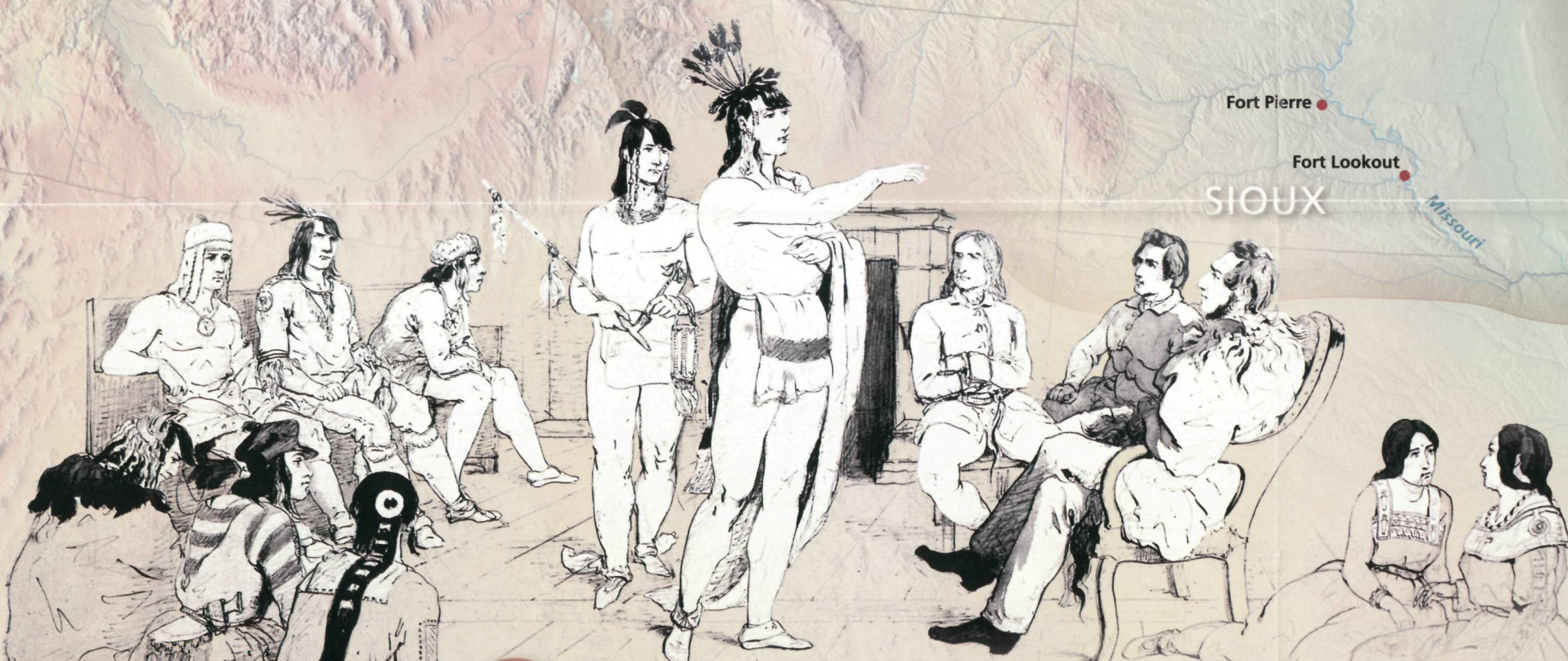
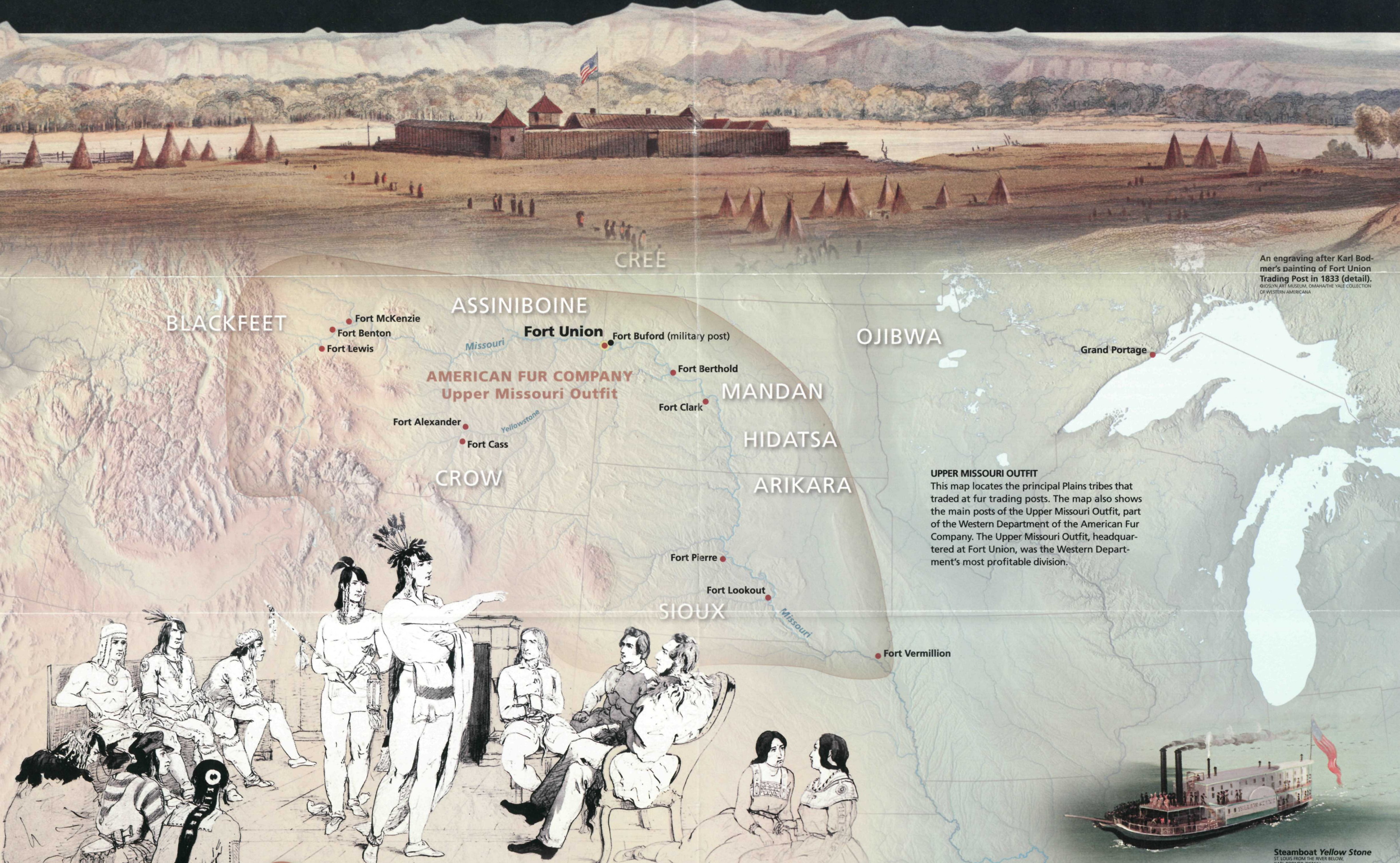


Fort Union Trading Post

National Historic Site
North Dakota / Montana

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Rudolph Kurz sketched Cree chief Le Tout Pique addressing bourgeois Edwin Denig in the clerk's office of the Fort Union trade house in 1851.



John Jacob Astor
1763–1848



Pierre Chouteau, Jr.
1789–1865

AMERICAN FUR COMPANY

The American Fur Company (AFC) was an international business established by John Jacob Astor in 1808. Astor aggressively sought access to the western fur trade based in St. Louis. By 1827 he merged with his two toughest rivals, Bernard Pratte and Company and the Columbia Fur Company, to control the fur trade on the upper Missouri River. In 1834 Astor sold his business to the Pratte-Chouteau partnership, which later became Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Co.



Kenneth McKenzie
1797–1861

“King of the Upper Missouri.” McKenzie, a former Canadian North West Fur Company trader, joined John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company in 1827 to manage the newly established Upper Missouri Outfit. He directed construction of Fort Union in 1828. In 1832 he negotiated construction of Fort McKenzie in Blackfeet country and Fort Cass in Crow country on the Yellowstone (see map above).

Upper Missouri tribes had a traditional trade system in place for centuries. Plains tribes traveled throughout the area of the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers in search of buffalo, elk, and other animals that provided them with subsistence. This area was traditionally Assiniboiné (uh-SIN-uh-boin), but other tribes made contact in the area too. The Assiniboiné, Blackfeet, Crow, Cree, Ojibway, Hidatsa, and Mandan traded buffalo robes, meat, corn, beans, squash, and other materials that belonged in their world. As Euro-Americans came into their area, trade for European goods attracted their interest. Fort Union Trading Post was established to meet this growing demand.

Interaction between the white traders and tribes during trade sessions was very ceremonial in nature. Sharing gifts, smoking traditional pipes, and speeches were all done according to tribal custom. Tribal chiefs and leading warriors negotiated with traders to obtain the best possible trade goods for their people. Buffalo robes, beaver pelts, and other furs were traded in exchange for guns, pots, beads, knives, blankets, cloth, and other items of value to the tribes.

The exchange of buffalo robes and furs for trade goods cemented a complementary relationship between fur traders and Indian tribes centered at Fort Union. In the trade exchange, each culture brought something of value to the other. The goods the tribes received allowed them to dominate their environment more effectively. Traders were able to sell the robes and furs to a growing population back East and to European fur markets.



Stu-mick-o-sucks (Buffalo Backs Fat)
1780s–unknown
A Blood chief among the Blackfeet, he was about 50 years old when painted at Fort Union in 1832. He survived the 1837 smallpox epidemic and signed the 1855 Blackfeet Treaty establishing reservation boundaries for his tribe.



Ah-jon-jon (Transparent and Bright)
ca.1800–1835
This leading Assiniboiné war chief traveled to the eastern United States in 1832. For three years after his return, he boasted of his experiences and the large white populations. Disbelieving his stories, a tribal member murdered him in 1835.



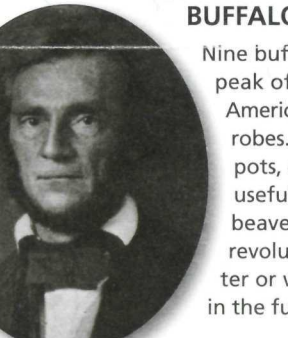
Alexander Culbertson
1809–1879
Culbertson followed McKenzie as bourgeois of Fort Union in 1837. He also served as bourgeois of Fort McKenzie and built Fort Benton in Blackfeet country. Culbertson’s marriage to Natawistacha (at right) helped cement the ties of the American Fur Company to the Blackfeet nation. More than any other Fort Union bourgeois, Culbertson came to empathize with his Indian trade partners.



Natawistacha (Medicine Snake Woman)
ca.1825–1893
Daughter of a Blackfeet (Blood band) chief, she married trader Alexander Culbertson. Their marriage benefited tribes and traders during negotiations. She provided language interpretation that ensured trust and a good working relationship.



Thachik'anawinyan (Deer Little Woman)
1817–1879
This daughter of the Assiniboiné Chief Iron Arrow Point (Rock band) married trader Edwin Denig about 1837. They were married for 21 years (until Denig’s death) and had three children. Their marriage secured trade with the Assiniboiné.



Edwin Thompson Denig
1812–1858
Edwin Denig worked as a clerk at Fort Pierre as early as 1833 and served as bourgeois at Fort Union, 1848–1856. He gives us the best written description of the structures at Fort Union. Denig was a capable manager, able to control the varied group of men working for him. An amateur ethnologist, Denig left extensive accounts of the Assiniboiné and other upper Missouri tribes.



Tanned Buffalo Hide
THE TANNERS, INC.

BUFFALO, BEAVER, AND BLANKETS

Nine buffalo robes equal one gun. At the peak of the buffalo robe trade in 1851, the American Fur Company received over 100,000 robes. Trade goods included blankets, cloth, pots, cups, knives, beads, and other items useful to the tribes. Furs included buffalo, beaver, fox, otter, and others. Trade items revolutionized the lives of Indians (for better or worse), making them active partners in the fur trade.

The Indians at Fort Union

“I wished to remain above ground in order to see and hear my children all the time.” —Funeral request of Wah-he-muzza (Iron Arrow Point), Assiniboiné chief.

The Assiniboiné people, one of about nine plains tribes who traded at Fort Union, considered this area their homeland. From the beginning to end of the fur trade here, the Assiniboiné presence was a reminder that Fort Union had been built on their land.

Assiniboiné trade was important to Fort Union, but the fort attracted other tribes too. Crow, as well as their close kinsman the Hidatsa, were frequent visitors. Cree and Ojibwa bands arrived from the north. Blackfeet traveled about 600 miles to trade here. Other groups like the Mandan, Gros Ventre, and Sioux were infrequent visitors. Contact with these tribes ensured a working relationship with traders that lasted close to 40 years.

Karl Bodmer painted this Assiniboiné camp outside of Fort Union in 1833. The large tipi belongs to a chief. The bear figure on the tipi depicts the spiritual power that helps ensure success in battle.



End of an Era

The acquisition of horses and guns through trade brought a flowering of the Plains Indian culture that lasted from about 1750 to the early 1880s. Horses provided mobility. Guns enabled tribes to hunt more efficiently. These factors—increased mobility and greater access to meat and hides—allowed Indians better ability to take more animals for their own use and to trade with whites.

In the 1840s emigrants from the East accelerated the reduction of buffalo (long before hide hunters nearly exterminated the herds after the Civil War). The advance of pioneers starting in the 1860s spelled the end of the Plains Indian buffalo hunting culture. Initially, pressure of white encroachment from Minnesota, coupled with the discovery of gold in Montana, brought Indian uprisings. As a result, the federal government sent army troops to police the Plains Indians. Finally, the expansion of transcontinental railroads brought more settlers to the upper Missouri country, eventually extinguishing the Plains Indian resistance.



Tatanka-iyotanka (Sitting Bull)
1831–1890
Sioux chief (famed for defeating the 7th Cavalry at the Little Bighorn) led resistance to army presence at Fort Buford. Returning from Canada, he surrendered at Fort Buford in 1881.



Brig. Gen. Alfred Sully
1821–1879
After the Sioux uprisings, Sully led an army response in battles at Whitestone Hill (1863) and Killdeer Mountain (1864). While at Fort Union, Sully selected the site for Fort Buford.

1000–1800 Although of different tribes and languages, Plains Indians come together to trade food, products, and ideas.	1805 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark explore the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers en route to the Pacific.	1828 John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Co. founds Fort Union; Kenneth McKenzie oversees its construction, is its first bourgeois.	1832 Steamboat <i>Yellow Stone</i> reaches Fort Union. Entrepreneur and trader Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and artist George Catlin on board.	1834 Astor retires from fur trade. Pratte, Chouteau, and Co. buys the Western Department of the American Fur Company.	1837 Smallpox epidemic on the upper Missouri River kills thousands of Indians.	1851 Northern Plains Indians and U.S. government sign first Treaty of Fort Laramie, establishing a brief period of peace.	1856 Another smallpox epidemic kills Indians on the Upper Missouri. Sioux make the first of several raids against Fort Union.	1862–1863 Sioux uprising spills onto Dakota plains. Gold discovered in Idaho and Montana sparks rush of prospectors.	1864 Company I, 30th Wisconsin arrives at fort to guard supplies for Brig. Gen. Alfred Sully during his campaign against Sioux.	1865 Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Co. sells Fort Union to the Northwestern Fur Company.	1867 U.S. government buys Fort Union; dismantles it to expand Fort Buford; site included in Fort Buford Military Reservation.
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FAMOUS GUESTS
Fort Union attracted more renowned people than any other fur trading post.

1830
World-traveler Prince Paul, Duke of Wurttemberg, visits the fort.

1832
Artist George Catlin arrives at Fort Union on the steamboat *Yellow Stone*.

1833
Prince Maximilian of Wied and artist Karl Bodmer visit the fort.

1840
Missionary Father Pierre DeSmet pays his first of many visits to the fort.

1843
John James Audubon begins his extensive study of area mammals.

1844
Jim Bridger and a party of trappers overwinter at Fort Union.

1847
Irish-born John Palliser—geographer, explorer, and author—visits as a tourist.

1851
Rudolph Friederich Kurz, working as a fort clerk, keeps a detailed journal.

1853
Fort Union hosts Isaac I. Stevens and his party of railroad surveyors.

1853
Artist John Mix Stanley takes the first daguerrotype photos of the post.

1856
Western explorer G.K. Warren and geologist F.V. Hayden visit the fort.



BUFFALO CHASE OVER PRAIRIE CLIFFS, GEORGE CATLIN
GEORGE CATLIN 1796–1872
In 1832 George Catlin was the first American artist to travel up the Missouri River by steamboat. During Catlin's 86-day journey to the Upper Missouri he completed 135 oil paintings of prominent Indian leaders and village life, a tremendous output for so short a time.

MAXIMILIAN (SECOND FROM RIGHT) MEETS WITH HIDATSA, KARL BODMER
PRINCE MAXIMILIAN OF WIED 1782–1867
Prince Maximilian, German explorer and naturalist, toured America from 1832 to 1834. In early 1833 Maximilian and Karl Bodmer traveled to Fort Union, where they spent the winter. Maximilian's studies of plants, animals, and the Mandan and Hidatsa remain a primary resource today.

JUNCTION OF THE MISSOURI AND YELLOWSTONE RIVERS, KARL BODMER
KARL BODMER 1809–1893
A Swiss painter of the American West, Bodmer accompanied Maximilian on the Missouri River expedition. Maximilian hired Bodmer to record images of the Indian tribes they encountered along the way. Bodmer's art is the finest pictorial record of Indian life in the early 1800s.

THIRTEEN-LINED GROUND SQUIRREL, JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON 1785–1851
In 1843 famed artist and ornithologist John James Audubon arrived at Fort Union on the steamboat *Omega* to conduct field work for a new book, *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (four-legged mammals). He spent two months at Fort Union collecting information on native mammals.

BOURGEOIS HOUSE FORT UNION SEPTEMBER 1851, RUDOLPH F. KURZ
RUDOLPH FRIEDERICH KURZ 1818–1871
Swiss artist Rudolph F. Kurz spent seven months at the fort as a company clerk. In his spare time he sketched the bourgeois house, bastions, buildings, traders, and Indians (*sketches left and below*). His extensive drawings of the fort in 1851 guided the accuracy of the reconstruction.

FORT UNION AND DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS TO THE ASSINIBOINE, J.M. STANLEY
JOHN MIX STANLEY 1814–1872
John Mix Stanley spent 10 years on the frontier, chronicling his travels and painting portraits of Indians. Stanley was one of the first to capture the landscape and Indians with a daguerreotype camera. Tragically hundreds of his works were lost in fires, including one at the Smithsonian in 1865.

People and Business within the Fort's Walls

A craftsman or workman receives \$250 a year; a workman's assistant is never paid more than \$120; a hunter receives \$400, together with the hides and horns of the animals he kills; an interpreter without other employment, which is seldom, gets \$500. Clerks and traders who have mastered (Indian languages) . . . may demand from \$800 to \$1,000 without interest. All employees are furnished board and lodging free of charge.

—Rudolph F. Kurz, clerk at Fort Union 1851–52

Fort Union trading post was a busy place. In its heyday (1830s–1850s) the fort employed up to 100 people, many of whom were married to Indian women and had families. The man in charge of the post was called the bourgeois. Starting with founder Kenneth McKenzie, Fort Union witnessed a succession of prominent bourgeois, including Alexander Culbertson and Edwin Denig.

Clerks—critical members of the fort's staff—maintained inventories of trade goods, furs, and hides. Clerks also kept track of the fort's tools, equipment, animals, and food. Traders conducted the trade negotiations, both at the post and in the Indian camps. Interpreters had to know several Indian languages, as well as English and French.

Hunters, often of mixed blood (a cultural blend of French-Canadian and tribal people called Métis) supplied tables with fresh buffalo, elk, and deer meat. Craftsmen—carpenters, masons, and blacksmiths—were essential in constructing and maintaining the fort and its equipment and tools. The tinner made trade goods like cups and plates, rings, bracelets, and kettles. Herders cared for the horses and cattle. Engagés—unskilled laborers and workers' assistants—loaded and unloaded boats, hauled timber and stone, baled furs, cut ice from the river, guarded horses, and staffed the mackinaw boats.





Charles Larpenteur

Charles Larpenteur
1807–1872

In 1834 Charles Larpenteur took a one-year job as a clerk at Fort Union for “\$250 and a complete suit of clothes.” He stayed on, serving at upper Missouri posts from 1833 to 1872 (mostly at Fort Union). Among his contributions were his written journals. In vivid detail Larpenteur described life at the fort—from the mundane (eating and drinking) to business (Indians and traders) to murder. His diary gives us the most complete account of life at Fort Union.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES H. HARRIS



Exploring the Fort Today

Fort Union Trading Post was the most important fur trading post on the upper Missouri River for 39 years (1828 to 1867)—longer than any other post on the frontier. Fort Union is renowned as a center of peaceful economic and social exchange between Plains Indian and white cultures. In 1966 Congress designated Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site to commemorate its rich history and significant role in the development of the American West.

The fort that you see today is a full-scale reconstruction built on the exact locations of the original structures. Not all buildings have been rebuilt, and those are indicated by timber outlines. You are invited to tour the fort on your own. Buildings and structures are numbered on the aerial photo (*above*). The tour notes briefly explain their functions (*at right*).



- 1 Main and Inner Gates, Strong Room** Main entrance to the trading post. Area between the outer and inner gates formed an open-air strong room. This permitted access to the trade house while it controlled entry to the courtyard.
- 2 Indian Trade House, East Side** Reception and trade rooms. Traders and Indians conducted business in the large reception room. The smaller room held trade items. (Replica items are for sale. Ask for details in the trade house.)
- 3 Indian Trade House, West Side** Office and meeting room. Clerks and traders kept ledgers, inventories, and business records here. Sometimes the bourgeois met here with important chiefs.
- 4 Bourgeois House** Home of bourgeois (field agent) and chief clerk. By 1851 a smaller building was enlarged into this two-story house with a porch.
- 5 Bell Tower** The bell announced daily events: the opening and closing of gates and the call to meals.
- 6 Palisade Walls** Width (east to west): 240 feet; length (north to south): 220 feet. The 18-foot-high palisade provided security.
- 7 Northeast Bastion** Designed for defense. Portholes for cannon and small arms allowed defenders to cover the outside walls. The bastions were seldom, if ever, used to defend the fort.
- 8 Southwest Bastion** Designed for defense (like northeast bastion). George Catlin used it as a studio in 1832.
- 9 Storage Range** Shops and store rooms (not rebuilt). Location of employees' retail store and storage rooms for trade goods, meat, and furs.
- 10 Dwelling Range** Housing for families and employees (not rebuilt). Six rooms were joined by three back-to-back fireplaces.
- 11 Ice House** Building and underground cellar (not rebuilt). River ice stored in the cellar lasted until August and helped preserve food.
- 12 Blacksmith Shop** Building contained a forge for producing and repairing iron products (tools, hardware, fire-arms). The park has an operable forge, without the wooden housing.
- 13 Powder Magazine** Stone building (not rebuilt) housed gunpowder, lead, and bullet molds.
- 14 Small Sheds** Temporary structures used for workshops and storage (most not rebuilt). Many were under the walkway of the walls.
- 15 Flag Pole** In 1851 the 30-star American flag atop the 63-foot pole was a welcome sight for arriving travelers.
- 16 Painting Atop the Gate** The painting, thought to be based on an illustration by Jean Moncrave (a fort employee in 1830s and 1840s), depicts Indians and traders meeting in a friendly exchange.
- 17 Buffalo Robe Press** Up to 10 robes were pressed into compact bundles, each bundle weighing about 100 pounds.

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INDIAN TRADE HOUSE This building housed the business center of Fort Union. See details of the reception and trade rooms (2) and office and meeting rooms (3) in the tour guide (*at left*).

Bodmer Overlook Trail (Across Mont. 327) This one-mile trail climbs to the point north of the fort where, in 1833, Karl Bodmer sketched images of Fort Union, Assiniboin Indians, and the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. The trail passes the site of the former town of Mondak (named because it straddled the

Montana and North Dakota border). The parking area and trailhead are on the north side of the highway, beyond the unlocked gate.

Trail Tips • Wildfires are a danger! Smoking is prohibited. • Close all gates behind you. • Stay on the trail. Respect privately owned property. • Be cautious if you encounter cattle. • Do not disturb plants or animals. Please help us protect the park for you and for future generations.

Planning Your Visit

Visitor Center The visitor center in the Bourgeois House has information, exhibits, a bookstore, and restrooms. You may purchase an authentic buffalo robe and reproduction trade goods—blankets and cloth, tools and cutlery, jewelry, tin ware, and more. The visitor center is open daily, except winter holidays: Thanksgiving, December 25, January 1, and Martin Luther King and Presidents' days. Seasonal hours vary.

Getting Here and Time Zones Fort Union Trading Post is on the North Dakota/Montana border, 25 miles southwest of Williston, N.D. and 24 miles north of Sidney, Mont. (*See map at left*.) But keep an eye on your clock! The fort is in the central time zone (North Dakota), and the parking lot is in the mountain time zone (Montana). The park operates on central time.

Activities Living history programs, ranger-led tours, and special events are offered seasonally.

Visit our website to find out about programs and summer events. www.nps.gov/fous

Accessibility The visitor center, exhibits, and restrooms are accessible for persons with disabilities. Contact the park for details. Transportation is available from the parking lot; request it by calling on the parking lot phone (summers only).

Safety and Regulations For a safe and enjoyable visit please follow these precautions. • Weather here can change rapidly; be aware of current conditions before you arrive. Summers are hot, and winters cold. Plan ahead. Be prepared for wind, sun, and insects. • Pets are permitted in the courtyard and must be on a leash at all times. • Leave historic objects as they lie. All historic and natural features are protected by federal law. • **Emergencies: Contact a ranger or call 911.**

Beyond Fort Union

While in the area, you may wish to visit these sites that are important to the history of the American West.

Fort Buford State Historic Site (*see map at left*) A military post established in 1866 near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. Sioux chief Sitting Bull surrendered here in 1881. Seasonal hours vary. Fee. Contact: 701-572-9034; www.state.nd.us/hist/buford/buford.htm.

Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center; part of Fort Buford State Historic Site Information, exhibits, a film, museum store, trails, and views of the rivers. Summer hours daily; seasonal hours vary; closed holidays. Fee. Contact: 701-572-9034; www.state.nd.us/hist/lewisclark/attractions_mycic.html.

Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site Earthlodge, exhibits about Hidatsa and Mandan tribes who traded Knife River flint. Bookstore, trails. Open year-round, except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Contact: 701-745-3300; www.nps.gov/knri.

Three Affiliated Tribes Museum Exhibits, museum shop, and information about settlements of Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Indians. Open seasonally. Contact: 701-627-4477; www.lewisandclarktrail.com/section2/ndcities/newtown/museum.htm.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park Wildlife, badlands scenery, ranching history, camping, trails. Open daily. Visitor centers closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Seasonal hours and facilities vary. 701-623-4466; www.nps.gov/thro.

More Information Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site 15550 HWY 1804 Williston, ND 58801 701-572-9083 www.nps.gov/fous

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks visit www.nps.gov.