Company decided to close Fort Clark. By 1863, the site consisted of little more than a pile of stones, a rubbish-filled icehouse, and an overgrown burial ground.²⁹

Many small mapping and testing projects covering different aspects of the Mandan village and trading post have been conducted at the Fort Clark site. In 1985 and 1986, W. Raymond Wood and Michael J. O'Brien of the University of Missouri conducted a systematic map-

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

29. Sunder, *Fur Trade*, pp. 194, 213-14, 245.

ping survey that plotted all surface features within the state historic site, including Fort Clark and its outstructures. In addition to the fort itself, the post had several associated outstructures. They included an earth lodge and fenced enclosure immediately to the northwest of the fort and a Euro-American cemetery, a possible garden, and two other unidentified structures to the southeast. In his journals, Chardon recorded several excavations outside the fort, including a coal pit (18 November 1834), a deep hole opposite the fort gate (4 December 1836), and a road on the riverbank for hauling wood (9 September 1837). It is unlikely that any actual construction took place outside the fort until several years later. Chardon also recorded several human burials, some of which Wood and his team were able to distinguish in their 1985–1986 testing.³⁰

Intensive remote sensing of Fort Clark and the areas surrounding the main structure was conducted in 2000 and 2001 by Kenneth Kvamme and Jo Ann Kvamme of the ArcheoImaging Lab at the University of Arkansas (Figure 5). One of the unidentified structures to the south of the fort was also covered in this survey, although no test excavations were conducted on any of the outstructures and none were identified. The magnetic survey clearly illustrates the historically known Garreau's lodge and enclosure north of the fort as well as the Euro-American cemetery to the south, with many individual graves visible. The magnetic data also revealed two large features west of the fort that were identified as middens, or trash dumps.³¹

The American Fur Company built Fort Pierre Chouteau, 39ST237, on the west bank of the Missouri slightly above the mouth of the Bad River in 1831 to serve as an administrative post. Sioux Indians commonly used the site in present-day central South Dakota as a camping ground. Like the other major trading posts of the American Fur Company, Fort Pierre Chouteau was visited by numerous travelers, including Prince Maximilian, John James Audubon, missionaries Pierre

30. W. Raymond Wood, "Integrating Ethnohistory and Archaeology at Fort Clark State Historic Site, North Dakota," *American Antiquity* 58 (July 1993): 544–59; Chardon, *Chardon's Journal*, pp. 15, 90, 135.

31. Kenneth L. Kvamme, "Geophysical Surveys as Landscape Archaeology," *American Antiquity* 68 (July 2003): 443–44.

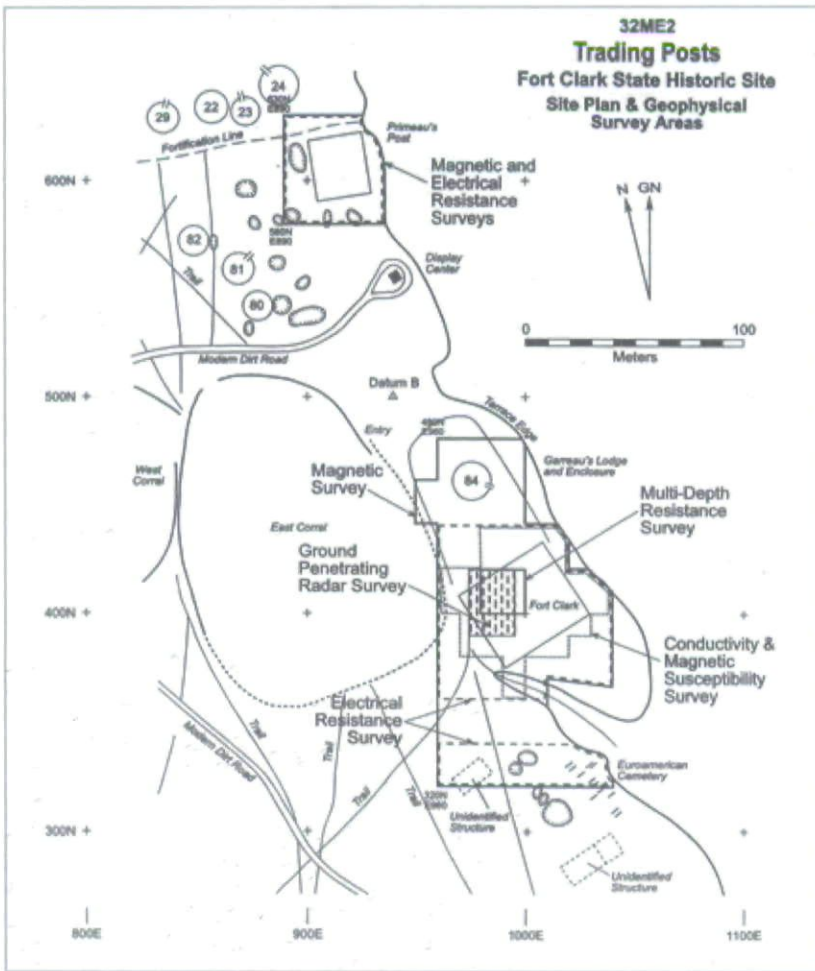


Figure 5. Diagram showing archaeological work conducted at Fort Clark

Jean De Smet and Augustin Ravoux, artists Karl Bodmer and George Catlin, and others. In fact, beginning in the 1830s, the company sought to improve its public image by sponsoring and hosting numerous scientific, leisure, and military expeditions to the northern plains, many of which used Fort Pierre as a base.³²

32. Harold H. Schuler, *Fort Pierre Chouteau* (Vermillion: University of South Dakota Press, 1990); Sunder, *Fur Trade*, pp. 24–25, 40–41.

In describing the fort shortly after its completion, Maximilian mentions the presence of an enclosed garden on the south side and included it in a sketch of the fort plan (Figure 6). The Fort Pierre letter book makes no mention of a garden or any outstructures but does reference yields of both corn and potatoes, which may have come from the garden attached to the outside of the palisade. Fur trade historian John Sunder notes that the post was improved consistently throughout its existence. Fort Pierre Chouteau operated as a fur post until 1855, when the United States Army purchased and occupied the facility for approximately one year.³³

Although it was a primary link in the strong chain of American Fur Company posts, Fort Pierre Chouteau faced direct competition in the

33. Schuler, *Fort Pierre Chouteau*, p. 35; Charles Edmund DeLand, "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 9 (1918): 203, 204; Sunder, *Fur Trade*, p. 41.

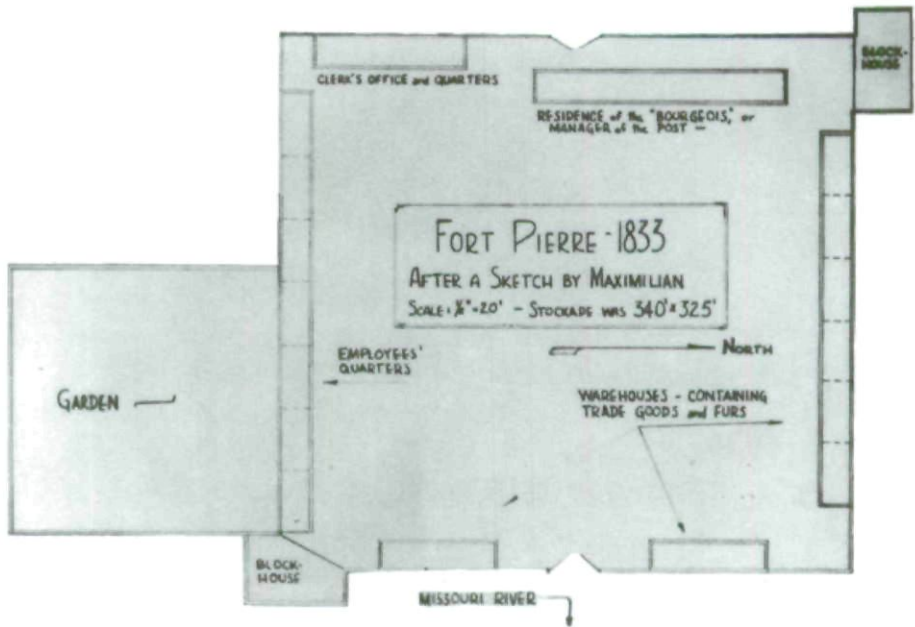


Figure 6. Plan of Fort Pierre Chouteau showing attached garden enclosure, based on an 1833 plan by Maximilian

1840s from the opposition firm of Ebbetts, Cutting and Kelsey, later reorganized as the Union Fur Company. From their post at Fort George, located twenty miles downriver, the opposition traded liberally in liquor, an illicit commodity on the Upper Missouri. At the behest of the American Fur Company, an agent was appointed to inspect cargo shipments bound upriver, including those sent to Fort Pierre. Because most of the agent's visits were promoted in advance, liquor was never discovered during any inspection, even though both firms used the commodity to gain a competitive advantage.³⁴

As with other fur-trading posts, Fort Pierre Chouteau faced the recurring problems of diseases such as cholera and smallpox that periodically ravaged the area. In addition, local Indians, such as the Arikara, troubled the post with periodic attacks. The late 1840s, as well, were environmentally difficult. No supply of timber for fuel existed nearby. During the hard winter of 1848–1849, the post cattle herd died, game was scarce, and employees had to subsist on corn and other stored produce.³⁵

As the Upper Missouri fur trade decreased during the 1850s, the American Fur Company considered whether to abandon Fort Pierre Chouteau. During the winter of 1854–1855, the Lakota, or western Sioux, Indians increased their raids on the growing numbers of non-Indians arriving on the northern plains. In 1855, the United States Army took over the post, paying forty-five thousand dollars to garrison troops under Brevet Brigadier General William S. Harney for the winter. Fort Pierre Chouteau had been in a state of disrepair for some time, and troops reported on the poor state of the buildings. In 1856, the army moved down the river, where it built Fort Randall using some of the material from the old post and leveling much of what remained.³⁶

Michael Fosha of the South Dakota State Archaeological Research Center conducted archaeological survey and testing at the Fort Pierre site between 1997 and 2000. In addition to delineating the successive

34. Sunder, *Fur Trade*, pp. 40, 48–50, 54, 69–72.

35. *Ibid.*, p. III.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–72.

building episodes of the fort proper, Fosha tested the location of the attached garden and found evidence of a historic structure. Archaeological survey and testing was also conducted at the possible location of a coal-storage unit, revealing bits of charcoal and one or two possible post holes, and a boatyard, which yielded no evidence but may be covered by modern development. Locational data for these two structures were not provided.³⁷

Fort Berthold I (briefly known as Fort James), 32ML2, is situated in the Garrison Reservoir area of McLean County, North Dakota. It existed as a fur-trading post from 1845 to about 1862. The post was built approximately two hundred feet from the permanent Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara settlement called Like-a-Fishhook and grew to share a symbiotic relationship with the village. It was built aligned to compass direction as opposed to topography.³⁸

Fort Berthold I faced many of the same issues and obstacles to peaceful trading as did the other Upper Missouri posts. Because its construction postdates the other facilities by at least fifteen years, however, the American Fur Company traders were able to apply the lessons learned earlier in dealing with subsequent disease epidemics, hostilities between local Indians and their mobile rivals, and tensions between employees and other post inhabitants. In the mid-1860s, when local hostilities increased as a result of the Dakota Conflict in Minnesota, Fort Berthold I hosted army personnel to guard the post against the Sioux.³⁹

As with Fort Union, a considerable amount is known of daily activity and human interactions from the journal of Rudolph Kurz. Serving as in-house artist and company clerk at Fort Berthold in the summer of 1851, Kurz was warranted semiprivate quarters, which he described as being small, dark, and equipped with a large fireplace and two bedsteads. When visitors arrived at the post, including Indian leaders, he had to host guests in his room. Kurz notes that many post

37. Michael Fosha, personal communication, 26 Mar. 2004.

38. G. Hubert Smith, *Excavation of the Site of Fort Berthold I (32ML2)*, *Interim Report* (Lincoln, Nebr.: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Nebraska, 1954), p. 26.

39. Sunder, *Fur Trade*, p. 254.

employees held a variety of jobs. One man, for example, worked as a smith, wheelwright, farmer, trapper, interpreter, and trader. Employees were expected to fill in as needed, even though there was a wide difference in skill levels for individual jobs.⁴⁰

Many of the same travelers who visited Fort Union and Fort Pierre visited Fort Berthold I, including Carl Wimar, whose illustration of the fort reveals at least one outstructure located near, and possibly attached to the fort by a palisade. This structure, according to archaeologist G. Hubert Smith, appeared to be a "large hip roof building just outside the palisade south of the gate, along the south line of the post, in the approximate location of a storehouse." Historical evidence of an outstructure is also seen on an 1875 plan of the area (Figure 7). Building 12 within the structure labeled "Old Fort Berthold" appears to be attached to the inside of a small palisaded enclosure, which itself is attached to the fort palisade. The building, identified on the 1875 plan as a storehouse, is not attached to the fort. A second drawing of Fort Berthold I by Wimar dating to 1859 shows "Building 12" as well as a second, smaller building behind and slightly to its right, also apparently unattached to the fort's palisade walls. This second structure does not appear on the plan map, indicating that it may have been removed by 1875.⁴¹

Fort Berthold I was systematically excavated in 1950, 1951, 1952, and 1954 by the State Historical Society of North Dakota and in 1952 and 1954 by Smith as part of the Smithsonian's River Basin Surveys. Excavated evidence of "Building 12" within the protruding palisade included two pit features, each approximately two and one-half feet in diameter, but no other features were present. The exact nature of these pits was not explored as part of Smith's project. Internal features and structures in the fort were documented in more detail.⁴² It is likely that archaeological remains of this outstructure at Fort Berthold I were identified because of its close proximity to the fort itself. The ar-

40. Kurz, *On the Upper Missouri*, p. 14.

41. Smith, *Excavation of the Site of Fort Berthold I*, p. 15.

42. G. Hubert Smith, "Like-a-Fishhook Village and Fort Berthold, Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota," *Anthropological Papers* 2 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972), pp. 89-100.

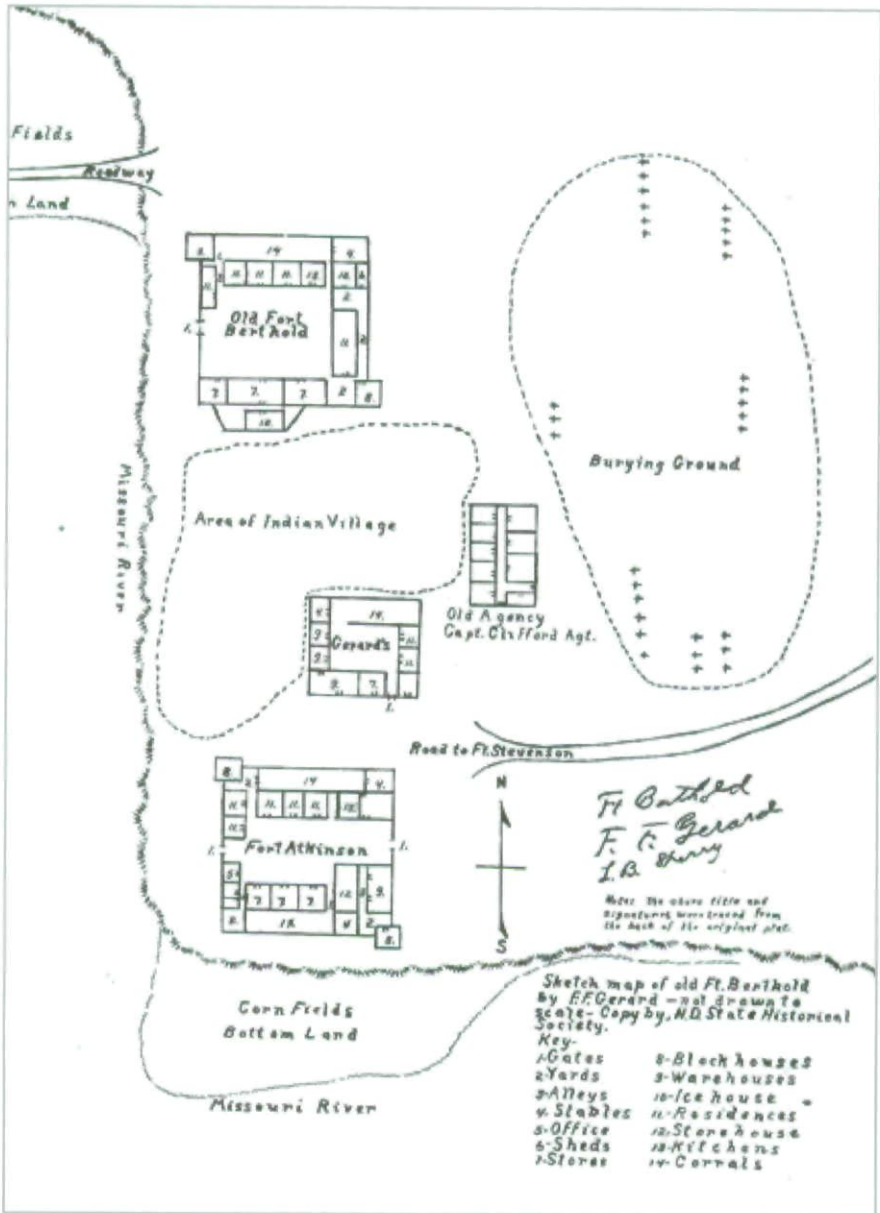


Figure 7. Plan of Fort Berthold I drawn in 1875 by F. F. Gerard and L. B. Sperry. Note structure labeled “12” surrounded by a palisade attached to the south side of “Old Fort Berthold” at upper left.

chaeological reports did not discuss nor recommend a systematic survey for additional structures associated with Fort Berthold I before the site was inundated following dam construction.

A major obstacle in identifying post structures through archaeological research lies in the fact that the sites may have been significantly altered over time. Many of the fort complexes were purchased by the army or used as convenient rest areas for travelers, including soldiers and, later, settlers. Some of the fur trade-era structures were converted to other uses during the army occupation period. Many were demolished or burned, while still others at these sites were constructed after the fur-trade outfits had left.⁴³

While these factors must be taken into consideration, it is still possible to determine some basic trends from the historical and archaeological record of the fort complexes discussed here. It is not surprising that at early nineteenth-century trading posts such as the short-lived Fort Manuel there is no evidence of outstructures. Smith and Ludwickson's explanation of the fort's design as being roughly constructed and easily expandable gives the idea that this particular out-fitting venture may have been speculative.⁴⁴ Had trade at the location proven profitable, it is likely that the main fort stockade would have been rebuilt with a more permanent palisade and more complex interior buildings before any outstructures were built. The same conclusion may be applied to Fort Floyd. While four years is a long period of time compared to most speculative ventures, it may not have been long enough for the fort's operations to become complex enough to require the construction of additional buildings.

The primary role and secondary function of a post may also be indicators of the likelihood of extensive structural remodeling at a site. For example, Fort Pierre Chouteau was built in an area in which speculative trading had already occurred, meaning that its more complex functions likely had been taken into account in the original construction, obviating the need for numerous outbuildings. First Fort Union and, later, Fort Pierre Chouteau were designed to serve as supply and

43. Michael Fosha, personal communication, 26 Mar. 2004.

44. Smith and Ludwickson, *Fort Manuel*, p. 81.

warehouse locations for the American Fur Company's smaller Upper Missouri Outfit posts, in addition to their roles as individual trading points. They were both also the primary administration sites for the Upper Missouri Outfit.⁴⁵ These roles as warehouse and administrative centers naturally lengthened the longevity of the forts and would account for the large number of outstructures present at Fort Union.

The type of American Indian settlement patterns in the vicinity of a post also helped to determine its construction. Fort Berthold I and Fort Clark were both built near existing, permanent Indian villages. This arrangement in itself constrained the possible placement of outstructures, keeping them close to the fort and located on the side away from the village or surrounded by some sort of demarcation line such as a fence or wall. Locations for outstructures in relation to temporary Indian camps, such as those at Fort Union and Fort Pierre Chouteau, are often archaeologically uncertain. At sites such as these, more variety in outstructure placement is likely. Whatever the exact reason for a structure's location, placement would have been based on security, need, and convenience.

By looking at all physical aspects of trading-post complexes, it is possible to gain a more comprehensive view of fur-trade life. In addition to the fort structures themselves, which formed the hub of activity for the business of the fur trade, it is instructive to look at the less-central aspects of posts to discern general trends in their organization. As more sites are studied, more will undoubtedly be learned about the variations in these fur-trade complexes and about the people who lived and worked in and around them.

45. Schuler, *Fort Pierre Chouteau*, p. 40; Erwin N. Thompson, *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Empire on the Upper Missouri* (Williston, N.Dak.: Fort Union Association, 1994), p. vii.

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