

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

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1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Fort Union

Other Name/Site Number: Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, ND Sites 32WI17, 32WI988, 32WI989, 32WI990, 32WI992, MT Sites 24RV50, 24RV596

Designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior July 4, 1961.
Updated documentation approved by the Secretary of the Interior February 27, 2015.

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 15550 Highway 1804

Not for publication:

City/Town: Williston

Vicinity: X

State: ND, MT County: Williams, McKenzie (ND) Code: 105/053 & Roosevelt, Richland (MT) Code: 085/083
Zip Code: 58801 (Williams)

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private:

Public-Local:

Public-State: X

Public-Federal: X

Category of Property

Building(s):

District: X

Site:

Structure:

Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

buildings	2
sites	7
structures	7
objects	0
Total	16

Noncontributing

buildings	4
sites	3
structures	1
objects	0
Total	8

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official_____
Date_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official_____
Date_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

☐ Entered in the National Register☐ Determined eligible for the National Register☐ Determined not eligible for the National Register☐ Removed from the National Register☐ Other (explain): __________
Signature of Keeper_____
Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:

Commerce/Trade
Domestic
Defense

Sub:

trade
institutional housing, camp
military facility

Current:

Recreation and culture
Agriculture/Subsistence
Landscape

Sub:

museum
agriculture
park, natural feature

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Mid-Nineteenth Century: Greek Revival (reconstruction)

MATERIALS:

Foundation: stone; wood
Walls: stone; wood
Roof: wood
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**SUMMARY**

The Fort Union National Historic Landmark (NHL) is located on the Montana/North Dakota border and sited on a level gravel terrace north of and 25' above the Missouri River. It contains a collection of archeological features, landscape features, and reconstructed buildings and structures associated with the principal fur trading post on the Upper Missouri River in the early nineteenth century. The primary component of the NHL is the site of the American Fur Company's Upper Missouri Outfit headquarters, the Fort Union trading post. Fort Union was designated a NHL in 1961 under the theme "XV: Western Expansion (Fur Trade and Indian and Military Affairs)." As little archeology had been undertaken at the time of designation, the NHL consisted of approximately eight acres within which only cellar pits were confirmed to exist. No boundary was described, and no period of national significance established. This NHL revision addresses the substantial increase in knowledge about the site, its resources, and development since 1961. This revision also establishes a boundary, based on that information, and a period of significance. This documentation clarifies that the Fort is eligible under NHL Criterion 1 as one of the largest and most important fur-trading posts on the Upper Missouri River region from 1828 to 1867. It adds NHL Criterion 6 for its potential to yield information of major scientific importance by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States—specifically the early nineteenth century in the Trans-Mississippian West and Upper Missouri River.

After Fort Union's authorization in 1966 as a unit in the National Park System¹ called "Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," documentation of the site eventually included a 1982 National Register of Historic Places nomination.² That nomination provided additional information on the physical appearance and national significance of the site, and established a boundary encompassing 240.54 acres. Yet it was not until a period of intensive archeological investigations (1986 to 1988) that the cultural chronology of the site became understood, and the fort's structural history became known.³ Those investigations served as mitigation documentation, driven by a 1985 Congressional mandate to reconstruct portions of the fort on the site itself. The resultant scientific record ultimately included ten Material Culture Reports and seven reports focusing on specific excavation blocks, as well as numerous theses, dissertations, journal articles, book chapters, and other publications on Fort Union archeology. Information on occupation and use of the greater terrace area has emerged, in conjunction with archeological monitoring associated with land management projects undertaken by the National Park Service (NPS). The Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) notes that hundreds of fort era features are located considerable distance beyond the palisade.⁴ Included within the National Historic Site and updated NHL boundary, these features are associated with three distinct periods of historic occupation between 1828 and the 1880s. The North Dakota archeological site number for Fort Union is 32WI17; while the Fort Union post site is located solely in North Dakota, the National Historic Site portion of Fort Union within Montana is assigned archeological site number is 24RV50. Other archeological sites associated with the fur trade era in the North Dakota portion of the NPS unit boundary and updated NHL boundary are 32WI988, 32WI989, 32WI990 and 32WI992; in Montana is archeological site number 24RV596.

¹ U.S. Congress, Public Law 89-458, 89th Cong. (20 June 1966), directed that the park unit size not exceed 400 acres. U.S. Congress, *National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978*, Public Law 95-625, 95th Cong., (10 November 1978) amended the maximum allowable acreage to 450.

² Mary Shivers Culpin, "Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 5 January 1982. The historic record does not indicate that the development was ever entitled "Fort Union Trading Post," but merely "Fort Union."

³ "Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," a summary of Fort Union investigations [ca. 1995], unnumbered page 3. Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska.

⁴ "Reconstruction," Midwest Archeological Center's Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, July 2010.

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Today the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site includes the intact archeological resources that were not removed as part of the reconstruction activity, and a historically accurate, partial reconstruction of the fort to the 1851 era, developed by the NPS as the “prime interpretive feature” for the area.⁵ The reconstruction includes a palisade and a number of stone and frame buildings. Immediately surrounding the fort are restored prairie and agricultural fields that transition to rolling uplands and bluffs to the north. About one half mile east of the reconstruction is a wooded ravine known as “Garden Coulee,” while immediately south of the fort is the Missouri River floodplain. At the north end of the National Historic Site is the topographical feature known as the Bodmer Overlook, the location from which it is believed that artist Karl Bodmer painted the fort in 1833. Bisecting the National Historic Site north of the fort complex are some late nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in the form of a two-lane state highway and a railroad grade that bisect the terrace north of the fort complex. There is also one access road that connects to the nearby state highway and a public parking lot west of the fort. Another access road east of the fort connects the NPS residential and maintenance area to the highway. This modern development area is located just below the edge of the river terrace to the east.

The revised NHL boundary incorporates roughly 600 acres, including the approximately 300 acres of federally-owned land within the National Historic Site. It does not include a parcel of privately-owned land under scenic easement with the National Historic Site, nor the sections of state highway and railroad grade. There is a small amount of acreage under easement with the NPS Historic Site that is used to provide an access route to the Bodmer Overlook, and that is also not included within the NHL boundary. Within the NHL boundary are approximately 300 acres of state-owned, aquatic and riparian land located between the Ordinary High Water Marks on the north and south banks of the Missouri River.

BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The archeological investigations carried out to date have shown that Fort Union is a very complicated site, but one that has outstanding integrity. Considerable features associated with the original trading post were shown to be intact at all locations examined in the large-scale efforts of 1986–1988. These include the fort palisades, the remains of several important structures, and numerous features associated with storage and refuse activities. Further, the data retrieved to date at the site include “methods of palisade construction, the size and shape of the trading post, the sequencing of building construction, and how construction may have been affected by natural and cultural climates of the region,” all of which was still unknown prior to the 1986–1988 field work.⁶

As William J. Hunt, director of the 1986–1988 investigations, has noted, the excavations at Fort Union have created an “archeological library” of massive scale and enormous scope “consisting of thousands of pages of field observations, thousands of photographs and drawings, and literally millions of objects.”⁷ Even if no additional excavations were conducted in the future, the existing record compiled from past endeavors would provide ample opportunity for undertaking nationally significant archeological research on topics related to the fur trade and the upper Missouri River frontier. This is not to say, however, that the remaining *in situ* archeological record at Fort Union is insufficient to support future field investigations. To the contrary, Hunt estimates that more than half of the site remains intact despite expenditures of the cultural resources associated

⁵ Although the first Fort Union master plan in 1966 called for partially reconstructing the fort, by about 1973 the plans were abandoned. Legislation passed in 1978 called for a study and recommendation regarding the possibility of reconstruction based on historic documentation, and in 1985 Congress appropriated funding to reconstruct Fort Union on site. See U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “Master Plan of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota-Montana” (1967), 11, 13; Public Law 95-625; U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *General Management Plan, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site*, (Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 7 July 1978), VUP-1.

⁶ William J. Hunt, Jr., “Origins of Fort Union: Archaeology and History,” *The Fur Trade Revisited, Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan, 1991*, Jennifer S. H. Brown, W. J. Eccles and Donald P. Heldman, eds., (East Lansing/Mackinac Island: Michigan State University Press/Mackinac State Historic Parks, 1994), 389.

⁷ Hunt, “Origins of Fort Union,” 390.

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with the reconstruction effort. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that the archeological integrity of the remaining cultural resources is as good as that shown in past investigations.

The following chronology gives the highlights of past archeological investigations at the Fort Union trading post site by year of their undertaking, with the most important field excavations occurring during the period 1968–1972 and especially the period 1986–1988. This summary does not include minor compliance studies that produced negative results or details on the many investigations carried out within the boundaries of the national historic site at other localities such as Garden Coulee, Mondak Townsite, or Fort William, though some of those neighboring sites may relate directly to the Fort Union trading post itself. It does, however, include reference to certain completed studies drawn from various episodes of fieldwork. The summary is adapted from that provided in Fred Finney's draft Archeological Overview and Assessment for Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site.⁸

Early Reconnaissance

1938: The NPS sent Edward Hummel to verify the Fort Union site location. Local residents had always known the fort location, as it could not be plowed. However, outside of the local area, it was uncertain where the fort had been in relation to the North Dakota and Montana state boundary. Also in 1938, Fort Union became a North Dakota State Park.⁹

1952: Ray Mattison inventoried Fort Union for the NPS "National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings."¹⁰

National Park Service-Era Investigations

After establishment of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, archeological research was initiated in 1968 and continued for many years thereafter with investigations of the trading post site directed towards the location and delineation of architectural features considered to be prerequisites for the partial reconstruction of the fort. This work covered portions of most of the known buildings.¹¹ One of the early NPS geophysical surveys occurred in 1977–1978 marking the beginning of cooperation between John Weymouth (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) and NPS archaeologists from the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC).¹² By the mid-1980s more detailed archeological information was required to meet the NPS standards for reconstruction. This work centered on the features and buildings to be rebuilt.¹³

⁸ Fred A. Finney, "2013 An Archeological Overview and Assessment of the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota and Montana (Draft)," (Upper Midwest Archaeology, Contract Completion Report 333, 2013), Lincoln, Nebraska: Midwest Archeological Center, (hereafter cited as MWAC).

⁹ Edward A. Hummel, "Special Report, Fort Union, North Dakota," 1938, MWAC.

¹⁰ Ray M. Mattison, "Fort Union," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. (1951).

¹¹ David A. Gillio, "1972 Excavations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota," 1973, Report by the University of Colorado, Department of Anthropology, National Park Service, MWAC; William J. Hunt, Jr., *Material Culture Reports, Part I; Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, (32WI17), A Critical Review of the Archeological Investigations* (MWAC: 1986; Wilfred M. Husted, "1969 Excavations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota: A progress Summary," 1970, MWAC; Wilfred M. Husted, "1970 Excavations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota: A Progress Summary," 1971, MWAC; Lawrence L. Loendorf, "Fort Union Backfilling Operation, Summer 1971," (Department of Anthropology, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, 1971), MWAC; Jackson W. Moore, Jr., "Summary of Archeological Investigations, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 9 October 1968, MWAC.

¹² John Weymouth, "An Analysis of a Magnetic Survey at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota," 23 July 1979, 4, MWAC.

¹³ Groover, Mark D. and Melanie A. Cabak, 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Montana-North Dakota, Block 18 Report, foreword by William J. Hunt, Jr. (MWAC: 2002); Hunt, Material Culture Reports, Part I; William J. Hunt, Jr., 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Montana-North Dakota,

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1968: The Fort Union investigations were initially made by the Missouri Basin Project office's River Basin Surveys (RBS), a program of the Smithsonian Institution. The Missouri Basin Project office was located in Lincoln, Nebraska. In 1968 National Park Service Midwest Region archeologist Jackson ("Smokey") W. Moore directed the field crew. This year the excavations found the location for most of the major interior buildings at Fort Union and revealed the dimensions of several structural foundations.¹⁴

1969: The 1969 crew at Fort Union is known for beginning the field season as Smithsonian RBS employees and ending the season as employees of the newly established MWAC. Wilfred H. Husted's crew for the Fort Union excavations of 1969 centered on the northeast and southwest bastions, Indians and Artisans House, main gate complex, kitchen, powder magazine, and store range.¹⁵

1970: Husted returned to Fort Union in 1970 with a crew from MWAC to examine a different series of buildings. The 1970 excavations included investigation of the Bourgeois House, kitchen, blacksmith shop, store range, dwelling range, and ice house.¹⁶

1971: Lawrence Loendorf of the University of North Dakota was contracted to backfill the 1968–1970 excavations made at the fur-trading post.¹⁷ In the subsequent MWAC excavations that used the Harris matrix for stratigraphic analyses,¹⁸ the 1971 backfill was recognized across the site as a sand lens.

1972: Additional investigations were contracted by MWAC to the University of Colorado. The 1972 excavations at the Fort Union site were led by graduate student David A Gillio. The areas examined that year included the palisades, north gate, dwelling and store ranges, flag staff, dairy room, east enclosure, bell tower, new tower, and north enclosure. Nearly 25,000 artifacts were catalogued from the 1972 field season.¹⁹

Block 19 Report, (MWAC: 2002); William J. Hunt, Jr., and Lynelle A. Peterson, Fort Union Trading Post: Archeology and Architecture, The 1986 Excavations, (MWAC: 1 May 1988); Lynelle A. Peterson, 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17), Montana-North Dakota, Block 15, foreword by William J. Hunt, Jr., (MWAC: 2002); Lynelle A. Peterson, 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17), Montana-North Dakota, Block 16, foreword by William J. Hunt, Jr. (MWAC: 2002); Lynelle A. Peterson and William J. Hunt, Jr., The 1987 Investigations At Fort Union Trading Post: Archeology and Architecture (MWAC: 1990); Douglas D. Scott, "Utility Trench Monitoring along the West and North Walls, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota," Archeological Project Report, 2003, MWAC; Jay T. Sturdevant, "Stratigraphy, Chronology, and Architecture at a Historic Fur Trade Post: A Harris Matrix Application at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota," (Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Department of Anthropology, 2001); J. Homer Thiel, 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17), Montana-North Dakota, Block 20, (MWAC: 2002); J. Homer Thiel, 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Montana-North Dakota, Block 21 Report, foreword by William J. Hunt, Jr., (MWAC: 2002).

¹⁴ Moore. Moore assisted Dr. Wilfred D. Logan, the NPS region's Chief of Archeological Research, and later the first Chief of the Midwest Archeology Center. The RBS program was the best-known component of the Interagency Archeological Salvage Program (IASP), a federal salvage archeology effort that emerged after World War II in response to federal water resource development programs. Both the NPS and the Smithsonian Institution were participating organizations in the IASP. The Smithsonian Institution established the RBS for the purpose of carrying out its research responsibilities. The NPS assumed a major coordinative role in the IASP, and administering funds received from Congress. The NPS also had legislative authority to conduct archeological research in the United States. See Tomas D. Thiessen, "Emergency Archeology in the Missouri River Basin: the Role of the Missouri Basin Project and the Midwest Archeological Center in the Interagency Archeological Salvage Program, 1946–1975," Midwest Archeological Center Special Report No. 2 (MWAC: 1999).

¹⁵ Husted, "1970 Excavations." Husted's crew was converted from RBS to NPS employees after MWAC was established on July 1, 1969, from the former RBS office.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Loendorf, "Backfilling Operations."

¹⁸ Edward C. Harris, *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy*, (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Gillio.

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1973: This year Adrienne Anderson (MWAC) conducted surveys to both east and west of the 1968–1972 Fort Union excavations in search of structures or materials that might be of cultural significance.²⁰

1976: In 1976 Adrienne Anderson (MWAC) monitored the original installation of water and electrical lines in the park. This work exposed three historic features that were profiled and mapped in relation to the nearest existing reference point at that time, the northeast corner of the northeast bastion at Fort Union. Additional scattered historic materials and bone fragments were noted at the base of the plow zone in several locations. The features and cultural materials were recorded as site 32WI18, now referred to as the Garden Coulee site.²¹

1977: In 1977 personnel from MWAC and Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site made four investigations concerning Fort Union. Tom Thiessen monitored the construction activities relating to the installation of an interim FOUS visitor facility and associated water and electric systems.²²

One of the early magnetic surveys in the National Park Service, conducted by John Weymouth (UNL) and Robert Nickel (MWAC), occurred at the location of the Fort Union trading post site (32WI17) and the Fort William stockade site.²³ Sixteen 20-m-by-20-m geophysical survey blocks or grid units were placed over the ruins of the trading post. An additional nine grid units were surveyed in the region east of the fort ruins identified as a possible location for the Fort William stockade.²⁴

A project by Cordelia T. Snow (Chaco Archeological Center, Remote Sensing Division) involved a remote-sensing investigation based on analysis of aerial photographs for the area surrounding Fort Union. The aerial photographs of the park were taken in 1977 using both black and white panchromatic and false color infrared imagery.²⁵ Snow analyzed the imagery with a mirror stereoscope and identified several anomalies some of which she was able to ground-truth to the east of the fort ruins. Anomalies appeared to be associated with the historic activities at the trading post, with the Fort William stockade, and with the Garden Coulee site. She also identified a wagon trail exiting the trading post and heading to the northwest. Several features to the northwest of the fort ruins were identified with the historic community of Mondak.²⁶

1979-1981: Beginning in 1979, Dick Ping Hsu and Leslie Perry wrote a draft report combining the 1968, 1969, 1970, and 1972 Fort Union excavations results. The Garden Coulee site is assigned archeological site number 32WI18. There was an attempt to fully describe the artifact inventory between 1979 and 1981 by NPS archeologists Dick Ping Hsu and Leslie Perry; however, in-house review of the manuscript identified several inherent problems.²⁷ Unfortunately Hsu transferred elsewhere in the NPS in 1981 and Perry left MWAC in 1982. As a result, William Hunt, Jr. and others began a series of material culture reports during 1982 on specific

²⁰ Adrienne B. Anderson, "Archaeological Survey, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 1973, MWAC.

²¹ Adrienne B. Anderson, Supervisory Archeologist, to Chief, Midwest Archeological Center, "Trip Report, on-site archeological evaluation, water line and well construction, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 25 May 1976, MWAC

²² Thomas D. Thiessen, Park Archeologist, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, to Superintendent, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, "Archeological investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, March-May 1977," 15 August 1977, MWAC.

²³ Weymouth, "1979 Magnetic Survey;" John Weymouth, "A Magnetic Survey of the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site: Analysis of the Bourgeois House Area," (Report by University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1989) MWAC; John Weymouth, "A Magnetic Survey of the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site: Correlations with Three Seasons of Excavations," (Report by University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1991) MWAC.

²⁴ Thiessen, "1977 Archeological Investigations"; Weymouth, "1979 Magnetic Survey."

²⁵ Cordelia T. Snow, "The Remote Sensing Project at Fort Union Trading Post National Historical Site," 1978, MWAC.

²⁶ Snow.

²⁷ Hunt, Material Culture Reports, Part I, 43-45.

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artifact categories for Fort Union that culminated in the production of 10 reports between 1986 and 2002. Six of the reports were produced in 1986 and the remaining four appeared between the early to mid-1990s to 2002.²⁸

Early 1980s: During the early 1980s the persistent local interest in Fort Union cumulated in political maneuvering that passed legislation resulting in a congressional mandate and NPS directive to reconstruct the fort.²⁹ This prompted a renewed series of large-scale archeological field investigations to inform and to mitigate the reconstruction efforts.

1985: In 1985 MWAC archaeologist Doug Scott investigated the center of Fort Union. The excavation in this location was directed to discovering the Fort Union flagpole and its bracing system.³⁰ Gillio had previously investigated the Fort Union flag pole area, but because of the scheduled fort reconstruction additional details were necessary for the original flag pole construction.³¹ Scott documented a circular picket fence around an upright pole consisting of two split logs connected on a flattened side. The underground bracing system consisted of horizontal boards placed at a right angle. One board fit through a hole made in the flag pole. Boulders, weighing up to 50 lb. each, were placed in the pit fill as an additional shoring mechanism.³²

1986: In 1986 MWAC initiated a multiyear program for the mitigation excavation of structures and features associated with the fur-trading post prior to the Fort Union reconstruction. The excavations represented state-of-the-art historical archeology and were made under the overall direction of William J. Hunt, Jr. The 1986 activities included establishing a site reference grid followed by excavation of the Bourgeois House kitchen area, north palisade wall, and the northeast bastion. The 1986 report covered the features and interpretation of the fort construction in the excavated areas, but not the recovered artifacts.³³

Also, in 1986, Hunt surveyed a route for a new (current) park entrance road. The proposed route approximated the location of Yellowstone Street in the Mondak Townsite (24RV102).

1987: In 1987 Hunt continued the large-scale Fort Union (32WI17) excavations. This year MWAC investigated the north and east palisade walls and the northeast and southwest bastions. The 1987 report covered the features and interpretation of the fort construction in the excavated areas, but not the recovered artifacts.³⁴

²⁸ Carole A. Angus and Carl R. Falk, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part VI: Preliminary Analysis of Vertebrate Fauna from the 1968–1972 Excavations (MWAC, 1986); Steven L. De Vore, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part VII: Building Hardware, Construction Materials, Tools and Fasteners, (MWAC: 1987); Steven L. De Vore, Beads of the Bison Robe Trade: Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Montana-North Dakota, (Lincoln, Nebraska: National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, and Pacific Palisades, California: The Bead Society, 1992); Steven L. De Vore and William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part IX: Personal, Domestic, and Architectural Artifacts (MWAC: 1993); Steven L. De Vore and William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part X: Native American Burials, (MWAC: 1994); Steven L. De Vore and William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part VIII: Artifacts Associated with Transportation, Commerce and Industry, and of Unidentified Function, (MWAC: 1996); Hunt, Material Culture Reports, Part I; William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part II: Food Related Items, (MWAC: 1986); William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part III: Personal and Recreation Materials, (MWAC: 1986); William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part IV: Firearms, Trapping and Fishing Equipment, (MWAC: 1986); William J. Hunt, Jr., Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part V: Buttons as Closures, Buttons as Decoration. A Nineteenth Century Example from Fort Union, (MWAC: 1986).

²⁹ John Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

³⁰ Scott.

³¹ Gillio.

³² Scott.

³³ Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Excavations*.

³⁴ Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*.

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1988: This was the final year of the large-scale mitigation effort for the Fort Union reconstruction. The 1988 MWAC excavations covered the west and south palisade walls, the main gate, and the Indians and Artisans House. The work was divided into a series of eight blocks numbered 15 to 22. However, the budget for 1989 neglected to fund a 1988 field season report in the same manner as previous years. As a result the blocks were reported individually, and much later in 2001–2002. These reports covered the features and interpretation of the fort construction in the excavated areas, but not the recovered artifacts.³⁵

The 1986-1988 excavations undertaken for the trading post's reconstruction yielded hundreds of thousands of additional artifacts; however, the artifact inventory from these excavations has not yet been completely analyzed or described. Selected categories of artifacts have served the basis for master's theses, doctoral dissertations, journal articles, and reports.³⁶

1991-2010: During this period most archeological investigations within Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site were performed in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and did not deal with the actual trading post. Rather, many of those projects focused on areas at some distance from the post, such as the Garden Coulee site, and only a few touched upon the immediate fort vicinity. Those investigations had to do with road replacements, prescribed burns, water lines servicing the park, and other projects related to improving park infrastructure. Several reports on the trading post investigations were completed, however, and those are outlined below along with the few projects that related directly to the trading post.

2000: Ann Bauermeister's UNL master's thesis "Chipped Stone Use at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota" reported the chipped stone artifacts from Fort Union (32WI17). The lithics included both pre-fur trade contexts and the fur trade era associated with the fort. The pre-fort lithics, both tools and debitage, represented a mobility based technological organization model. For the fort-era lithics, only the tools fit the same model.³⁷

Lester Ross, under contract to MWAC, completed a massive study of the trade beads from Fort Union. The report includes a detailed typology of the more than 190,000 beads recovered from the 1968-1972 and 1986-1988 trading post investigations and describes some 345 varieties from the bead assemblage.³⁸

³⁵ Groover and Cabak; Thomas Hensiak, 1988 Archeological Investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Montana-North Dakota, Block 22 Report, foreword by William J. Hunt, Jr. (MWAC: 2002); Hunt, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 19; Peterson, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 15; Peterson, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 16; Sturdevant, "Stratigraphy"; Thiel, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 20; Thiel, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 21.

³⁶ Ann Bauermeister, "Chipped Stone Use at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota," (Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, Department of Anthropology, 2000); Kenneth P. Cannon, "Multivariate Analysis of Canid Remains from Fort Union, North Dakota," (paper presented at the 112th Annual Proceedings of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, Lincoln, 1992), MWAC; William J. Hunt, Jr., *Firearms and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade Frontier: Weapons and Related Materials From Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17), North Dakota*, (Ph.D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1989) University Microfilms, Ann Arbor; Lester A. Ross, "Trade Beads from Archeological Excavations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," (Report on compact disk), Midwest Archeological Center, National Park Service, Lincoln, Nebraska, in cooperation with the Fort Union Association, Williston, North Dakota; Sturdevant, "Stratigraphy;" Byron J. Sudbury, "Politics of the Fur Trade: Clay Tobacco Pipes at Fort Union Trading Post (32WI17)," *Historic Clay Tobacco Pipe Studies, Research Monograph No. 2* (Ponca City, Oklahoma: Clay Pipes Press, 2009); W. E. Sudderth and Linda J. Darnell Hulvershorn, "The Rare Bone China Gorgets of Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Williston, North Dakota," *Historical Archaeology*, 34 no. 4 (2000), 102-121; J. Homer Thiel, "Food and Power: Meat Procurement and Distribution at Fort Union Trading Post, National Historic Site," (Master's Thesis, Arizona State University, Department of Anthropology, 1992); J. Homer Thiel, "Worked Bone Artifacts Recovered During Excavations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, 32WI17, North Dakota," (Report by the Center for Desert Archaeology, Tucson, Arizona, 1998), MWAC.

³⁷ Bauermeister.

³⁸ Ross.

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2001: Jay Sturdevant wrote his UNL master's thesis entitled "Stratigraphy, Chronology, and Architecture at a Historic Fur Trade Post: A Harris Matrix Application at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota" on Block 17 of the 1988 excavations. This was the first of the 1988 blocks to be reported. The thesis is notable for use of the Harris matrix to report the historic stratigraphy at Fort Union.³⁹

2002: As a result of an MWAC initiative that began in 1997, the 1988 excavation blocks (15-22) were reported in 2002. These reports cover the feature excavations and stratigraphy at Fort Union (32WI17).⁴⁰

2003: On July 11, 2003, Douglas Scott (MWAC) monitored the installation of utility lines outside the palisade on two walls of the fort. The new lines extended outside the west wall from the southwest bastion to the northwest corner and then halfway across the north wall on the outside of the fort and terminating at the electric junction box. No artifacts were found in the ditch-witch-excavated utility trench. This new utility trench outside the fort walls lay in an area previously disturbed either by a gravel quarry, the 1986–1988 excavations, or the fort reconstruction. As a result no intact features or significant resources were encountered in the utility trench.⁴¹

2004: Alicia Coles' 2004 UNL master's thesis was entitled "Fort William in Context: Independent Post versus Outstructure of Fort Union." Coles integrated various forms of data in order to produce an understanding of Fort William's role in the Upper Missouri fur trade, and a perspective on the use of exterior versus interior buildings for Fort Union.⁴²

2009: In 2009, Byron Sudbury published his study entitled "Politics of the Fur trade: Clay Tobacco Pipes at Fort Union Trading Post (32WI17)." This work is a detailed description of the nineteenth century clay tobacco pipes found during the Fort Union excavations.⁴³

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Fort Union has a variety of contributing resource types, primary among these are the intact archeological remains. There is also a cultural landscape with remnant vegetation and geographical features that contribute to the overall setting, feeling, and association of the NHL. Finally, there are full and partial reconstructions of structures associated with the American Fur Company's Fort Union Trading Post circa 1851. Together, these resources contribute to the NHL's period of national significance of 1828–1867. Because the siting of the original fort was so dependent upon the area's natural features, this description will begin with the landscape. It is followed by a summary of archeological sites and features. As the archeological investigations and research supported the reconstruction work, a description of the site's historic appearance precedes the individual listings of reconstructed interpretive features.

1) Landscape

1 contributing site

The historic Fort Union site is located in extreme western North Dakota and is included within the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site. The National Park unit overlaps the border into eastern Montana, an area

³⁹ Sturdevant, "Stratigraphy."

⁴⁰ By order of block number, these are Peterson, 1988 Archeological Investigation, Block 15; Peterson, 1988 Archeological Investigation, Block 16; Sturdevant, "Stratigraphy;" Groover and Cabak; Hunt, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 19; Thiel, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 20; Thiel, 1988 Archeological Investigations, Block 21; Hensiak.

⁴¹ Douglas D. Scott, "Utility Trench Monitoring along the West and North Walls, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota," Archeological Project Report, 2003, MWAC.

⁴² Alicia L. Coles, "Fort William in Context: Independent Post Versus Outstructure of Fort Union," (Master's Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Department of Anthropology, 2004).

⁴³ Sudbury.

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characterized by scattered ranches and widely-dispersed towns. The nearest sizeable community is Williston, North Dakota, 25 miles east via North Dakota State Route 1804. The climate of the region is extreme; summer high temperatures average about 84 degrees Fahrenheit but can climb above 100 degrees while winter temperatures average -5. Precipitation averages 12–16 inches per year, much of which falls as rain in May, June, and July. Winters, though cold, are often relatively dry. The growing season averages 115 days. Fort Union is located within the Northern Temperate Grassland biome, within which native vegetation on the terrace above the floodplain is mixed grass prairie: short, mixed, and tall grass vegetation communities.

Within this semi-arid landscape, the fort occupied a strategic position near the historic confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers—two dominant watercourses that served as transportation corridors for Euro-American exploration, commerce and military operations, making the area one of the most important places in the northern Great Plains.⁴⁴ The general confluence area lies within the Missouri Plateau portion of the Northern Plains physiographic province. In the vicinity of the confluence, the eastward flowing Missouri River occupies the channel established at the end of the last ice age, and marks the approximate southern limit of glaciation on the plains. The northward flowing Yellowstone River cuts a meandering course through its wide floodplain, entering the Missouri River from the south. Both the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers shift seasonally within their active flood plains, and old meander scars are visible. Natural structural aspects of the Missouri River corridor above the confluence (gravel terraces and high bluffs) restrict the movement of the river channel, and the relationship of the river to the site of Fort Union, located above the confluence, has not changed appreciably. In contrast, the flood plain at the mouth of the Yellowstone River is wider (roughly three miles wide), with fewer structural elements limiting its movement.

The actual point at which the rivers converge has changed many times through the millennia. Most recently, a dramatic shift in the rivers' courses occurred in the 1930s when an ice jam in the Yellowstone River forced that stream out of its banks to cut a new channel due north creating a new confluence with the Missouri—approximately 2 ½ miles east of the previous confluence. As a result of this change, the Missouri River migrated southward, abandoning its historic channel and creating a new course approximately one mile to the south.⁴⁵

On the north side of the river and below the south edge of the terrace, a band of native trees and shrubs flank the Missouri River, both up- and down-river of the historic site. This area was once part of the river bed course during the historic period of the fort's occupation, and is now part of the river's riparian setting. On low-lying land directly adjacent to the river, cottonwoods predominate, with willow, chokecherry and redosier (or "red osier") dogwood. Slightly higher and drier sites contain mixtures of ash and elm. Along most of the south edge of the terrace the vegetation is dense enough to screen the river from view. Vegetation is manually cleared from the area in front of the fort to provide views of the Missouri River. On the south side of the river and within the NHL boundary there is a 10-acre narrow strip of mature cottonwood trees and some willow growing along sloughs and on sandbars in the river. Most of these appear to be decadent stands, as Missouri River flood control projects have eliminated much of the seasonal flooding that periodically recharged the riparian zone, creating conditions suitable to cottonwood regeneration.

⁴⁴ Mark Harvey, "A History of the Missouri-Yellowstone River Confluence" (Department of History, North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota, 2001), 1, draft manuscript in the possession of Ann Emmons, Historical Research Associates.

⁴⁵ W. Raymond Wood, "Notes on the Historical Cartography of the Vicinity of Fort Union, North Dakota" (Lincoln, Nebraska: National Park Service, MWAC, December 1979); Missouri River Commission, "Missouri River at Mouth of the Yellowstone," Sheet LX, 1884, map file, Fort Union National Historic Site, North Dakota (hereafter cited as FOUS); George K. Dike, "Map of T152N R104W, June, 1901," Surveyor General's Office, 18 December 1902, Bureau of Land Management files, Bismarck, North Dakota; Satellite Image, 28 July 1995, FOUS.

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The terrace upon which the reconstructed fort sits is generally flat—the result of leveling and cultivating undertaken after the period of national significance. A gravel pit created some time after the abandonment of Fort Union had been located south of the fort at the edge of the terrace and cut into part of the location of the southwest bastion. The eastern portion of the pit was later filled by the NPS in order to stabilize the area and to facilitate archeological investigations and reconstruction. In 1992 the NPS removed excess fill material in order to reestablish the contours of the terrace and a drainage as they appeared in mid-1800s sketches of the areas.⁴⁶ Since 1987 the NPS has been actively restoring the shortgrass prairie on the terrace area immediately surrounding the reconstructed fort. As of 2010, approximately 125 acres of prairie have been restored.⁴⁷ The prairie extends from the south edge of the terrace north roughly one quarter mile to North Dakota State Route 1804/Montana State Route 327. Immediately north of the highway is the Burlington Northern railroad grade, constructed as the Great Northern railroad grade in 1887. The part of the terrace that lies north of the highway remains in agricultural use. Although located within the authorized boundary of the NPS historic site, the property is privately owned with a scenic easement in agricultural use.

Roughly one-half mile east of Fort Union, the terrace is bisected by a tree-lined drainage known as “Garden Coulee.” This drainage historically provided an avenue of approach to the fort by the American Indians.⁴⁸ Between this coulee and the fort, historical images and descriptions note that the terrace was periodically occupied by visiting tribes. Gardens were recorded as present in the area in 1834 and 1843, one established on the terrace, two others on the floodplain. These supplied the fort inhabitants with fresh vegetables. The main garden was probably in Garden Coulee.⁴⁹

Less than a mile north of the terrace edge, the land transitions to steep, heavily dissected ravines and rolling uplands. The ravines are generally dry and those few streams that run perennially are alkaline. Beyond the ravines lie the bluffs at the margins of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers—the visual backdrop for the area. These grass-covered hills average from 200 to 300 feet in height and are heavily eroded to talus cones, pyramids, and steep perpendicular faces. At their base lie coal deposits, of insufficient quality to represent a marketable commodity, but historically mined for use by Fort Union and later inhabitants. The bluffs generally run east to west, parallel with the Missouri River. They dominate historic narrative and pictorial descriptions of Fort Union and today largely define the limits to the viewshed from the valley bottom.

The gradient of the bluffs at the northern boundary of the NHL precludes cultivation, and they are used for grazing. The Bodmer Overlook, nearly 200 feet above the terrace, is an important topographical feature and a discontinuous part of the NHL. The overlook is located within a 30-acre parcel under Federal ownership. It is believed that from this vantage point artist Karl Bodmer painted the fort in 1833. Today it provides visitors with a bird’s eye view of the fort and beyond to the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Steven E. Daron, “Monitoring of Bluff Contouring: Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site,” (Rocky Mountain Region Archeological Project Report, December 1992), 2-3, MWAC.

⁴⁷ The park has 19 restoration units that have been treated for invasive species and seeded with native plants. Some native prairie species have been re-established, but there is little species diversity so far. National Parks and Conservation Association, “Center for the State of the Parks, Fort Union Trading Post,” FOUS; Rodd Wheaton, for Richard Strait, Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resource Preservation, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, to James Sperry, North Dakota State Historic Preservation Officer, “Section 106 Compliance, Project No. FOUS-8801,” 22 April 1988, MWAC.

⁴⁸ Erwin N. Thompson, *Fort Union Trading Post Historic Structures Report Part II, Historical Data Section*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, Document DB-203 901, 30 September 1968), 15. Thompson’s subsequent book, *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri* (Williston, North Dakota: Fort Union Association, 1994) is derived from this report.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 265, citing observations to John James Audubon by Edwin Thompson Denig in Maria R. Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals* Vol. 2, (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 180-188.

⁵⁰ Matzko, 138. Artist Thomas Hart Benton visited the site in 1965 and spent a day searching for the hill that he thought best matched the perspective. An NPS pedestrian trail that is not within the NHL boundary, but which allows visitor access to the overlook

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Fort Union Era Archeological Sites, Features and Artifacts

All the extant historic cultural features associated with the Fort Union Trading Post have become archeological remains. In addition to the archeological cultural resources identified that are associated with Fort Union, site work has identified cultural material that pre- and post-dates the fur trade era. Within the proposed NHL boundary, there are six archeological sites that contribute to the nationally significant theme of the fur trade, and eight non-contributing archeological sites that do not. All have been assigned state site numbers. The contributing sites are the Fort Union site (32WI17), the Fort Union to Fort Benton Road site (24RV596), the Fort William Stockade (32WI988), the Larpenieur Trading Post (32WI992), and two fur trade era trash dump sites (32WI989 and 32WI990).

There are eight non-contributing sites within the proposed NHL boundary. Three of the archeological sites considered non-contributing to the nationally significant theme of the fur trade include the Garden Coulee Site (32WI18), an historic trash dump site (32WI991), and the site of the 20th century community of Mondak (24RV591, 24RV592, 24RV593, 24RV594, 24RV595, 32WI902) listed together as one “site” for purposes of this nomination. While not considered contributing for the purposes of this NHL evaluation, they have been or may be considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places for other reasons. The Garden Coulee Site has been determined eligible for the NR as the location of an 1870s–1880s Hidatsa village led by Crow-Flies High, and post-dates the historic fur trade era. Further archeological investigations regarding the historic trash dump site are needed to determine if it is associated with Fort Union Trading Post or the Garden Coulee Site. The various sites confirmed or likely to be associated with the 1903–1928 community of Mondak may be considered for National Register listing, although additional investigations are needed for some of the sites. Many above ground resources associated with this town that straddled the Montana-North Dakota border have been destroyed by cultivation.⁵¹

The other five sites assigned state site numbers which are considered non-contributing are 24RV590, 32WI899, 32WI900, 32WI901, and 32WI996. Site 24RV590 appears to have good site integrity but may not be significant under the fur trade context due to the restricted type of artifacts that occur at the site (vehicle maintenance). A historic trash dump site (32WI996) has been recommended as ineligible for the National Register at this time due to site disturbance. Another three sites (32WI899, 32WI900, 32WI901) do not appear to meet any National Register criteria at this time.⁵²

While not assigned separate state numbers, a broadly scattered and diffuse assemblage of American Indian artifacts have been recorded as part of the various archeological investigations. They include flakes, pieces of shatter, core and biface fragments, and a fragment of a stone pipe. These may be associated with protohistoric

via the north side of State Route 1804, is partially owned by the states of Montana and North Dakota, and partially under private ownership with a Federal easement. The *North Dakota History*, vol. 69 nos. 2-4, published by the State Historical Society of North Dakota in 2002 is devoted to the theme of the confluence area. It includes articles on the Fort Union reconstruction and historical subjects related to the confluence.

⁵¹ Sites associated with Mondak, recommended as eligible under criterion D, retain integrity and may represent a little known aspect of this historic town. Cellar depressions and foundation remnants along abandoned streets remain. Mondak was established on the state line in response to North Dakota’s state laws against selling and serving alcohol. A number of bars and bordellos were established on the Montana side. William J. Hunt, Jr., to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, “Trip Report for an Inventory of the Proposed Bodmer Overlook Perimeter, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (FOUS),” 28 August 2000, MWAC, citing Lynne B. MacDonald, T. Weber Greiser and Daniel F. Gallacher, “Testing and Evaluation of Cultural Resource Site 24RV102, the Mondak Townsite, Roosevelt County, Montana,” (Report by Historical Research Associates, for North Dakota State Highway Department, Bismarck, North Dakota, 1982), MWAC; William J. Hunt, Jr., and Ann C. Bauermeister, “A Post-Burn Inventory of the West Terrace Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (FOUS), Williams County, North Dakota, Roosevelt County, Montana,” 2002, MWAC, 5-12.

⁵² Hunt and Bauermeister, 10.

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or historic American occupation.⁵³ There have also been numerous prehistoric objects identified—some dating to 3000 or more years ago. It is probable that encampments may have covered the terrace top near Fort Union.⁵⁴ Archeological information indicates that people related to the area's earthlodge dwellers occupied the terrace edge sometime between AD 1400 and 1700, possibly in temporary encampments.⁵⁵

As noted previously in the summary of archeological investigations, systematic research and archeological investigations of the Fort Union sites and features began in 1968, and for the next two decades a principal purpose of the work overseen by the NPS Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) was to acquire architectural information in advance of reconstructing the fort. It also yielded a great quantity of information about the American Indian Trading era. Subsequent reports provided "... functional and formal data regarding nineteenth century fur trade artifacts, activities, and manufacturing technologies utilized during that area, as well as trade networks which existed at the time."⁵⁶ Archeological investigations found evidence of a variety of other events and constructions that occurred on the terrace at various times. Some of these are not associated with the period of national significance but contribute to an understanding of the evolution and use of the important confluence area.

The focus of most archeological study was the Fort Union palisade—the location of most intensive activity, and within which were company residences, workshops, and storage buildings. Prior to its NHL designation in 1961, a survey of the fort site remains identified only "a few cellar pits."⁵⁷ In 1966, when the site became a unit of the NPS, it was distinguishable as a roughly rectangular raised berm at the edge of the terrace north of the river.⁵⁸ In addition, previous landowners had quarried gravel from at least three locations at the edge of the terrace, one of which came close enough to the structure to undermine the archeological remnants of the southwest bastion.

Seven field seasons of archeological work spanning 1968–1988 have provided a great quantity of nationally significant information about Fort Union. Excavations were undertaken in four field seasons between 1968 and 1972 within the primary palisade area.⁵⁹ Between 1981 and 1986 MWAC analyzed the material recovered during those excavations, and produced a ten volume series that provided an overview and assessment of the first four seasons of field work, with detailed descriptions of objects associated with particular material culture classes. This series is entitled "Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports."⁶⁰ Between the 1970s and the early 1980s a number of smaller scale investigations were undertaken in

⁵³ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁴ Robert W. Nickel and William J. Hunt, Jr., "A Magnetic Gradiometer Survey of the Waterline Corridor at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 2000, 2, MWAC.

⁵⁵ William J. Hunt, Jr., "The Fort Union Reconstruction Archeology Project," *CRM Bulletin* 12, no. 1 (1989), 4; William J. Hunt, Jr., to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, "Trip Report. Geophysical survey of proposed waterline route through Fort Union Trading Post (32WI17) and the Garden Coulee or Crow Flies High Village site (32WI18) Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 29 September 1999 memorandum, MWAC.

⁵⁶ De Vore and Hunt, *Material Culture Reports*, Part IX, 1, 5.

⁵⁷ Ray H. Mattison, "Fort Union," *National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Form*, 1951. This inventory form served as the NHL document since the site's designation on 4 July 1961.

⁵⁸ NPS Archaeologist William J. Hunt, Jr., states that the large quantities of stone used in fort construction had protected the core area of the fort from damage stemming from agricultural use of the terrace: "Horse-drawn equipment couldn't plow through it, although there was evidence that attempts were made." William J. Hunt, Jr., to Dena Sanford, "Comments on Missouri/Yellowstone Confluence Historic District Nomination," November 2001, National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, Nebraska (hereafter cited as MWRO).

⁵⁹ The goal was to gather detailed facts directly from extant fragments of structures and features, with a special interest in structural location, size, construction and appearance, De Vore and Hunt, *Material Cultures Report Part IX*, 1. See also William J. Hunt, *Material Culture Reports Part I: A Critical Review of the Archeological Investigations* (MWAC: 1986); Moore; Husted, "1969 Excavations;" Husted, "1970 Excavations;" Gillio.

⁶⁰ De Vore and Hunt, *Material Cultures Report Part IX*, 1. The delay between field work and production of reports was due to lack of funding and the transfer of project archeologists to other NPS offices. The temporary abandonment of reconstruction plans in

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the park. Then, in order to both accomplish a 1985 Congressional mandate to reconstruct the fort on site, and to salvage archeological data from those areas that would be impacted by development activities, three additional field seasons of excavations were organized between 1986 and 1988.⁶¹ The work resulted in the largest excavation ever conducted on a single site by MWAC. The archeological investigations resulted not only in a profile of the building techniques and materials employed in construction, and of the physical characteristics of Fort Union at the height of its development (ca. 1851), but also a greatly expanded understanding of the life and characteristics of the “common, generally illiterate people at the fort (the Indians, the lower status employees, and their families)” —those not often described in the written accounts of the literate clerks, bourgeois, and privileged visitors.⁶²

The fieldwork ultimately resulted in the recovery of millions of specimens. Virtually all are now curated at the park. They range from glass and metal containers, gun parts and ammunition, ceramic dinnerware, tools for making and repairing objects of wood and metal, building materials, clothing items, glass beads, and decorated ceramic tobacco pipes.⁶³ Information collected related to the research domains of subsistence, personal protection, commerce, industry and economy, personal adornment, and entertainment.⁶⁴ The size and diversity of the collection make it one of the foremost assemblages of fur trade era information in the world.⁶⁵

2) Fort Union Trading Post Site, 32WI17 (ND)/24RV50 (MT)

1 contributing site

The Fort Union Trading Post site contains numerous structural components and secondary features within the fort; other sites and features have been located beyond the palisade. These are detailed below and are included within the proposed expanded NHL boundary. A minimum of 41 identifiable structures are known to have existed in and around the fort’s walls, exclusive of American Indian lodges built within and outside of the palisade,⁶⁶ but as the fort’s primary and ancillary structures were constantly changing during its nearly 40 years of existence, this number is not comprehensive. Buildings and areas were functionally dynamic and changed use according to need; for example, a horse shelter later served as storage space, then employee housing.⁶⁷ Many of the Fort Union Trading Post site features have been identified by an alphanumeric code used by the NPS to inventory extant historic structures. This code system was initiated in 1968 to identify the location and delineation of potential archeological features as a prerequisite to partial reconstruction of the fort.⁶⁸ These features are not considered individual contributing resources to the NHL, but rather represent distinct parts of the one contributing archeological site of Fort Union Trading Post.

the early 1970s also deferred analysis of the artifacts. For a detailed administrative history detailing the creation of this National Park System unit, see Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, and John Matzko, “The Fort Union of the National Park Service,” *North Dakota History*, 69, nos. 2, 3, 4 (2002): 24-33.

⁶¹ Ibid. This action was undertaken in order to mitigate the adverse effect of reconstruction on the archeological site. See also Douglas D. Scott, Thomas D. Thiessen, and William J. Hunt, Jr., “Scope of Work for 1986 Archeological Investigations at the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site in Preparation for Partial Reconstruction,” 19 December 1985, FOUS 106 (through 1986) file, MWAC.

⁶² Hunt, *CRM*, 2-3.

⁶³ Ibid.; United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “Resource Management Plan, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota/Montana,” 1 June 1998, MWRO.

⁶⁴ Scott, Thiessen, and Hunt, “Scope of Work for 1986 Archeological Investigations.”

⁶⁵ William J. Hunt, Jr., “Digging Up Fort Union – The History and Archeology of Fort Union Trading Post, National Historic Site,” (paper presented at the Omaha Westerners Club, 17 October 1996, and the Mid-West Tool Collectors Association Meeting, 20 October 1996), 5, MWAC.

⁶⁶ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 163-269. Thompson’s report was both the first detailed history of Fort Union and the first effort to provide a comprehensive list of structures and buildings at the trading post. Thompson’s work assigned structure numbers to nearly all known buildings and structures mentioned in the historic record.

⁶⁷ Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 131.

⁶⁸ Hunt, *Material Culture Reports Part I*, 6.

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The following structural remains were entirely excavated during the 1980s:

- the palisade (HS-1) and the palisade bracing system;
- the southwest and northeast bastions (HS-2 and HS-3);
- the front and back gates (HS-4 and HS 5);
- the Indians' and artisans' house (HS-6);
- the bourgeois house (HS-7);
- the blacksmith shop (HS-10);
- the powder magazine (HS-12);
- the flagstaff and picket fence (HS-13);
- the dairy (HS-19); and
- the bell tower (HS-23).

Below the Indians' and artisans' house was found Fort Union's original blacksmith shop, and above this, another structure dating to the 1840s whose western half contained a gun shop.⁶⁹ Other features below the blacksmith shop remain, in addition to another possible structure. For all but the powder magazine, neither the archeological remains of these features nor their associated archeological material exist now in situ.⁷⁰ In their places stand ten interpretive reconstructions. Their detailed physical descriptions appear in the discussion on reconstructed interpretive resources.

Within the palisade area the following archeological remains were partly excavated:

- the bourgeois house kitchen (HS-8);
- the dwelling range (HS-9);
- the store range (HS-11); and
- the ice house (HS-30).

Significant elements of the dwelling and store ranges, and the ice house still exist undisturbed, and there are pre-1832 features and structures below the dwelling and store ranges. Evidence of other features found include an earlier circa 1828–1829 palisade; a number of interior board fences; boardwalks and gravel walkways; hitching posts, minor storage buildings, and several early cache pits circa 1828–1829. Portions of the 1828 era north palisade remain in place under the kitchen.

Within the palisade some of the excavated historic features were retained and incorporated as part of the partial reconstruction at Fort Union because of their ability to demonstrate scale, the sense of enclosure, and the relationship of various functions and activity areas within the palisade.⁷¹ For example, only the roof of the kitchen had been documented historically; therefore the foundation and fireplace of the kitchen were left exposed, and a gable roof was erected on steel columns, creating an open pavilion. The locations of the dwelling and store ranges, the blacksmith shop, the powder magazine, and the ice house were outlined with

⁶⁹ Hunt *CRM*, 4.

⁷⁰ This action was recognized as an adverse effect when proposed. See Jack W. Neckels, Acting Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Region, to Robert Fink, Chief Western Division of Project Review, 7 March 1986 memorandum, FOUS 106 (through 1986) file, MWAC. Numerous NPS officials and archaeologists argued passionately against the reconstruction, citing the extreme significance of the archeological remains and asking that any reconstruction be completed off site. Other Park Service officials demurred, citing Congressional intent, the educational value of the reconstruction, and the importance of original setting to any interpretive effort. Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 115.

⁷¹ Rodd L. Wheaton, Supervisory Historical Architect, "To Reconstruct Or Not To Reconstruct: Decision Within Documentation," (Rocky Mountain Region n.d. [1984]), 12, Fort Union National Historic Site Historic Resource File 0002, FOUS.

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timbers left over from palisade reconstruction and set on limestone footings. The dairy flagstones were left exposed.⁷²

Archeological evidence probably associated with the 1860s occupation by the United States Army includes two privies, one immediately adjacent to the inside margin of the east palisade foundation, the other northeast of the bourgeois house (Features 321 and 496, respectively) and 1864–1865 storerooms (HS-31). There was archeological evidence of a number of other structures that had never been identified in the historical record, or were so vaguely described that the feature could not be related to structures in the historical record.⁷³ Very little archeological evidence could be found for smaller structures referenced in the historic record as being located along the north palisade, including stables (HS-14); buffalo calves stables (HS-15); a hen house (HS-16), an artist's studio (HS-17); and a cooper's shop (HS-18). A well not assigned an historic structure number was also found within the palisade, and which included a human interment likely associated with the nearby post-fort Crow Flies High Village.⁷⁴

Beyond the Fort Union palisade a number of archeological surveys completed between 1973 and 2010 identified additional subsurface features on the terrace and closer to the Garden Coulee area. These are included within the proposed expanded NHL boundary. Investigative techniques included pedestrian and geophysical surveys, and reconnaissance and monitoring efforts in areas of NPS and Department of Transportation undertakings. A proton magnetometer survey of the entire Fort Union site and the Fort William stockade area has been undertaken. A rock-lined well (Feature 18) was identified west of the fort's southwest bastion, and outside of the north palisade wall are the subsurface remains of a circa 1858 sawmill. Several different structures were possibly located outside of the east palisade wall, with evidence found of a substantial structure or structures, possibly a corral, or portions of an unknown number of structures.⁷⁵ West of the palisade, on the terrace edge near the NPS trail leading from the parking lot to the fort is a possible lime kiln (HS-27) built into the west side of the slope. This earthen feature was identified during the 1986 excavations, and by 1998 was severely eroded. It consists of a large, heat-reddened bell-shaped pit.⁷⁶

In addition to permanent fixtures, the tipis of resident Assiniboine and of visiting tribes were also erected on the terrace—the number and size of the encampments varied depending upon the season and the status of intertribal relations. Hearths, post holes, and hide-smoking pits have been identified both inside and outside the palisade, at the terrace edge.⁷⁷ North and east of the fort have been found trash middens, post holes, fragments of fire hearths, storage/trash pit features and other unknown features. These appear to be associated with the trading post occupations around the post or occupation immediately after the post's abandonment.⁷⁸

⁷² Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 123-125; Hunt to Sanford, "Comments."

⁷³ Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Excavations*, 92-108; Hunt "Origins of Fort Union," 382-386; Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 113-131; Hunt, "Digging Up Fort Union," 10-12; William Hunt, Jr., to Eileen Star, electronic mail message, 3 March 1998, FOUS Section 106 file, MWAC.

⁷⁴ Richard L. Jantz and R. W. Mann, "Analysis of a Burial From the Fort Union Trading Post, North Dakota," Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee, 1987, MWAC. Following compliance with NAGPRA, the remains were turned over to the Three Affiliated Tribes.

⁷⁵ Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 129-130.

⁷⁶ Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Investigations*, 11; William J. Hunt, Jr., to Superintendent Andy Banta, electronic mail message, 3 March 1998, Section 106 file, MWAC; William J. Hunt, Jr., Archeologist, to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, "Trip report, Post-burn inventory, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (FOUS)," 19 May 2000, MWAC.

⁷⁷ Hunt, "1999 Geophysical Survey;" Thomas D. Thiessen, Park Archeologist, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, to Superintendent, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, "Archeological investigations at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, March-May 1977," 15 August 1977, MWAC; Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Excavations*.

⁷⁸ Hunt, "1999 Geophysical Survey;" Thiessen, "1977 Archeological investigations;" Anderson, "Trip Report" 1976; Adrienne Anderson, Supervisory Archeologist, to Chief, Midwest Archeological Center, "General Management Plan policy review meeting and onsite archeological observation, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 25 October 1977, MWAC.

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Other cultural materials encountered or indicated include numerous magnetic anomalies interpreted as trash pits or hearths, and a lime kiln. These are not identified as individual contributing resources, but as part of the Fort Union Trading Post 32WI17 archeological site. This includes the Gregory, Bruguier, and Geowey Trading Post site, which has been potentially identified by surface debris. It has not been recorded with the states of North Dakota or Montana, nor has it been the focus of archeological investigation. Located about 200 feet north-northwest of Fort Union, it existed at the end of Fort Union's period of national significance. Consisting of two wood buildings, this unpretentious wood complex was in existence by 1863 and photographed in 1866.⁷⁹ This site may be assigned a separate site number if its location is ever confirmed archeologically.

There are five additional subsurface features that are individually listed as contributing sites within this NHL district, due to the extent of cultural resource material discovered. These are a stockade, a fort-era road, another historic period fort, plus two fur trade era-related trash dumps. These features are discussed below.

Fort William Stockade Site (32WI988)

1 contributing site

The Fort William stockade/the "old fort", was built east of Fort Union in 1834 from the timbers of another area trading fort, Fort William, after which it was named.⁸⁰ Various historical sources placed the distance between the stockade and Fort Union within a range of proximity from 200 feet to 150 or 200 yards. This stockade, described as 150 feet square, provided quarters for some personnel, and served as a hospital for American Indian victims of smallpox in 1837. In 1836 the Fort William stockade included bastions and dwellings; some were destroyed by fire that year. A garden space was located within or adjacent to its boundary. It was dismantled sometime between 1847 and 1853. Later images show a large, cross-gabled structure in the area in 1853, and a collection of smaller buildings sometime after 1851. There was also a cemetery located southeast of the fort.

Tentative location of the site began with one of the earliest magnetic surveys in the NPS, conducted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the Midwest Archeological Center, in 1977. In 1978, a second survey of the suspected Fort William location was undertaken and produced a large number of magnetic anomalies that appeared to correlate to known archeological features. A re-analysis of the magnetic data resulted in the identification of four major localized anomalies and at least ten linear anomalous features. Magnetic anomalies identified during geophysical investigations in 2006 confirmed this site as the location of the Fort William Stockade. Based on these investigations, the site appears to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places according to criterion D, and that the site will yield significant archeological information on the local and regional historic activities of the fur trade on the Upper Missouri; however, additional archeological evaluation, including ground truthing, is warranted.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 261; "Resource Management Plan," 18.

⁸⁰ Weymouth, "1979 a Magnetic Survey." The original Fort William was constructed in 1833 by fur traders William Sublette and William Campbell at a site near the later Fort Buford, two or more miles east of Fort Union. It was rectangular in pattern, with two bastions at opposite corners and fifteen-foot palisades. This site was abandoned and dismantled in the spring of 1834. Subsequent posts at the first Fort William site included Fort Mortimer, 1842-1845; the Fort William of Harvey, Primeau & Co. (1846-ca. 1854); the Fort William of J. Picotte & Co (1855- ca. 1857); and the Fort William of Clark, Primeau & Co. (1857-1858). Each successive owner "reoccupied and repaired" the fort of its predecessor. See Thomas D. Thiessen, "The Several Forts William (Or Confusion at the Confluence)," 19 September 1986, 1-3, MWAC; Robert K. Nickel, Acting Chief, Midwest Archeological Center, to Regional Historical Architect, Rocky Mountain Region, "The 'Fort William' Outstructure at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," 1 April 1986 memorandum, MWAC.

⁸¹ Weymouth, "1979 Magnetic Survey"; Duane Klinner, "Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site – Survey of 64 Acres." (UNDAR-West Project Number 2061, Department of Anthropology, University of North Dakota, November 1988), 11, 13, MWAC; Nickel, "Magnetic Gradiometric Survey," 3-4; Steven L. De Vore, "Geophysical Investigations of Selected Areas within Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, Williams County, North Dakota," 2007, MWAC, 15, 17; .Steven LeRoy De Vore and William J.

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4) Fort Union to Fort Benton Road Site (24RV596)

1 contributing site

While there are anecdotal reports that many of the trails in the hills around the fort remain intact,⁸² the Fort Union to Fort Benton Road Site is the only historic road to be counted as a separate contributing site. The road is poorly documented in the written record, although paintings of the fort prepared during its period of occupation show a series of roads and paths leading from the palisade gates to other activity areas on the terrace and beyond. Located on the west side of the fort, the road is depicted in George Catlin's 1832 painting of Fort Union, on a circa 1843 Jean-Baptiste Moncravie watercolor, and on an unattributed 1850s illustration. The route was described and illustrated on maps in reports describing the results of an 1853 expedition for a railroad route to the Pacific Ocean, and an overland freight hauler described in his journal, a late 1860s trip over the trail.⁸³

This resource was documented in 1986, with subsequent recordation as part of a post-burn inventory. The site is visible as a shallow road depression 12 meters wide by 357 meters long, trending east/west, although it may extend beyond the western boundary of the park. As the road is situated in an agricultural field that has been plowed for years, its historic depth has probably been reduced and its width widened. The east end of the trace was impacted with the construction of a new entrance road to the National Historic Site in the late 1980s. No artifact concentrations were noted to correspond to the site.⁸⁴ The Fort Benton Road Site is said to be "... arguably one of the most important and earliest overland commercial routes in Montana from the early 1830s through 1883 when the Northern Pacific Railroad completed its transcontinental line."⁸⁵ The road site has not yet been evaluated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, but it appears eligible according to Criterion A, and historic contexts include fur trade commerce, commercial freighting, and early transportation routes.⁸⁶

5) Charles Larpeur's Opposition Post (32WI992)

1 contributing site

About 200 yards west of the fort surface debris marks the most likely location of Charles Larpeur's 1866–1867 Opposition Post, which measured about 96 feet by 20 feet. Larpeur, who had been the last bourgeois at Fort Union under the management of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company, established his own trading enterprise here. The buildings were adobe and included a bastion. Operations at the fort were short-lived, and Larpeur abandoned the post within a year.⁸⁷

Following the identification of surface artifacts by site staff, a 2006 magnetic survey identified a number of magnetic anomalies, including the possible outlines of two structures. The magnetic data suggested that the site boundaries were fairly well defined on the north and east sides, but the lack of time did not permit additional magnetic survey on the west and south sides of the survey area. Based on these investigations, the site appears to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criterion D as a contributing site within the district. The site will yield significant archeological information on the local and regional historic activities of the fur trade on the Upper Missouri; however, additional archeological evaluation, including ground truthing, is warranted.⁸⁸

Hunt, Jr., *Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site (32WI17) Material Culture Reports, Part VIII: Artifacts Associated with Transportation, Commerce and Industry, and of Unidentified Function*, (MWAC: 1996), 29.

⁸² Hunt to Sanford, "Comments."

⁸³ Hunt and Bauermeister, 9; Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Investigations*, 11. Moncravie was an *engage*, or contract employee, at the fort.

⁸⁴ Hunt and Bauermeister, 8-9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 9, 11.

⁸⁷ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 261; "Resource Management Plan," 18.

⁸⁸ De Vore, "Geophysical Investigations," 15-17.

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6 & 7) Historic Trash Dumps (32WI989 and 32WI990)

2 contributing sites

Located east of the Fort Union Trading Post site, both trash dump sites were identified during the course of the 2006 magnetic survey. Both sites contained numerous magnetic anomalies that appeared to represent historic ferrous objects. The investigations concluded that the sites were associated with the fur trade era, and the magnetic survey data indicated that the sites contain intact archeological deposits and features related to the nineteenth-century activities at the trading post. Based on these investigations, the sites are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion D as contributing sites within the district. They will yield significant archeological information on the local and regional historic activities of the fur trade on the Upper Missouri. Additional archeological evaluation, including ground truthing, is warranted.⁸⁹

HISTORIC APPEARANCE

Accounts by contemporaries such as Charles Larpenteur described the area as “a beautiful site, abounding in the best of timber, above, below, and opposite the fort, and with all kinds of game.”⁹⁰ The confluence area, located adjacent to both the broad riparian zones of the two rivers and the vast expanses of mixed-grass prairie beyond, contained an abundant variety of natural resources in the early nineteenth century. Broad bands of deciduous forest paralleled the two rivers. Within these areas, overstory vegetation included cottonwood and willow within the active floodplains, with elm, ash, and box elder in drier areas. Understory vegetation included dense thickets of chokecherry, service berry, buffalo berry, gooseberry, wild plum, grapes, and honeysuckle.⁹¹ On the terraces and uplands, blue grama, needle-and-thread, green needlegrass, and western wheatgrass provided habitat for large grazing and browsing ungulates, including bison, elk, and deer. These resources were of great value to American Indians and Euro-Americans alike.

The larger ecosystem of which it was a part contained the resources upon which the American Fur Company depended for success, principally the abundant herds of bison in the vicinity. The beaver skin trade was a major purpose for establishing Fort Union, but bison would become the main focus of American Fur Company trade during the 1830s. Bison also provided staple food for Fort Union’s employees. Bear, deer, elk, and antelope were abundant, as were sage grouse, ducks, and geese. Native fruits and berries were available in the vicinity of the fort and may have helped to stave off scurvy. The same native grasslands that supported bison and elk served as forage for imported domestic livestock, including beef and dairy cattle, and horses owned both by the company and the American Indians who frequented the post. In some low-lying sites, the native grasses grew so abundantly that Fort Union’s employees harvested it as hay, carting it to the fort from distances of up to 10 miles.

Access to the trading post was both overland and by water. The gravel terrace contained sufficient level ground to allow for post construction, with enough left over to accommodate the lodges of the local Assiniboine bands and visiting Crow, Blackfeet, Plains Cree, Hidatsa, Mandan, Arikara, Ojibwa, and Lakota. The main channel of the Missouri River flowed by the base of the terrace, facilitating river transport.⁹² Depending on the volume of water and the position of the main channel, loading and unloading cargo from the boats docked below the fort required a walk of 25 to 100 yards, directly into the fort’s front door. East of the fort was a shallow, dry depression leading from the river’s edge to the east side of the palisade.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ 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), 92.

⁹¹ The 1805 journal entries of Lewis and Clark provide the first recorded description of the confluence area. See Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Volume IV* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 69-70.

⁹² Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 15.

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The American Fur Company used the stands of timber as the principal building material for construction of the fort, including the palisade, the buildings inside it, and support services such as carts, boats, and firewood. Graphic depictions of the fort between 1832 and 1864 show numerous trees south of the river, but by 1863 the timber upstream from the fort had nearly all been cut away for fuel and building material, while downstream the area was still heavily wooded.⁹³ During its operational period, the post clerk described Fort Union as “the principal and handsomest trading post on the Missouri river.”⁹⁴ It was largely constructed of cottonwood (“for no other wood is available here”), a soft wood of twisted grain, prone to rot and rapid deterioration. Strong and nearly constant winds further stressed the buildings and structures, and fire proved a constant risk, if an infrequent event. Maintenance and reconstruction of the fort was therefore continual.⁹⁵

Despite the constant work, there are four distinguishable construction phases during the years 1828 to 1867.⁹⁶ The first construction phase (1828–ca. 1835) corresponds with original construction and expansion of the trading post. During phase one construction, partner Kenneth McKenzie attained virtually uncontested economic control over the northern Rocky Mountains east of the Continental Divide, and the northern plains. Fur trade centered on small furs and bison robes. The second phase, from the late 1830s to about 1850, represented a period of maintenance and remodeling. Trade centered on buffalo robes rather than small furs. It was a period when Fort Union “... served as a focus of American economic power and wealth beyond which the fur trade had seen before or would ever see again.”⁹⁷ The decade of the 1850s was a period of slow decline. This third phase reflected a rise in the Sioux nation’s strength and pressure on the trading community, an apparent shortage of trade goods, and a loss of profitability and/or decline in the demand for bison products. There was an associated and steady decline in the condition of the buildings and structures. The fourth phase marked the final, diminished years of Fort Union’s operations in the 1860s, when the fur trade had lost economic viability.⁹⁸

Within the first construction phase, Fort Union underwent two distinct development periods. The first was a hastily built facility dating from 1828–1832. It was replaced between 1833 and 1835.⁹⁹ Details on the initial construction are few, but work is estimated to have begun in the fall of 1828 with the palisade, using a variety of square-hewn logs, split planks, and half-round logs. James Kipp with the American Fur Company’s Upper Missouri Outfit may have supervised the work and possibly been responsible for the overall plan.¹⁰⁰ The skilled workmen (carpenters and masons) came from St. Louis, while the majority of laborers were French Canadian engages from Quebec.¹⁰¹ The first palisade was a parallelogram measuring roughly 178 feet along the north and south walls and 198 feet along the east and west walls. It was situated to avoid shallow drainages east and west of the construction site while maximizing the perimeter and utilizing the greatest amount of flat land. The 15- to 16-foot-tall palisades were constructed of pickets hewn from cottonwood, using a *poteaux-en-terre* (posts in

⁹³ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 266, citing Henry A. Boller, *Among the Indians, Eight Years in the Far West, 1858-1866*, (Philadelphia: T. Ellwood Zell, 1868).

⁹⁴ Edwin Thompson Denig provided this description to John James Audubon in his report entitled “Description of Fort Union, July 30, 1843.” Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 272, citing Maria R. Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals*, 2 vols., notes by Elliott Coues, (New York: Dover Publications, 1960).

⁹⁵ Barton H. Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 44.

⁹⁶ During the archeological excavations of the 1980s, MWAC archeologists identified a beginning date for the original period of Fort Union construction at 1829, although subsequent reports document initial construction of the palisade to late 1828. See, for example, Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 105, versus Hunt, “Origins of Fort Union,” 383-385.

⁹⁷ Hunt, *Material Culture Reports Part I*, 4. For a detailed biography of Kipp, see W. Raymond Wood, “James Kipp: Upper Missouri River Fur Trader and Missouri Farmer,” *North Dakota History* 77, nos. 1 & 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-5.

⁹⁹ Barbour, *Fort Union*, 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 45. Kipp’s involvement has not been confirmed, and the palisade’s haphazard construction is not in keeping with the man’s reputation. However, deteriorating weather conditions during the fall and winter of 1828 may account for this. Hunt, “Origins of Fort Union,” 383-385.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 17.

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ground) construction technique familiar to the French Canadian and Creole laborers. In this system vertical timbers, typically hewn flat on their exterior faces, are set in long shallow trenches and secured with heavy stones and rammed earth. At the top was attached a *cheval-de-frise* (a portable frame covered with spikes). At Fort Union the design varied between the palisade walls. Sections on the south palisade used two alternating inner and outer rows of 5- to 8-inch-wide pickets. The north (and less substantial) palisade was built of 2- to 3-inch-thick split planks, intermittently supported by round posts on the interior. Large square posts anchored the southwest and northwest corners. Two-story-high bastions, thought to have been constructed “log-cabin style,” of cottonwood, were located at opposing corners of the palisaded enclosure, and had “pointed” roofs, embrasures and cannon. Within the palisade were eight to ten log houses and stores and an ice house.¹⁰²

The first of the many dramatic and consequential modifications occurred in February 1832 with reconstruction of the bulk of the western palisade and building range following a late night fire. Then, between 1833 and 1835 there was a complete reconstruction of the palisades, bastions, manager’s house, store, powder magazine, and probably the Indians’ and artisans’ house as well. It was essentially a complete replacement of the earlier post structures. The new 237 by 245-foot palisade provided protection not only from attack but also from the high winds that buffet the Northern Plains. Unlike the original palisade, the replacement rested on a stone and mortar foundation, or *poteaux-sur-sole* (posts on sill). The palisade was reinforced with a network of bracing and cross bracing set at roughly 12 foot intervals. This design provided no protection, however, from the rain and the courtyard became a muddy mess during foul weather. Boardwalks documented in various paintings, sketches and photographs are presumed to have provided the relief that numerous attempts to improve site drainage failed to provide.¹⁰³

Set within the new north and south palisade walls were gates. The main entrance facing the river on the south was actually a controlled area about 12 by 32 feet, with two sets of double gates at either end. This picket-lined space was created after a smallpox epidemic of 1837 and prevented unauthorized access to the fort’s interior courtyard. The outer gate measured 12 feet wide by 14 feet high. By 1843, a painting of a treaty of peace between American Indians and whites, created by Moncravie, was installed over the gates. This painting may have been removed by 1851–1852. In the western half of the north palisade was a 10 foot-wide, large, but simple back gate that led out on to the prairie.¹⁰⁴

In 1834, new stone bastions replaced the earlier versions, and were described as two stories tall, with embrasures and pyramidal hipped roofs. They were probably built by stonemason Peter Miller. They averaged 22 feet square and stood 27 to 28 feet tall; the lower 22 feet was built of stone. They were 3 feet thick and had whitewashed walls. Balconies were built at the top of the second stories. In 1843 a flagstaff was reported atop

¹⁰² Hunt, “Origins of Fort Union,” 382-385; Thiel, 1988 *Archeological Investigations, Block 20*, 58-59; Peterson, 1988 *Archeological Investigations, Block 15*, 79, citing Alexander Philip Maximilian (Prince of Wied-Neuwied), *Travels in the Interior of North America*, trans. H. Evans Lloyd, (London: Ackermann and Co., 1843), 187; Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 106, citing George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians*, (1844; reprint, New York: Dover Publications 1973), 21, and Alexander Philip Maximilian (Prince of Wied-Neuwied), *Diary of a Journey in North America in the Years 1832, 1833, 1834, Part II*, trans. Emery Szmrecsanyi (Omaha, Nebraska: Archives of the Joslyn Art Museum, 1832-1843), 143; Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 47. Between 2008 to 2012, Prince Maximilian’s journals have been published by the University of Oklahoma press, edited by Stephen S. Witte and Marsha V. Gallagher.

¹⁰³ Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 110-113; Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 49; Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Excavations*, 92-94. Particularly clear documentation of the bracing can be seen in Kurz’s drawing of 1851, see Rudolf F. Kurz, “Interior of Fort Union from the Southwest Bastion,” 1851, Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 175-177; Jean-Baptiste Moncravie, watercolor of Fort Union ca. 1843, IX De Smetiana Collection, Midwest Jesuit Archives, St. Louis, Missouri; Rudolph F. Kurz, “Bourgeois House,” 18 September 1851, Midwest Jesuit Archives, St. Louis, Missouri; Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 114, citing personal communication with NPS Rocky Mountain Regional Office Regional Historic Architect Richard Cronenberger, 1988; Husted, “1969 Excavations,” 14-15.

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each roof, with a bison weathervane on the northeast bastion and an eagle weathervane on the other. Between 1853 and 1858 a third wood story was added to the southwest bastion.¹⁰⁵

Immediately west of the main gate was the log 21- by 60-foot Indians' and artisans' house. The east end of this bison skin and sod-roofed building served as reception room and store for American Indians and opened into the passageway formed by the double gates. The west end was the work area for artisans, (a tinner, blacksmith and gunsmith), then later served as an office. The two rooms shared a centrally-located chimney with two hearths. A small room, or "trade shop" south of the reception room and within the palisade bracing, shared an opening with the reception room through which goods were exchanged. It is likely that the bracing system was used to support this room's walls, roof and floor. A second window, on the fort's exterior wall, could be opened from the trade room, for trade when security was particularly high.¹⁰⁶

Two long buildings were ranged along the interior east and west palisades. Along the west side was the 119 by 21-foot, gabled dwelling range, or apartments for employees. This range replaced an earlier range of about 120 by 24 feet, which was destroyed in the 1832 fire. Historical evidence suggests that the replacement range was built *poteaux en coulisse* (i.e., with grooved posts) over the existing foundation and divided into six nearly equal compartments.¹⁰⁷ Along the east side a 25 by 157 foot store range contained a luggage storage room, a retail store, a wholesale warehouse, a meat storage room, and a fur press room. The gabled frame building was sided with weatherboards. It had a garret and a stone-lined cellar measuring roughly 30 by 12 feet.¹⁰⁸

At the north end of the enclosure stood the bourgeois house and, behind it, a bell tower, kitchen, and dairy. The bourgeois house, the most elaborate fur trade era structure on the upper Missouri, was depicted graphically with two very different appearances between 1833 and 1866. Early images show a 1 ½ story house, with weatherboard siding painted white, green window shutters, and a red-painted shingle roof with four dormers. Two chimneys penetrate the roof, equally spaced at a distance from the gable ends. Its appearance was similar to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century French Colonial or French Canadian design. On the south wall was a full-width veranda (described as a "piazzia" in 1843) that used an extension of the building's roof as its cover. Turned posts supported the roof in 1843. A picket fence extending the width of the house was painted brown. The first floor contained four rooms and a central hall; the attic was apparently one open space that was subsequently subdivided into three rooms. The bourgeois house was remodeled between 1848 and 1850. Alterations included an additional story added to the central section, between the chimneys, and a gallery (also known as a widow's walk) on the top of the roof. The chimneys were extended, the veranda removed, and in its place built a narrower and centrally-placed 18 foot-wide, two-story gabled porch supported by eight columns. In 1851 it was painted white with red shutters, with blue porch columns and red porch railings. Some earlier shutters were reused and enlarged for the second-story windows. The roof gallery had blue posts, white pickets

¹⁰⁵ Peterson and Hunt, *The 1987 Investigations*, 126-127; Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 167-169, citing in particular Moncravie, Denig in Audubon, and Carl Wimer, "P. Chouteau and Co." 1858 image, FOUS.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 181-183, citing Denig, Moncravie, Maximilian, Kurz and Larpenteur; Thiel, *1998 Archeological Investigations*, 62; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, National Park Service, "Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis," August 31, 1979, drawing 436/80029, Sheet 22, Technical Information Center, Denver Service Center, Lakewood, Colorado.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 197-198, citing in particular Denig, Larpenteur and Kurz; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 22; The construction method is known by various names including "Canadien," "Red River Frame", "French Canadien" "Hudson's Bay Company Frame" and "piece sur piece". This log construction employs a squared horizontal sill log into which a vertical squared log is mortised and tenoned. Squared horizontal logs infill between and mortise into the verticals.

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 201-204; Husted, "1969 Excavations," 19-21; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 18-19.

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and red railings. The picket fence and four hitching posts were painted red. In the gable of the upper porch was painted a portrait of Pierre Choteau, Jr. In 1864 a stairway was added to the front of the house.¹⁰⁹

Archeological investigation determined the bourgeois house foundation measured 75 by 22 ½ feet, and uncovered evidence that this building, in its 1 ½ story form, was built between 1832 and 1834. Its veranda may have been remodeled up to four times. The house replaced an even earlier bourgeois house located slightly to the north, and immediately adjacent to the original north palisade. The 1832–1834 house was built on stone foundations apparently recycled from a fire-damaged building or old fireplace, or both. Construction of these foundations followed a Georgian period technique, in which the stones were laid on top of boards or timbers, as a means of providing additional stability. A similar technique was found in the design of foundation support for the remodeled porch.¹¹⁰

North and behind the bourgeois house was the log kitchen, which never appeared in any illustrations of the fort, although a maintenance description in 1864–1865 mentions the tasks of daubing and whitewashing the walls. Between the kitchen and the bourgeois house was a 10-by-6-foot bell tower that was first graphically depicted in 1851–1852. It had a pointed roof and what appeared to be a decorative lightning rod, and was probably connected to the north outside wall of the house. Archeological excavations suggested that the kitchen measured about 20 ½ by 16 ½ feet, and though there was historic reference that the floor may have been “paved,” this was not confirmed in the 1986 excavations. North of the kitchen, and situated within the palisade buttresses, was the 9 by 8 foot dairy, which had a paved floor.¹¹¹

Other larger buildings and structures within the palisade included an ice house, powder magazine, a blacksmith shop, and a flagstaff. The 24- by 21-foot-long ice house located north of the dwelling range had a door in the floor and a rope ladder to access ice stored below grade. The upper floor was used for a time to store lumber. The ice house may have been demolished and reconstructed between 1847 and 1851. The roughly 24 ½ by 16 ½ foot limestone powder magazine, attributed to stonemason Miller, had whitewashed walls 4 to 6 inches thick, a barrel vaulted interior, double doors, and stood north of the store range. The 25 by 20 ½ foot blacksmith shop may have had two forges in its interior and was located west of the Indians’ and artisans’ house. In the center of the palisade stood a 60-to-63-foot flagstaff equipped with bracing at the base and wood climbing pegs. In 1843, it is known that at its base was a vegetable garden and a cannon, surrounded by a roughly circular “railing and panel work” fence 16 feet in diameter. The flagstaff was no longer depicted by visiting artists after 1853 and was replaced by a “new” rectangular tower in the southwest quarter of the post.¹¹²

Space against the palisade and under its gallery provided location for a number of smaller structures. Horse stables described in 1843 were located along the west and south palisades, measured 117 by 10 feet, and accommodated 50 horses. A charcoal house was probably included within the horse stables on the west side. Stables for bison calves were located against the north palisade behind the kitchen in 1843, as was a hen house, an artist’s studio, and a cooper’s shop.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 185, citing Denig, Maximilian, Larpenteur and Kurz; Richard Cronenberger, “Review of the Draft National Historic Landmark Nomination,” 13 February 2011, MWRO, 4.

¹¹⁰ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 185-193; Hunt, *Material Culture Reports Part I*, 60; “Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Investigations*, 83-96; Hunt, “Origins of Fort Union,” 386-388; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 11.

¹¹¹ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 195, 219, 227, citing Denig, Larpenteur and Kurz; Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Investigations*, 102-104; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 15.

¹¹² Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 205-208, 241, citing in particular Denig, Maximilian, Larpenteur and Kurz; Husted, “1969 Excavations,” 22-24; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 24, 29; Douglas D. Scott, “ ‘This Flag-Staff is the Glory of the Fort’: Archeological Investigations of the Fort Union Flagpole Remains,” 1986, MWAC, 6.

¹¹³ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 209-217, citing Maximilian, Larpenteur and Denig.

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Less mention was made by visitors of built resources outside the palisade, although images reference a variety of structures over 30 years. Resources located outside the protected confines of the fort included a boat yard used for construction of the small mackinaws that provided auxiliary downstream transport. The ca. 1843 painting by Moncravie documents a boat dock on the north bank of the Missouri, directly in front of the fort, but this structure was not captured by other visiting artists before or after 1843. The composition of this bank of the river may have been such that a more permanent dock was unnecessary.¹¹⁴ A distillery was installed in 1833, but was in operation for only a short time, possibly only a year. In 1834 the manufacture of alcohol was suspended. Charcoal kilns were described as being located south of the river in 1843, and the locations may have moved many times.¹¹⁵

At different times within and beyond the palisades could be found the Fort Union gardens. Prince Maximilian reported in 1833 that Fort Union had no garden, and was skeptical that any would prove successful. Yet by 1835 at least three gardens were planted and bore fruit. The first seeds and sets were planted in May and included potatoes, corn, peas, red onions, radishes, lettuce, parsnips, carrots, yellow French radishes, celery, curled parsley, oyster plant, turnips, dwarf beans, pole beans, cabbage, onions, and cucumbers. A one and one-half acre garden established in Garden Coulee is estimated to be the main garden and was fenced. A garden south of the river was reserved for the sprawling and slow-to-mature crops of corn, squash, pumpkin, melons, and beets, and may have been fenced. In the distillery house yard grew radishes and “tongue grass”. Another small garden was created within the fence around the flag staff. In 1843 there were two gardens, one planted at the mouth of Garden Coulee and the other attached to the Fort William stockade.¹¹⁶

Use of the terrace area also included stock enclosure. Stock included hogs, oxen, cattle (milk and beef), and horses; in 1833, fort visitor Prince Maximilian reported that the interior of the fort was filthy, due to the 50 to 60 head of horses picketed in the courtyard each night.¹¹⁷ Additional stock was secured in the Fort William stockade to the east. In addition to serving as the primary horse corral, this facility was used to secure the winter’s hay supply and as an auxiliary (protected) habitation area. As noted previously, the stockade would be used as a hospital for Indian victims of smallpox. This structure is shown in Moncravie’s circa 1843 painting of the fort. A second fenced area shown in the 1843 sketch is interpreted as a graveyard.¹¹⁸ This Euro-American cemetery was located about 100 yards east of the main fort.

Numerous pictorial and written historic accounts document, and archeological investigations confirm, that American Indian camps dotted the prairie west and north of Fort Union. In 1851, Swiss artist Rudolph Kurz described an Assiniboine camp:

A group of gaily colored tents with their attendant poles from which are suspended trophies, such as scalps, buffalo beards, strips of red cloth, etc.... men walking about, youth at their games,

¹¹⁴ Intermountain Regional Office Historic Architect Richard Cronenberger observed that any evidence of this dock would have been destroyed by later gravel operations in this area. However, he noted that the gravel lens in this area is very stable and extends over 100 feet below the level of the river. The gravel lens is so very tightly compacted that Cronenberger surmises that the Missouri River could not wash it away and instead created a very defined and stable edge, suitable for docking a boat as shown in the Moncravie painting. Cronenberger, “Review of the Draft,” 2.

¹¹⁵ Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 264-266, citing Larpenteur and Denig.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 264; David Wishart, “Agriculture at the Trading Posts on the Upper Missouri, Prior to 1843,” *Agricultural History* 47, no. 1 (January 1973), 61, citing Denig, and Michael Hamilton to David Lamont, 17 July 1853, “Fort Union Letterbook,” Chouteau Collection, Missouri Historical Society.

¹¹⁷ Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 49, citing Maximilian.

¹¹⁸ Hunt to Sanford, “Comments,” 2.

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girls carrying water, women trudging in with wood, cleaning and scraping hides; horses grazing or near their owners' tents... a multitude of dogs.¹¹⁹

Reconstructed Interpretive Resources (NHL EXCEPTION 6)

No historic buildings or structures associated with Fort Union survive above grade. However, the partial reconstruction in the form of two buildings and seven structures are considered contributing resources within the NHL boundary according to "NHL Exception 6" because their design was based upon the level of detail provided in archeological, written, and pictorial records concerning historic construction and appearance. These resources are built on the location of the original structures. The justification for Exception 6 consideration is that the reconstructions were designed to be as accurate as possible, were presented in a dignified manner, and were reconstructed as part of a formal design plan. This plan, the 1979 "Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis," was subsequently modified to reflect additional historical research and excavation.¹²⁰ The reconstructions at Fort Union are managed as historic structures in the park's building inventory although they are not misrepresented as authentic historic property; rather, they serve as the primary interpretive resource for the NPS unit.

A number of smaller objects, historic and reconstructed, are also on-site. A number of the original stones, the larger blocks that display chisel marks, are used as benches throughout the site.¹²¹ Outside the palisade, a variety of objects, reconstructed according to original designs, has been placed to aid with interpretation. In the summer months a small grouping of tipis is located outside the north palisade door. In front of the palisade, a huge robe press and a sawpit and frame add to the historic scene.

The NPS focused partial reconstruction of the fort to its appearance circa 1851—the best-documented period of occupation due largely to the detailed journals and drawings of Rudolph Kurz—although other sources of visual documentation from the 1830s to 1866 informed the design process. The artifact materials recovered during the 1980s excavations and their contextual information significantly contributed to the reconstructions. In some instances archeological resources were incorporated into the reconstructions. The reconstructions were largely limited to the extent of knowledge gathered from the written, pictorial, or archeological record. In instances where such references were silent on necessary detail, existing historic resources of the same era as Fort Union were visited, and architectural details copied in order to complete reconstruction. Observing the goal of accuracy and authenticity, the "Fort Union Reconstruction Analysis" delineated between historical and archeological facts and assumptions; however, the reconstruction team understood that their final design never existed in its exact form during its period of occupation. In addition, the design team balanced historical accuracy with modern building codes and maintenance requirements.¹²² The first Fort Union reconstruction occurred in 1985 with the completion of the flagstaff and picket fence enclosure, followed in the winter of 1986-1987 with the bourgeois house and bell tower. Reconstruction of the palisade and bastion occurred between 1988 and 1989, followed by the Indians' and artisans' house in 1990–1991.

¹¹⁹ Thompson, *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri* (Williston, North Dakota: Fort Union Association, 1994), 68, citing Kurz.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Scott, "This Flag-Staff," 20.

¹²¹ Richard Cronenberger, "Fort Union Original Stones: Notes to Dena Sanford for NHL Nomination," 16 April 2002, MWRO.

¹²² Cronenberger, "Review of the Draft," 3; Richard J. Cronenberger, "Design for Permanence: Historic Accuracy and Modern Construction," *Fur Trade Symposium 2000 Proceedings, Indians & Traders: Entrepreneurs of the Upper Missouri* (Williston, ND: Fort Union Association, 2001), 136. While a Kansas limestone was used for the bastions and foundations, Cronenberger identified the possible location of the original quarry for the Fort Union construction. Drawing on the historical record, Cronenberger and two Fort Union staff members discovered a site approximately two miles north of the NPS unit, which included a limestone ledge, and "several piles of stone, neatly gathered and ready to be loaded... they were covered with lichen and other surface growth." Richard Cronenberger, "Fort Union Recollections," 26 January 1988, unnumbered page 7. Copy on file MWRO.

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8) Reconstructed Palisade (HS-1)

1 contributing structure

The palisade, southwest bastion, northeast bastion, front/north gate and back/south gate were reconstructed in 1988-1989, according to historical literary and graphic documentation and the archeological record. The palisade is 20 feet tall, 237 feet long along the north/south walls and 245 feet along the east/west walls. It is constructed using a *poteaux-sur-sol*, or posts-on-sill, method. The pickets (historically the 1832 rebuilt palisade were reported to be between 16 to 20 feet high) are made of large, square timbers and are braced at intervals with an interior framework of cross-braces on stone footings.¹²³ In consideration of maintenance needs, the palisade was reconstructed of Douglas fir instead of cottonwood, and the foundations supported by concrete footing capped with a foot of limestone. The foundations are set at the original height, set approximately one foot below finished grade. The historic southeast corner stones were reinstalled, and a drain discovered underneath the northwest corner was reconstructed using some of the original stones. The archeological remains of the dairy structure, located adjacent to the north palisade, were retained in place, although the north wall directly under the palisade sill was reconstructed to support the sill. The whitewashed wood members are supported by cross bracing. The timbers for the 10 by 10-inch bracing were cut with a band saw to create the appearance of the original pit saw marks (visible in historic photographs). The timbers were subsequently connected using the mortise and tenon technique used historically. A gallery 5 feet below the top of the palisade extends around the interior of this resource.¹²⁴ One-story wood sheds built between bracing on both the south and west palisades were designed to represent the type of more temporary structures that appeared and **disappeared during the historic period.**

9 & 10) Reconstructed Southwest and Northeast Bastions (HS-2, HS-3)

2 contributing structures

While the original circa 1834 bastions were built of stone, the whitewashed reconstructions are made with a concrete masonry block core faced with heavy stone. They sit on concrete foundations and include basements. As part of the reconstruction process, some of the excavated quoins in the southwest bastion foundation were reinstalled and were not whitewashed. Original stones and quoins reused for the northeast bastion were incorporated at or below eye level on walls outside the palisade. The existing stone threshold for the southwest bastion was reused.¹²⁵ The bastions stand two stories high, are whitewashed, and have pyramidal, wood-shingled roofs painted red. The first and second stories have cannon ports and gun ports on the exterior walls. There are observation balconies near the roof eave. The roof structures for these bastions were patterned after the roof structure of the original, contemporary bastion at Fort Benton, Montana. New hardware was crafted based on the original hardware excavated from the site.¹²⁶ Each bastion is topped with a weathervane, with an eagle on the southwest bastion and a bison bull on the northeast bastion. The bastions historically served as watchtowers, storage rooms for armaments and ordnance, and as vantage points from which to observe the sweeping view of the river and of the plains.¹²⁷

¹²³ Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 123; Peterson, 1988 *Archeological Investigations Block 16* 63-64; Thiel, 1998 *Archeological Investigations*, 59-61; Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 272, citing Denig.

¹²⁴ Richard Cronenberger, "Fort Union Original Stones;" Cronenberger, "Design for Permanence," 139-142; Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 5, 9; Cronenberger, "Fort Union Recollections 1/26/1998," 7, MWRO.

¹²⁵ Only those familiar with original stone work would be able to identify the historic material in the northeast bastion. See Cronenberger, "Fort Union Stones."

¹²⁶ The bastion at Fort Benton, while an adobe structure, survived with few modifications, and the roof structural system was original. Historical Architect Richard Cronenberger measured Fort Benton's bastion, and used the details to design the Fort Union bastion roof structural system. He also visited Fort Snelling in Minnesota to measure the bastion gun portal opening, cannon openings and various doors and gates. National Park Service employee and historical blacksmith George Ainsly crafted the hardware. Cronenberger, "Review of the Draft," 3; Cronenberger, "Design for Permanence," 137.

¹²⁷ Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 6-8; Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 122-123.

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11 & 12) Reconstructed Front/South Gate and Back/North Gate (HS-4, HS-5) 2 contributing structures

Reconstructed in 1989 the front/south gate measures 14 feet 5 inches tall by 12 feet 2 inches wide. It is a set of doors, set in a timber frame, hung by wrought iron strap hinges, and constructed of wood planks. The exterior planks are set on a diagonal, while the interior planks are vertical. The outer doors are part of a reconstructed controlled area walled on the east side, framed by the Indians' and artisans' house on the west, and blocked by a second set of gates on the north. The back/north gates are also wood plank doors, hung by wrought iron strap hinges, and measure 9 feet 10 inches tall by 10 feet 2 inches wide. The original stone apron just outside the north gate and excavated at the site was reinstalled in place; likewise, the entrance stones at the south gate were removed by the archeologists, numbered, and reinstalled in their original location, and set on a new foundation.¹²⁸

13) Reconstructed Indians' and artisans' house (HS-6)

1 contributing building

The log-walled Indians' and artisans' house reconstruction (1990–1991) was more conjectural. While there were some written descriptions, the only graphic documentation of the exterior was of the sod roof and east walls. An 1851 interior drawing by artist Rudolph Kurtz documented a portion of the interior.¹²⁹ While the written analysis of the archeological investigations had not been completed prior to reconstruction activity, the reconstruction design relied on archeological remains, including wood material as reference for the floor beams and floor planks, and locating the doors and front walkway.¹³⁰ Construction begun in 1990 resulted in a one-story, two-room building following the *poteaux-en-coulisse* construction method with dovetail corner notching used on the west end. The original hearth stones to the fireplace in the east room (Indian reception room) were reinstalled in their original location, with new stones added to replace missing originals. The trade shop was reconstructed between the Indians' and artisans' house and the palisade, forming a portion of the wall for the controlled space inside the front gate. The reconstruction included a basement vault to serve as the park's curatorial facility. The basement is accessed by a one-story wood shed built between palisade bracing, and was never present historically, but would have been typical of the period.¹³¹

14) Reconstructed Bourgeois House (HS-7)

1 contributing building

The same guiding policy allowed the reconstruction of the front and side exterior of the bourgeois house as it existed in 1851—a time when post visitors and inhabitants left numerous and detailed descriptions. While the interior was not reconstructed due to the lack of substantive nineteenth century documentation, the archeological excavations of interior fireplaces guided the design team's spatial layout for recreation of the first-floor interior walls and locations of the clerk's room, dining room, central hall, and office. As part of the reconstruction, in 1986 the original hearthstones were reset in the area of the original chimney structure but relocated opposite their original orientation.¹³² The interior houses administrative offices, the archives, museum, and visitor center.

¹²⁸ Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 8-10, 22; Richard Cronenberger, "Fort Union Original Stones."

¹²⁹ Rocky Mountain Region Historic Preservation Team, 22-23; Rudolph F. Kurtz, "Indian-Artisan House," 1851, Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma; idem, "Interior of Fort Union"; National Park Service Archeologist William Hunt maintains that there were almost no historical specifications for this structure, and that no written descriptions existed. See Hunt to Sanford, "Comments," 3.

¹³⁰ Cronenberger, "Review of the Draft," 5.

¹³¹ Ibid., 5-6; idem, "Fort Union Original Stones;" Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 123-126. Matzko also notes on page 205 that by 1851, the artisans had been displaced, so the name "Indians' and artisans' house" for this reconstruction is not entirely applicable.

¹³² Richard J. Cronenberger, telephone conversation with Dena Sanford, 8 April 2002, MWRO; idem, "Review of the Draft," 3-4; idem, "Design for Permanence," 137; idem, "Fort Union Original Stones"; Detailing for the bourgeois house was based on a variety of

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Historic photographs and drawings reviewed in stereo pairs allowed NPS historical architects to interpolate vertical dimensions of the bourgeois house. Horizontal dimensions were revealed through archeological excavations. Pictorial accounts revealed finish details, roof line, and fenestration style and placement. Paint colors were based upon narrative descriptions. Based on archeological information, the floor plan was duplicated to the extent that the stairs and fireplace locations were retained on the first floor, and most of the hearthstones were reinstalled in their original locations, although the east fireplace was relocated. A picket fence enclosing the area in front of (south) and about 12 feet from the house, was reconstructed based on historic drawings, photographs, and archeological evidence.¹³³

While the bourgeois house was built with modern construction techniques, the central (two-story) section and porch presents an exterior reconstruction reflecting the Greek Revival architectural style popular in America's 1850s urban centers and seats of power. It is a gabled, two-story building with one-story wings, all aligned on an east-west axis. It measures roughly 75 by 22 ½ feet. The wood shingled roof is painted red. A two-story central porch is on the south (main) façade, and a gallery is located on the top roof. Each porch includes a balustrade. The bourgeois house is sided in white-painted clapboard with corner boards, while the porch railings are painted blue and red. The window openings on the south wall, first floor, contain 8-over-12 light double hung wood sash, have green-painted wood shutters, and are symmetrically arranged about the central porch—four on each side. The second-floor windows, one on each side of the porch on the south side, are also 8-over-12 light, but larger than those on the first floor.¹³⁴ The one-story wings each have one small gabled dormer with a multi-pane window. There are two stone chimneys, one on each end of the central two-story section. Two four-panel doors are set within the central porch, one on each floor. There is one off-center door on both the west and east sides, first floor. On the north side, two functional windows are located on the second floor, central section.

An original design feature that was not exactly recreated is the foundation. Archeological investigations in 1986 determined that the original stone foundation rested upon the ground surface, and in a number of places was underlain by boards or timbers—a construction technique commonly used throughout the Georgian period. Roughly-shaped sandstone was used on the south, and portions of the east and west sides (those sides most visible to visitors). Other portions of the east and west sides, and all of the north side, utilized granitic and unshaped rocks.¹³⁵ The reconstruction included a basement and full concrete foundation, with the house set at its historic elevation. To represent the original foundation, a stone veneer was applied at the appropriate elevation, and incorporated some of the original stones, primarily on the corners.¹³⁶

15) Reconstructed Flagstaff and Picket Fence (HS-13)

1 contributing structure

Using the 1851 Kurtz sketch as the primary visual reference, the 63-foot-tall flagstaff is made from two log poles, spliced together at the crosstree frame 40 feet above grade, and connected with two steel compression

sources. These included elements from the 1849 “Old Bedlam” building a Fort Laramie National Historic Site; second floor details were inspired by the 1865 ranch house at Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site; first floor porch columns were based on period columns from New Orleans, and second floor porch column design was inspired by columns depicted in drawings of the steamboat *Bertrand*. Matzko notes that in an interview with supervisory historical architect for the project Rodd Wheaton, Wheaton surmised that the columns were salvaged from a steamboat. Matzko, *Reconstructing Fort Union*, 204.

¹³³ Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Investigations*, 94-95.

¹³⁴ This reflects differences in window pane size. The first floor panes are 7"x9" while the second floor panes are 8"x10". The reconstruction team made this distinction to interpret what would have been the difference in historic material sources. The first floor is indicative of the French/New Orleans influence, while the second-floor panes reflect material from St. Louis. Richard Cronenberger to Dena Sanford, 29 May 2012 electronic mail correspondence, MWRO.

¹³⁵ Archeological investigations further found a wider foundation on the north side, suggesting that the builders may have intended the bell tower to be an integral part of the bourgeois house structure. Hunt and Peterson, *The 1986 Investigations*, 83-84.

¹³⁶ Cronenberger, “Review of the Draft,” 4; idem, “Fort Union Original Stones.” Two or three of the best-carved stones excavated on site were incorporated into the museum collection, and these were primarily from the bourgeois house foundation.

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collars. The lower pole is about 20 inches in diameter. Atop the pole is a copper fish weathervane. Three diagonal braces support the flagstaff at the base. The staff's base is set approximately 8 feet into the ground, in the original staff's location. The white picket fence is roughly 12 feet in diameter, is 2 ½ feet tall, and made of 1 by 2 inch rough-cut boards. The flagstaff was replaced after a 2007 windstorm destroyed it, with the 1985 hardware reused.¹³⁷

16) Reconstructed Bell Tower HS-23

1 contributing structure

The three-story bell tower has the same siding and roofing material as the bourgeois house. There are first-floor door openings on the east, north and west, with the doors painted green. The third floor is open with a protective railing; the timber roof structure is pyramidal in shape and is equipped with a bell and lightning rod. The bell design is of the era of the fort's construction.

NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES**1) NPS Housing #1**

1 noncontributing building

Housing unit #1 is one of several modern buildings located below the edge of the terrace, at the southeast corner of the NHL boundary, in what was once a channel of the Missouri River. One of two identical designs, this housing unit is one story, has a hipped roof with overhanging eaves, and lap siding above a stone veneer at the base of the walls. The roof is covered with asphalt shingle. The front, southeast-facing façades feature two large projecting gables. The northern gable includes smaller, nested gables with large, plate glass arched windows; the southern gable covers a two-car garage. The main entrance is between these gables. Small open patios are located on the southwest sides.

2) NPS Housing #2

1 noncontributing building

Housing unit #2 is identical to housing unit #1.

3) NPS Maintenance Building

1 noncontributing building

The maintenance building is a one-story, gabled structure sided in metal. Three overhead doors are located on the east side.

4) NPS Water Treatment Building

1 noncontributing building

The small, cinderblock water treatment building has a gabled roof covered with asphalt shingle. A pedestrian door is located on the south side.

5) NPS Access System

1 noncontributing structure

Two paved vehicular access roads lead south off the state highway. One is a one-half mile, two-lane public access road that parallels the west side of the National Park unit boundary/NHL boundary, and incorporates a parking area and a smaller circular parking lot. The parking area is sited within the abandoned gravel pit. A concrete path leads from the parking area to the south entrance of the reconstructed fort. Nearby, an unpaved pedestrian trail leads to an overlook with an interpretive sign at the south edge of the parking area. The parking area and the majority of the trail are located below the level of the fort, so that neither is readily visible from the

¹³⁷ The local chapter of the Muzzle Loaders fur trade organization volunteered to construct the flagpole and provide materials; it was dedicated on July 6, 1985. Cronenberger, "Review of the Draft," 3.

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terrace. The east access road is also two lanes, and serves the NPS housing/maintenance area. Like the west access road, this eastern route is located along the edge of and generally below the terrace level.

6) Garden Coulee/Crow-Flies-High Village site (32WI00018)

1 noncontributing site

Initially recorded in 1976, numerous archeological investigations, analysis of diagnostic artifacts, documentary records, and ethnographic evidence identify this site at the edge of Garden Coulee's north bank, roughly 525 yards east of Fort Union, as the location of the late 1860s/early 1870s to 1884 dissident Hidatsa and Mandan village. The band of 120 to 240 members, under the leadership of Crow-Flies-High, had left the main body of their tribes at Like-a-Fishhook village on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation to the east.¹³⁸ Twenty-three earthlodges were described at the Garden Coulee location. The band abandoned the site in 1884 and relocated at least one more time (32MZ1) before being forced to return to Fort Berthold in 1894. While the site post-dates the Fort Union period of national significance and is therefore considered noncontributing to the NHL district under this context, the Garden Coulee site 32WI00018 has been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.¹³⁹ It represents a pivotal time in United States and American Indian history.

7) Mondak site (24RV591, 24RV595, 32WI902, 32WI593, 24RV592 and 24RV594) 1 noncontributing site

The community of Mondak was established on the state line in 1903 in response to North Dakota state laws prohibiting the sale and serving of alcohol. A number of bars and bordellos were established on the Montana side of the town. The Great Northern Railroad ran through the site, and the community prospered for a short time until the completion of a railroad bridge a few miles to the west. Mondak subsisted on vice, and dwindled over the years as businesses closed, including the railroad station. A 1928 fire destroyed most of the remaining buildings.¹⁴⁰

After its abandonment, the site was under cultivation for a number of years. National Park Service archeological investigations began with a reconnaissance survey in 1973, which identified "a series of historic period dumps," In 1981 surface survey and subsurface testing of the main portion of Mondak (24RV102, located immediately north of the park and not within this proposed NHL boundary) resulted in its nomination to the National Register. Another Mondak site north of the park and outside the proposed NHL boundary, has state site designation number 32WI416. In 2000, a post-burn inventory identified a number of sites associated with Mondak, two of which (24RV591 and 24RV595) may be eligible for National Register designation under Criterion D for their ability to represent little known aspects of the town. Further archeological investigations are necessary for 24RV592, 24RV594, and 32WI902.¹⁴¹

8) Trash dump site (32WI991)

1 noncontributing site

Located east of the Fort Union Trading Post site, this trash dump site was identified during the course of the 2006 magnetic survey. The site contained numerous magnetic anomalies that appeared to represent historic

¹³⁸ See in particular Gregory L. Fox, "A Late Nineteenth Century Village of a Band of Dissident Hidatsa: The Garden Coulee Site (32WI18)," 1982, MWAC; Geoffrey Jones, David L. Maki and Lewis Somers, "A Geophysical Investigation at the Garden Coulee Site (32WI18), An Historic Native American Village at the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site," (Archaeo-Physics Report of Investigation Number 46, Archaeo-Physics, LLC), MWAC; Jay Sturdevant, to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, "Geophysical Grid Layout and Pedestrian Archeological Survey of Garden Coulee Site (32WI18), September 9–September 21, 2002," 30 September 2002 memorandum, MWAC. Fox estimates that their main reasons for choosing a location near Fort Buford included the protection from the Sioux due to the proximity of the military force at the fort, the abundance of game, the proximity to the River Crow, and the continued presence of a trader at Fort Buford.

¹³⁹ Sturdevant, "Geophysical Grid Layout," 2.

¹⁴⁰ Matzko, 27-32.

¹⁴¹ Hunt and Bauermeister, 5-12.

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ferrous objects. Further archeological investigations into the nature of the anomalies are necessary to determine if the discarded trash was associated with Fort Union Trading Post or the Hidatsa village at the Garden Coulee site. Based on these investigations, the site appears to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places according to criterion D, and will yield significant archeological information on the local and regional historic activities of the fur trade on the Upper Missouri. Additional archeological evaluation, including ground truthing, is warranted.¹⁴²

ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY

Evolution in land use and transportation patterns that have occurred since the abandonment of Fort Union have resulted in substantial changes to the cultural features associated with the fort, and to the natural features of the greater confluence area setting. Irrigation, plowing, and leveling have impacted the historic scene of rolling terrace land dissected by the curvilinear lines of hummocks and wooded draws, while native prairie vegetation and the expanses of timber along the floodplain are largely gone. However, these changes existed at the time of the original National Historic Landmark designation in 1961, and since that time, carefully-planned natural and cultural resource restoration projects undertaken by the NPS have contributed to an increase in the site's integrity, especially regarding the criteria of location, setting, feeling, and association.

Natural resource features within the NHL boundary are highly important elements that contribute to the integrity of the site. These include the larger geographic factors in the form of the high bluffs to the north that define the river corridors, the Missouri River and its associated floodplain, and the gravel terrace. In addition to its location at the convergences of traditional tribal territories, the building site for Fort Union was chosen for its access to abundant timber (scarce on the Missouri River and therefore highly valued); the availability of land for building, stock tending, and gardening; and its immediate proximity to the Missouri River and its confluence with the Yellowstone. While upriver damming and river regulation has controlled the power of the river, and over time it has shifted course, evidence of the Missouri River's movement within the floodplain is still evident in the riparian area, and the river is still clearly visible from the Fort Union terrace.

The restored native prairie on the terrace between the highway and the palisade has restored the physical integrity of that area. Native trees and shrubs have reestablished themselves on the lower terraces on the north bank of the Missouri River, both above and below the historic site. Although some exotic plants have been introduced into the rangelands adjacent to the irrigated croplands, for the most part the appearance of the vegetation in the immediate vicinity of the fort approximates that of the native prairie. The Bodmer Overlook contains the finest surviving prairie within the park's boundaries. Although initial management plans suggested development of a paved road and parking area at this location, no construction plans have been developed. Access to the overlook currently is by foot traffic on a trail marked by a simple mowed path.¹⁴³

The noncontributing developments associated with NPS operations have generally been undertaken in a manner that mitigates their intrusion on the historic scene. For example, the visitor entrance and parking area and the majority of the trail (all west of the fort) are located below the level of the fort (in the former gravel pit), so that neither is readily visible from the terrace. The NPS employee housing and maintenance area are likewise located just below the edge of the river terrace. The most intrusive cultural features on the terrace are not included within the NHL boundary. These are the railroad grade of the Great Northern railroad and the state highway—physical symbols of the regional changes in circulation systems and land use following closure of the frontier—and they do not present major vertical intrusions into the viewshed. Small-scale features, such as

¹⁴² De Vore, "Geophysical Investigations," 15-17.

¹⁴³ Hunt, "Inventory of the Proposed Bodmer Overlook."

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fences and some signage, have not been included in the resource list, and are not generally visible within the greater viewshed.

With respect to the archeological integrity of Fort Union, it is assumed that unexcavated portions of the site are largely undisturbed—partly owing to the fact that large amounts of stone precluded plowing of the main site area. Excavations undertaken in advance of reconstruction and the installation of any associated infrastructure revealed outstanding preservation of archeological deposits across large areas of the site, and there is no reason to believe that remaining areas will have been subject to greater degradation.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B C D X

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E X F G

NHL Criteria: 1 and 6

NHL Criteria Exceptions: 6

NHL Theme(s): I. Peopling Places
6. Encounters, conflicts, and colonization
IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
4. Political ideas, cultures, and theories
V. Developing the American Economy
6. Exchange and Trade
7. Governmental Policies and Practices
VI. Expanding Science and Technology
3. Scientific Thought and Theory

Areas of Significance: Archeology – Historic-Non-Aboriginal; Archeology – Historic-Aboriginal; Art; Commerce; Exploration and Settlement; Ethnic Heritage; Military Science

Period(s) of Significance: 1828–1867

Significant Dates: 1832, 1833, 1835, 1837, 1853, 1864, 1866

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation: European-American, Metis, Assiniboiné, Cree, Lakota, Blackfoot, Crow, Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara

Architect/Builder: American Fur Company; United States Army; National Park Service

Historic Contexts: X. Westward Expansion of the British Colonies and the United States, 1793–1898
B. The Fur Trade
3. John Jacob Astor and the American Fur Company, 1808–1840
C. Military-Aboriginal American Contact and Conflict
3. The Northern Plains

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**SUMMARY**

In 1959 the National Park Service (NPS) established that the “Fur Trade” was a significant theme in the nation’s history and that the use of fixed trading posts is an important feature of this trade. At least 140 fixed trading posts were constructed west of St. Louis between 1807 and 1843.¹⁴⁴ Fort Union, which anchored the Upper Missouri trade, was described by artist George Catlin in 1832 as “the largest and best built establishment of the kind on the river, being the great or principal head-quarters and depot of the Fur Company’s business in this region.”¹⁴⁵ The NPS determined that Fort Union best represented the American Fur Company’s dominance of that trade area, and was therefore the most appropriate physical representation of the cultural and commercial changes attendant upon the Upper Missouri fur trade. It was accordingly designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1961.

Also, in 1959 the NPS determined that nationally significant sites associated with the subtheme Military and Indian Affairs included Apache Pass and Fort Bowie, AZ (NHL, 1960); Hubbell Trading Post, AZ (NHL, 1960); Fort Larned, KS (NHL, 1960); Fort Leavenworth, KS (NHL, 1960); Fort Snelling, MN (NHL, 1960); Fort Robinson and Red Cloud Agency, NE (NHL, 1960); Fort Gibson, OK (NHL, 1960); Fort Sill, OK (NHL, 1960); Fort Belknap, TX (NHL, 1960); Fort Davis, TX (NHL, 1960); Fort Phil Kearney and Associated Sites, WY (NHL, 1960); and Fort Smith, AR (NHL, 1960).

In 1961 the NPS amended the subtheme “Military and Indian Affairs” to include a more complex discussion of the cultural interaction and impacts of manifest destiny and westward expansion. Additional significant sites in this theme included Bent’s Old Fort, CO (NHL, 1960); Spalding Mission, ID; Cataldo Mission, ID (NHL, 1961); Wounded Knee, SD (NHL, 1965); Carlisle Indian School, PA (NHL, 1961); Haskell Institute, KS (NHL, 1961); Whitman National Monument, Washington; and Fort Laramie National Historic Site, Wyoming. Fort Pierre Chouteau in South Dakota was designated an NHL in this theme in 1991. In contrast to the military sites previously identified as significant for their association with the Indian Wars, these sites represented cultural interaction and efforts at assimilation. Fort Union was identified as significantly associated with this expanded subtheme.

Fort Union (NHL) is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 as one of the largest and most important fur-trading posts in the Upper Missouri River region from 1828 to 1867 and under Criterion 6 for its nationally significant archeological research potential. Significant NHL themes include “Peopling Places,” “Shaping the Political Landscape,” “Developing the American Economy,” and “Expanding Science and Technology.” Fort Union represents the impact of white settlement and resource extraction upon native cultures, alliances, and economies, including changes in the relationships between established tribal groups. The fort also represents American Indian response to non-Indian incursion; United States political hegemony secured first through commerce and ultimately through force; and the central role of geography and topography—of natural space—to historical process.

The site of Fort Union (32WI17) qualifies for National Historic Landmark status under Criterion 6, archeological research significance, for its potential to yield information of major scientific importance by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States—specifically the early nineteenth century in the Trans-Mississippian West and Upper Missouri River. It is expected that archeological

¹⁴⁴ Hiram Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1920).

¹⁴⁵ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, 1844, reprint, (New York: Dover Publications, 1973).

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data derived from the site of Fort Union potentially can affect anthropological theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree. The site's research potential relates principally to two major themes of the National Park Service's thematic framework for prehistory and history: Theme I, "Peopling Places," and Theme V, "Developing the American Economy."

Established by Kenneth McKenzie for the American Fur Company, Fort Union occupied a strategic location on the Missouri River, near its confluence with the Yellowstone River. This area served as a gateway to several northern Plains and Rocky Mountain tribes. This "Seat of the Kingdom,"¹⁴⁶ location provided access to, and control of, the beaver pelt trade (and later the bison robe trade) throughout the northern Plains and the northern Rocky Mountains east of the Continental Divide, via the natural water routes.¹⁴⁷ It was an important focal point for tribes, the Metis, and French Canadians who came to trade and enquire about Euro-American activities. The location facilitated communication with the local Assiniboin bands and took advantage of their familial connections with the northern bands and with their close allies the Cree.¹⁴⁸ It was a strategic location for initiating contact with the Crow via the Yellowstone River valley and its tributaries, and with the Blackfeet via the Upper Missouri. The Missouri River also functioned as a transportation route downriver, and Fort Union's location was selected with the possibility of future steamboat service in mind.¹⁴⁹ When completed, this dramatic whitewashed wilderness post set on the windswept expanse of the Northern Plains provided what historian Barton Barbour has termed "a grand stage on which to perform the trade ritual."¹⁵⁰

Fort Union operated during, and contributed to, a period of great change in American Indian culture. As with other fur trading posts of the time, Fort Union directly and indirectly affected changes to the economic, religious, social, and domestic structures of Plains bands. Fort Union also represents the change in Federal policy regarding its relationship with American Indian tribes. At the time of the fort's establishment, U.S. government priorities emphasized trade relations and gaining a dominant trade position ahead of the British Hudson's Bay Company. Following the conclusion of Federal treaties (a process begun in 1825) the U.S. government developed contracts with fur trading companies to deliver annuity goods to the tribes. Although the U.S. did not establish a military garrison at the confluence area until the 1860s, it was long recognized as an important site. Proposals to build a fort at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers were included in various reports to Congress in 1816–1819, but the fur trade post of Fort Union satisfied U.S. interests until federal policy changed after the Civil War. The opening of native lands to settlement and the advancement of the frontier meant a new policy of American Indian "control" through subjugation of Upper Missouri tribes. For Fort Union, the change in U.S. policy, along with the depletion of the bison herds, led to a slow decline in profits and operations ultimately leading to the sale of the fort to the Federal government, and its dismantlement.

During the height of Fort Union's power and influence, the fort hosted a number of artists, authors, and scientists whose work played a significant role in shaping Euro-American images of and a greater national awareness of American Indians and of a landscape with apparently inexhaustible resources. Together with the documentation from fort employees Edwin Denig, Charles Larpenteur, and Alexander Culbertson, their work represents a large portion of knowledge of early nineteenth-century American Indian lifestyles, the nature of the fur trade, and the native flora and fauna of the Northern Plains. These visitors included artists George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, Isaac Sprague, and Rudolph Franklin Kurtz; naturalists John James Audubon, Prince Maximilian

¹⁴⁶ Thompson, Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri, 6.

¹⁴⁷ "Archeological Overview and Assessment (Revised 2/90 History of Archeological Research)," Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site Cultural Sites Inventory, MWAC, 21-22.

¹⁴⁸ "Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site Resource Stewardship Strategy" (FOUS, April 2, 2010), 1; Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Volume III* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 364.

¹⁴⁹ "Archeological Overview," Cultural Sites Inventory, 22.

¹⁵⁰ Hunt and Peterson, *1986 Inventory*, 85-86; Hunt, "Origins of Fort Union," 386-388; Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 60.

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of Wied-Neuweid, Dr. George Stuckley, James G. Cooper; geologist Thaddeus Culbertson; explorer and geologist Ferdinand V. Hayden; and ethnographer Lewis Henry Morgan.

This Fort Union NHL nomination augments the original 1961 NHL document, which categorized the site within the NHL theme “Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific” and its subthemes: “The Fur Trade” and “Military and Indian Affairs.” Fort Union best represented the American Fur Company's dominance of that trade area, and was the most appropriate representation of the cultural and commercial changes attendant upon the Upper Missouri fur trade. Under the amended 1961 subtheme “Military and Indian Affairs” Fort Union represented cultural interaction and impacts of manifest destiny. The nomination recognized Fort Union's vital role in commerce, westward expansion of settlement and culture, scientific exploration, frontier transportation, and economic and cultural relations with American Indians. The 1961 NHL contained approximately eight acres, but did not define a boundary. Following the extensive archeological investigations undertaken since designation, and in order to update the physical description of the associated resources of Fort Union, describe an appropriate NHL boundary, and address more fully the national significance of the site, this revised nomination has been prepared.

The period of significance for Fort Union extends from its construction in 1828 until 1867, when Fort Union was abandoned and dismantled. Significant dates include 1832, the first year of steamboat travel to Fort Union, revolutionizing means of supply and communication and the year when George Catlin produced his now-famous landscape sketches and Indian portraits; 1833 when Karl Bodmer completed his artistic portfolio; 1835, marking completion of an enlarged and more permanent Fort Union; 1837 when smallpox was introduced to the Northern Plains, decimating American Indian populations; 1853, when the Pacific Railroad Survey explored the area in advance of transcontinental railroad development; and 1864, the year of General Alfred Sully's expedition and the year that U.S. military troops were first garrisoned at Fort Union.

NHL Exception 6 applies to the reconstructions at Fort Union. In addition to possessing sufficient archeological and documentary evidence to allow accurate reconstruction, the larger site was determined to possess integrity of setting and of association. Reconstruction has not adversely affected the site's integrity of setting, feeling, and association.

Fur Trade Overview

The fur trade involved both a cultural exchange between native and European peoples and a clash of interests of rival empires. Wherever the fur trade occurred it was influenced by overlaying geographic contexts that were shaped as much by cultural factors, such as international markets, imperial rivalries, competition between opposing companies and groups of American Indians, and differences among Indian peoples, as it was by the physical world of navigable waterways and environment. A greater understanding of Fort Union can be gained through an explanation of these factors.

The North American fur trade was based on an exchange of commodities between European and Indian peoples. Europeans brought to the exchange their technologies of metalwork, textile manufacture, and gunsmithing. They found American Indians willing to travel great distances to obtain these goods. American Indians supplied a variety of furs and skins of animals, which the Europeans prized primarily for use in stylish clothing and hats. European fur traders sought the furs of mink, marten, ermine, otter, and muskrat, but the most valuable and plentiful fur animal was the beaver, whose underhair contributed to the manufacture of felt and hugely popular felt hats. So lucrative was the European fur market that companies could invest huge sums in efforts to supply wilderness outposts and extract furs over long, difficult transportation routes and still achieve large profits. The British Hudson's Bay Company (chartered 1670), the Montreal-based North West Company

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(first established in 1776), and the American Fur Company (founded 1808) were some of the largest corporations of their day, and their influence was felt across the continent.¹⁵¹

During the seventeenth to eighteenth century period of European contact, the beaver was abundant throughout its range in North America, which extended from coast to coast and from the subarctic to the southern Rockies. While adapted to a watery habitat, the beaver is slow on land and cannot migrate long distances. Thus, despite its ability to reproduce quickly, the beaver was easily exterminated by over-trapping.¹⁵² It was a characteristic of the fur trade to over-harvest beaver populations fairly quickly, prompting an ever-widening search for new areas. Where competition was keen, companies could encourage over-harvesting in order to create a kind of fur desert that would be apt to discourage others from invading their ground.

By the early nineteenth century the fur trade exchange had organized generally around the post system of trade, developed by the Hudson's Bay Company the previous century. Fur trade companies established forts, or posts, at strategic intervals along key waterways. This was the best means of accessing the interior of the continent, and for transporting goods. While traders at the posts periodically searched out American Indians with whom to trade, more often, the native groups brought their "hunts" directly to the posts. Thus, the posts served as home and protection for the traders, places of contact for the American Indians, and essential warehouses for the storage of European trade goods, American Indian products, and supplies. Trading occurred at all times of year but most often in the winter and spring when pelts were prime. Transportation occurred primarily in the summer. Some posts were occupied only on a seasonal basis from the end of summer through the following spring.¹⁵³

The economic success of the post system of trade was predicated on the establishment of a monopoly. A given operation, usually defined geographically as a "district" or "department," was profitable when the returns in furs exceeded the cost of the "outfit" (trade goods, pelts, provisions, and transportation). The company might charge a district trader a 70 percent markup on the prime cost of goods, so that the district trader then had to set prices even higher to show a profit over the marked-up cost. Post traders often supplied guns and traps and other commodities on credit, so that the Indians gradually became virtual employees of the company.¹⁵⁴ The Hudson's Bay Company royal charter gave it an exclusive right to trade throughout a large area, and at first the only challenge to its monopoly came from the French. With the rise of the North West Company in the late eighteenth century, however, the monopolistic premise of the post trading system began to break down. Although the American Fur Company attempted to achieve a monopoly wherever it operated, competition became an even more common feature of the fur trade in the United States. On the Upper Missouri, the American Fur Company was never able to achieve a complete monopoly.¹⁵⁵

The post system of trade generally featured two classes of posts. Some, such as Fort Union, were built to last a number of years and to anchor a company's business in a certain area. Others took the form of outlying posts and were more ephemeral. Sometimes the outlying posts were actually "opposition posts" established by competitors who sought to divert some of the trade that was attracted to the major company posts. The locations of many of these outlying posts are known, and their effects on the native peoples and animal populations were

¹⁵¹ Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 4.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵³ Theodore Catton, *Special History: The Environment and the Fur Trade Experience in Voyageurs National Park, 1730-1870* (Contracted report by Historical Research Associates, Inc., for MWRO, 2002), 32-47.

¹⁵⁴ Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Harper & Row Company, 1957), 146-147. See also Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*.

¹⁵⁵ See Mattison, "Fort Union: Its Role in the Upper Missouri Fur Trade," *North Dakota History* 29 (1962). The competition in the later period is detailed in John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).

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no doubt significant. However, the records associated with these posts are scant compared to the records kept by the large fur trading companies on major posts such as Fort Union.¹⁵⁶

The decline of the beaver pelt trade, attributed to various causes including overexploitation of the animal, changes in European fashion, Euro-American settlement, and American Indian dislocation, was replaced by the 1840s with trade in bison hides.¹⁵⁷ While beaver skins dropped half their value by the 1840s, the rapidly expanding St. Louis market saw western fur dealers more than double their bison robe (the winter coat) sales. Dried bison meat, bison tongues, and pemmican also found growing markets in St. Louis and points east.¹⁵⁸ The sheer bulk of the bison robes, however, posed a challenge to fur traders. Transporting heavy loads of bison robes down the rivers risked loss through collisions with snags, bars, or shoals.¹⁵⁹ The difficulty of transporting such a bulky item down the Missouri River was remedied in part by the advent of steamboats. By the early 1850s, bison robes accounted for a significant amount of the cargo aboard the steamboats. At the same time, immense quantities of hides were floated down the river on flat boats and rafts of various kinds.¹⁶⁰

By the mid nineteenth century, the fur trade on the Upper Missouri almost exclusively centered on the bison. As transportation improved, and as eastern industries demanded a greater volume of leather, the large fur trading companies increasingly competed with small outfits and individual hunters. Whereas the large companies traded mostly in robes, the new competitors entered the plains in the summer months and harvested the resource for the hides. Hunting the bison in summer spared the hunter much of the hardship of exposure, preparation, and delay until the steamboats could come up the river to take the hides. Hides were individually less valuable than robes, but quantity trumped quality as exploitation of the bison intensified. With the coming of the railroads into the Trans-Mississippi West, the pace of slaughter increased still more, leading to the annihilation of the bison herds and the near-extinction of the species.¹⁶¹

Upper Missouri River Area Tribes

The financial success of Fort Union depended largely upon the hunting and trapping efforts of the American Indians, who brought their pelts to trade for American goods.¹⁶² The post's name, "Fort Union," acknowledged that the post would unite the two important early Indian trade areas: the Upper Missouri Villages and the Rocky Mountain Systems.¹⁶³ Although the American Fur Company's main goal at Fort Union was to obtain the trade of the Assiniboine, the fort also served as a crossroads for trade and social interactions with other Plains Indian groups including the Cree, Metis, Ojibwa, the Upper Missouri Villagers (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara), Blackfeet, Crow, and Sioux. These groups had long established trade relationships developed as part of their own interactions on the Northern Plains, which during the protohistoric and historic periods, could be characterized as a fluid and fluctuating pattern of conflict, alliance, and interband political change.

¹⁵⁶ W. Raymond Wood, "An Introduction to the History of the Fur Trade on the Northern Plains," *North Dakota History* 61 (1994): 4.

¹⁵⁷ By the mid-1840s, silk hats had replaced beaver hats as the most fashionable type of hat in Europe and the United States. Eugene D. Fleharty, *Wild Animals and Settlers on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 299.

¹⁵⁸ Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, 17.

¹⁵⁹ Merrill G. Berlingame, "The Buffalo in Trade and Commerce," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* 3 (1929), 269. Once secured at the fort, the robes were still at risk from moulds, ticks, and fire. For example, the ship *Assiniboine*, moored at Fort Union, burned with all its cargo on June 1, 1835. A fire inside the fort on February 4, 1832, destroyed 800 "planks" of bison meat and 1000 dried bison tongues.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 276-277.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 265, 286.

¹⁶² "Resource Stewardship Strategy", 1.

¹⁶³ David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 57. Wishart uses the term Rocky Mountain Systems.

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Early historic descriptions of the Indian groups living in the upper Missouri River region provide a picture of an ethnically diverse group of people, possessing similar resource procurement techniques and material culture characteristics.¹⁶⁴ A main distinction between those groups is that some retained some manifestation of their earlier Woodland settlement and subsistence patterns (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara), while other groups abandoned agriculture and sedentary villages and adopted a nomadic hunting lifestyle (Crow, Assiniboine, Cree, and Blackfeet).¹⁶⁵ Prior to the heyday of the bison economy, nomadic bands were autonomous, mostly small, and followed a round of seasonal transhumance, joining other bands only in semi-permanent winter encampments. Later, larger groups formed to slaughter and process bison in sufficient quantities to trade and acquire wealth. Bands might also congregate for ceremonies or warfare. The bands worked within a clear division of labor, with the men hunting and raiding while the women processed hides and conducted other domestic activities.¹⁶⁶ Women also did the majority of work packing and unpacking camp and maintaining the lodge. Kinship was bilateral, although the wife most often joined the husband's band. Bands were often headed by the most meritorious member of the family. The chief was the leading member of the band council, which consisted of every man who had achieved success in hunting or warfare.¹⁶⁷ Wealth and generosity, accompanied by bravery in action, factored into prestige and power for male Plains American Indians.

The ceremonial systems and political organization of Plains groups complemented their economic system, which included not only subsistence activities but also trade and warfare. Trade was an integral part of the economic cycle between Plains groups as well as later with Euro-Americans. Well-maintained trade ties meant access to items that gave both prestige and superiority. Positive trade ties were maintained and developed through friendships and kinship ties, both fictive and real. In the same way, raiding and warfare acted as a means to redistribute materials between groups that did not have friendly economic relationships.

The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara make up the three units of the consolidated tribes of the upper Missouri. All three tribes shared a number of similar traits. The villages were most similar in regard to material culture and subsistence strategy and least alike in their religious beliefs and social and political organization.¹⁶⁸ All groups

¹⁶⁴ John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968).

¹⁶⁵ Groups of sedentary villagers occasionally adopted all necessary traits and took to the plains in search of bison herds. Conversely, the burgeoning robe-trade economy created the need for large groups of hunters and warriors, with the result that Plains nomads began adopting social organization styles similar to those of horticultural groups, since they were better suited to handle large aggregates of people. In-depth and wide-ranging discussions of Northern Plains ethnic groups are available. Denig's work comprises the main body of local descriptions of historic Plains Indian lives. Other descriptions have been gleaned from the journals of Lewis and Clark, Karl Bodmer, Freiderich Kurz, George Catlin, John Audubon, Father De Smet, la Vérendrye, Washington Matthews, Prince Maximilian du Wied, Thaddeus Culbertson, Alexander Henry the Elder and Alexander Henry the Younger. Later scholarly works on ethnic groups associated with the Fort Union area include numerous works by Robert Lowie, John Ewers, Clark Wissler, Michael Kennedy, David Mandlebaum, John Milloy, Royal Hassrick, David Miller, Raymond DeMallie, David Rodnick, and Roy Meyer. A recent book by Mark D. Mitchell, *Crafting History in the Northern Plains: A Political Economy of the Heart River Region, 1400-1750* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), explores in part the trading role of the village peoples, particularly the Mandan, in late prehistoric and early historic times.

¹⁶⁶ Raymond J. DeMallie and David R. Miller, "The Assiniboine," *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13: *Plains*, Ray DeMallie, ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 575

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 576.

¹⁶⁸ Many accounts of early historic village life exist because of the location of the villages and the ease of access to early Euro-American traders and explorers. See George Catlin; John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America The Years 1809, 1810, and 1811*. 1817, reprinted as Vol. 6 of Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*; Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Journal of a Voyage up the River Missouri Performed in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, 1816, reprinted as Vol. 6 of Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*; Elliot Coues, ed., *The History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark*, 4 Vols. (New York: F. P. Harper, 1893); W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders Among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); Ferdinand V. Hayden, "On the Ethnography and Philology of the Indian Tribes of the Missouri Valley," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 12 (Philadelphia, 1863); Washington Matthews, "Ethnography and Philology of the Hidatsa Indians," *U.S. Geological Survey Miscellaneous*

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relied on hunting and horticulture in equal proportions, supplemented with small amounts of gathered vegetal foods and fish. The bison hunt provided the major preoccupation for the men, while family groups lead by the women tended gardens located on fertile river terraces. Crops included corn, beans, squash and pumpkins, which were exchanged for the dried buffalo meat, dressed hides and clothing (all processed or made by women) of the Plains nomadic tribes. The majority of the harvest was used for village consumption and the remainder traded. After permanent Euro-American settlements were established in the area, large quantities of vegetables were used for trading purposes. As has been observed by historian Michael Lansing, because Indian women both produced and distributed items, they were the principal traders at fairs, controlling the supply and exchange of goods between groups. It was a role that would help reshape tribal worlds following the advent of the Euro-American fur trade.¹⁶⁹

During the Late Prehistoric period (A.D. 900–1500), villages were much more widely distributed along the banks of the Missouri, Heart, and Knife rivers. Archaeologists assume that the three groups were more independent of each other than during the early historic period, and that each village maintained more autonomous control. With the onset of European disease and population pressure from the east, the bands, villages, and ethnic units began to interact on a more frequent basis. The Mandan and Hidatsa consolidated in 1845 when the groups left the Knife River region and founded Like-a-Fishhook Village on the Missouri River (about 20 miles downstream from the mouth of the Little Missouri River). They were joined at Like-a-Fishhook by the Arikara in 1862, after the Sioux became an increasingly major threat.¹⁷⁰

The Plains Interband Trade System

Trade in European goods began as an extension of the Plains Interband Trade System (inter-group trade relationships), which had developed during the prehistoric period. Items were exchanged from the Pacific Coast to the Plains, from the Plains to the Southeast via the eastern Woodlands, and between the Plains and the Southwest. Items traded included shell, bison hides, salmon and pemmican, and raw lithic materials, like Knife River flint and obsidian.¹⁷¹ Trade essentially occurred in two ways: at fairs conducted by the Shoshone in what is now northern Wyoming and south-central Montana; and by the Sioux on the eastern margins of the Plains and at the upper Missouri horticultural villages, which served as permanent trade centers. Items changed hands with no prescribed routes.¹⁷²

Early Plains trade relationships were not based solely on the desire to acquire material goods; instead, they served as a means of risk management and of maintaining alliances and communicating with neighboring ethnic groups. The Interband Trade System incorporated predominantly redundant goods: the transfer of items had more to do with the maintenance of relationships than an actual need for items.¹⁷³ In essence, the goods traded

Publications, no. 7, Washington (1877); and Pierre Gaultier de Varrennes Sieur de la Verendrye, *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier De Varennes de la Verendrye and His Sons*, Lawrence J. Burpee, ed. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1927), 332.

¹⁶⁹ Michael Lansing, "Plains Indian Women and Interracial Marriage in the Upper Missouri Trade, 1804-1868," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 414-415, citing John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman, 1968), 20; James Berry, "Arikara Middlemen: The Effects of Trade on an Upper Missouri Society," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1978), 34; W. Raymond Wood, "Plans Trade in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Intertribal Relations," *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, ed. W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (Lincoln, 1980), 100; and Julie E. Francis, "Gender Studies in Plains Anthropology: A Commentary to the 1987 Symposium," *Plains Anthropologist* 36 (April 1991): 79.

¹⁷⁰ Tom Thiessen to Dena Sanford, "Comments on Missouri/Yellowstone Confluence Historic District Nomination," November 2001, 6, MWRO.

¹⁷¹ W. Raymond Wood, "Northern Plains Villages Cultures: Internal Stability and External Relationships," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 1-17; Donald J. Blakeslee, *The Plains Interband Trade System: An Ethnohistoric and Archaeological Investigation*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1975).

¹⁷² Wood, "Northern Plains Villages," 155.

¹⁷³ W. Raymond Wood, "Contrastive Features of Native North American Trade Systems," *University of Oregon Anthropological Papers*, 4; W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty, "Northern Plains Villages Cultures: Internal Stability and External Relationships,"

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were obtainable by anyone living on the Plains. Groups had access to most materials in the system without the aid of trade. This pattern may have been motivated in order to manage risk. If the subsistence base failed for one group, then its ties to other groups in the system fostered opportunities to seek assistance from economic partners. The pattern of redundancy also brought about specialization in hunting and horticultural lifestyles as various groups observed opportunities within the system and adapted themselves to meet them.

Early fringe trading with Euro-American markets began to have profound effects on Plains groups. Although subsistence patterns and traditional religious and social patterns were maintained, the most obvious effects were the increases in mobility and interaction resulting from the adoption of the horse as the main method of transportation. The presence of the horse had direct implications to traditional methods of establishing prestige and accumulating wealth and caused changes in subsistence patterns. Differential access to horses created differences in wealth between groups and initiated horse raiding, a fierce competition over accesses to non-aboriginal goods, and territorial disputes over once common hunting lands. With competition the frequency of intergroup warfare increased.

Scholars place varying emphasis on the appearance of non-native trade goods and their relationship to the Plains Interband Trade System. Early studies tend to place heavy emphasis on the horse and gun for the creation of large-scale trade systems,¹⁷⁴ while more recent discussions tend to find the origin of the Plains Interband Trade System in prehistoric patterns.¹⁷⁵ Regardless of the antiquity of the system, Euro-American fur traders actively used it to their own benefit.

From the perspective of trade and gender, men's roles in intertribal exchange rose with the importance of horses as a particularly valuable trade item. Horses supplanted food and clothing as the primary object of trade. Indian women continued to trade, but their exchange assumed a secondary role. As noted by Historian Michael Lansing, having found their trade roles limited by the new male-dominated horse exchange, Indian women expanded on their existing female role in kinship relations. These marriages or liaisons "symbolically and tangibly united different groups and prepared the way for vigorous trading sessions. Whether fictive or real, kinship ties were essential for positive trade relations and gradually created a role for women as intertribal go-betweens."¹⁷⁶

Due to their ability to trade fur for firearms via the Hudson's Bay Company York Factory (located at the southwestern shore of Hudson Bay), the Assiniboin and Cree were able to establish themselves as middlemen in the system. With superior firearms, they pushed south onto the Northern Plains, placing pressure on groups like the Atsina and the Blackfeet, who had been powerful players in the prehistoric and protohistoric trade system. The latter two groups were among the earliest bison hunters on the Northern Plains and had a wide regional subsistence base, yet they were pushed west and south, away from prime fur trapping and bison hunting territory north of the Missouri River in Montana and Canada. The Arikara and Cree also used their

and "Plains Trade in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Intertribal Relations," *Anthropology on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Blakeslee, *The Plains Interband Trade System*; Ewers, *Indian Life*; and Joseph Jablow, "The Cheyenne Indian in Plains Trade Relations: 1795-1840," *Monographs of the American Ethnological Society*, 12 (1951). See also Mitchell.

¹⁷⁴ John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958); and Jablow, "The Cheyenne Indian."

¹⁷⁵ Blakeslee, *The Plains Interband Trade System*; Derek S. Beery, "The Montana Masks: Implications of Shell Mask Gorgets to Trade Between the Plains and Southeast," (Master's thesis, University of Montana 1998); Katherine A. Spielman, "Late Prehistoric Trade Between the Southwest and Southern Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* 28 (1983): 283-308.

¹⁷⁶ Lansing, 415, citing Berry, 68, 77; W. Raymond Wood, "Northern Plains Village Cultures: Internal Stability and External Relationships," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 30 (Spring 1974); and Martha Harrou Foster, "Of Baggage and Bondage: Gender and Status Among Hidatsa and Crow Women," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (1993): 121-152. Lansing notes that the decline in status for Plains women with the introduction of the horse may not have applied to Crow or Hidatsa women.

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superior armaments to prevent the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Blackfeet from accessing the area around York Factory, placing themselves between competing smaller posts on the Assiniboine and South Saskatchewan Rivers (in present-day Manitoba and Alberta), the Cypress Hills (straddling present southern Alberta-Saskatchewan border) and the Upper Missouri Villages.¹⁷⁷ The Assiniboine traded with the Plains groups, passing on their own second-hand items for greatly increased prices, thus enticing the Plains bands into the use of non-native goods. They maintained their position as middlemen by allowing only secondhand items to flow onto the Plains proper and charging sufficient prices for the used items to buy new ones for themselves.

Gradually the position of the Assiniboine was undermined by changes in the fur trade. In 1805 new fur trade districts were established on the North Saskatchewan River. The establishment of these posts gave the Atsina, Blackfeet, and Gros Ventre direct access to trading establishments and integrated them into the fur trade economy. It also eliminated the role of the middleman, forcing the Assiniboine to assume a role as producers in the European trade system. By 1820, however, the Metis (First People of Canada who trace their descent to mixed European and First Nations parentage) were settling in Woodland/Parkland regions north and east of the Great Plains and assumed the role of provisioners to the trading posts. Deprived of both the role of middleman or provisioner, the Assiniboine pushed south to take control of prime bison and fur territory along the Missouri River and actively increased their role as hide producers in the fur trade economy. This action severed many important exchange ties and intensified the economic competition on the Northern Plains.

The Blackfeet were aware of the trade relationships between the Euro-Americans and their enemies. A similar situation was occurring in the south, with the Crow and Shoshone and the horse trade. Similarly, the Arikara had been effective middlemen in the Plains Interband Trade System and had early control over both American Indian and Euro-American access to Plains trade items. However, as the fur trade pushed up the Missouri, the Arikara were bypassed, losing their economic advantage. As a direct result, both the Blackfeet and Arikara became hostile to American traders' attempts to enter their areas. While the Blackfeet continued to maintain their ties with the British traders in Canada, Arikara resistance was aimed at all white traders.

Early traders on the Northern Plains during the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries initially worked independently within the Plains Interband Trade System. Their main access points for these traders were the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara villages on the upper Missouri where they took advantage of the villages' locations and trade relationships to acquire furs and other manufactured items from nomadic bands. This scheme not only provided the white traders with the materials produced in the villages but also effectively brought in the items manufactured by nomadic groups as they traveled to interact with the villagers within the Interband Trade System. In effect, the traders introduced replacement "luxury" items into the economy, to their benefit and to the benefit of the traditional middleman positions. It would be a very brief time before the corporate fur trade industry set its sights on the upper Missouri.

Early Upper Missouri River Area Trade

In the eighteenth century, the Upper Missouri River country lay at the edge of the known world of three rival empires. France, Britain, and Spain all claimed an interest in the region. British interest in the Upper Missouri River country was at first only a far extension of the Hudson's Bay Company's position on Hudson Bay. The Hudson's Bay Company was founded under a royal charter in 1670 for the purpose of obtaining steady profits on fur resources through trade with the American Indians. For the first several decades of its existence, the

¹⁷⁷ Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 59; David R. Miller, "The Role of the Assiniboine in the Fort Union Fur Trade," Fur Trade Conference, Fort Union, 2000, 11.

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Hudson's Bay Company showed little inclination to push inland, as American Indian groups were willing to travel from the interior to the company's posts on the Hudson Bay coastline.

France's interest was similarly tied to the fur trade. Starting in the region around Quebec and Montreal in the 1640s, the French administered the fur trade through a combination of business licensing and royal patronage. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, French fur traders were prepared to dominate the fur trade and push westward of the Great Lakes region to the Great Plains, cutting off Hudson's Bay Company's communication with the American Indians in the interior of the continent.¹⁷⁸ French-Canadian trader Jean-Baptist Trudeau, who traveled up the Missouri from St. Louis, would provide the earliest known reference to the eventual site of Fort Union. Trudeau's 1795 written account suggested that a fort built on the Missouri River near the mouth of the Yellowstone River, "would be very profitable for the opening of a large trade in peltries."¹⁷⁹ However, French ambitions in the area declined in the mid-eighteenth century, and in 1762, France sold the Upper Missouri River country to Spain, together with all of "Louisiana" west of the Mississippi River.

Although Spain held the territory for the next thirty-seven years, the Spanish regarded this possession as a buffer to their New World Empire to the south.¹⁸⁰ Spain sent a few explorers up the Missouri River to secure alliances with American Indian tribes against their British and American rivals. These Spanish expeditions were actually led by French and Scottish mercenaries who got as far as the Mandan villages in present-day North Dakota.¹⁸¹

Following France's cession of Canada to Britain in 1763, the establishment of the North West Company introduced major business competition for the fur trade. Headquartered in Montreal, this company featured a combination of Scottish entrepreneurs and French-Canadian employees. From its depot at Grand Portage on Lake Superior, the North West Company pushed aggressively westward, establishing a position in the interior of the continent.¹⁸² By the 1800s, the North West Company had eclipsed the Hudson's Bay Company as the most productive fur trading enterprise in North America. In the far West, its operations extended south to the Columbia River, although its explorations were mostly north or west of the Upper Missouri River country.¹⁸³

American interest in the Upper Missouri River area followed its acquisition of Louisiana from France in 1803, and its intention to become a continental power. The Meriwether Lewis and William Clark expedition, formally titled the Corps of Discovery, introduced the United States into the European rivalry for possession of western North America. Their information on the natural resources and environment along the route to the Pacific Ocean made the West itself an object of desire.¹⁸⁴ In accordance with presidential instruction to explore the Missouri and Columbia Rivers for the shortest route to the Pacific Ocean, these military men reached the Mandan Villages in 1804. During the winter of 1804–05, Lewis and Clark acquired all the knowledge they

¹⁷⁸ The most important French-Canadian explorer and fur trader to undertake such efforts was Pierre Gaultier de Verrenes, Sieur de la Verendrye. Verendrye explored the upper Missouri River area with his sons, and made contact with the Mandan in 1738. His chronicle of the encounter was the first Euro-American documentation of ethnic groups in the region. Verendrye provided numerous accounts of the middleman status of the villagers and of the changing demographic patterns on the northern Plains during this period. His descriptions indicate that the early use of the Interband Trade System by whites had little negative effect, and provided a first taste of non-native goods like firearms and ammunition, utensils, metal arrowheads, and other material goods along with a glimmer of opportunity in Euro-American ventures. Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder and William Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 24-25.

¹⁷⁹ Mark H. Brown, *The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone: A History of the Yellowstone Basin* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), 15; Malone, Roeder, and Lang, 28; Moulton, *Journals Volume III*, 198, 270.

¹⁸⁰ William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 14.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸² Moulton, *Journals Volume III*, 364-365.

¹⁸³ Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 9.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

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could from their Mandan hosts about the Indian tribes and geography that lay ahead of them. What information the Mandan couldn't provide was augmented by French fur traders' accounts they had gathered in St. Louis.¹⁸⁵

Reporting on knowledge gained during the course of their long winter camp with the Mandan, Meriwether Lewis wrote of the confluence area before he had even seen it:

[I]f Indian information can be relied on, this river [Yellowstone] waters one of the fairest portions of Louisiana, a country not yet hunted and abounding in animals of the fur kind... We are informed that there is a sufficiency of timber near the mouth of the river for the purpose of erecting a fortification, and the necessary buildings. In point of position, we have no hesitation in declaring our belief, of its being one of the most eligible and necessary, that can be chosen on the Missouri, as well in a governmental point of view, as that of affording to our citizens the benefit of a most lucrative fur trade. This establishment might be made to hold in check the views of the British N[orth] West Company on the fur-trade of the upper part of the Missouri, which we believe it is their intention to monopolize if in their power... If this powerful [sic] and ambitious company are suffered uninterruptedly to prosecute their trade with the nations inhabiting the upper portion of the Missouri, and thus acquire an influence with those people; it is not difficult to conceive the obstructions, which they might hereafter through the medium of that influence, oppose the will of our government, or the navigation of the Missouri.¹⁸⁶

Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery camped at the confluence¹⁸⁷ on April 26, 1805, and reiterated their belief that the location afforded "a butifull [sic] commanding Situation for a fort."¹⁸⁸ Impressed with the area, Lewis observed that there were more trees in the confluence area than he had seen anywhere on the Missouri as far below as the Cheyenne River. Wildlife was plentiful and included "immence [sic] herds of Buffaloe [sic], Elk, deer, & Antelope."¹⁸⁹

Of most interest to those who would follow, Lewis and Clark recorded an abundance of beaver and of beaver-chewed tree stumps, including one that measured three feet across.¹⁹⁰ Addressing the potential for navigation up both the Missouri and the Yellowstone, Clark measured flow above the confluence. The Missouri measured 520 yards wide, of that 330 yards occupied by water, with a "deep" channel. The Yellowstone, its flow diminishing with the summer season, measured 858 yards including sandbar; of this the water occupied 297 yards with a 12 foot channel.¹⁹¹ Although their time at the confluence was brief (and cultural evidence of their stay ephemeral), the impact of their exploration proved profound: in his summary of findings submitted to President Thomas Jefferson, Lewis reported "that portion of the Continent watered by the Missouri and all its branches from the Cheyenne upwards is richer in beaver and Otter than any country on earth particularly that proportion of its subsidiary streams lying within the Rocky Mountains."¹⁹²

Water transportation along the Missouri would be critical to the transportation of people and goods. Interior waterways formed the highways of commerce throughout the fur-trade era; geography funneled this commerce into a few main channels. Until the War of 1812, the resources of the western hinterland flowed primarily north and east to the shores of Hudson Bay or eastward through the Great Lakes and down the Ottawa River to

¹⁸⁵ Moulton, *Journals Volume III*, 270, 298, 333-335, 373, 381; and *Journals Volume IV*, 74.

¹⁸⁶ Moulton, *Journals Volume III*, 364.

¹⁸⁷ Located, in 1805, within the north half of Section 33, three miles south and one mile west of the current confluence.

¹⁸⁸ Moulton, *Journals Volume IV*, 74.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-70; Bernard DeVoto, ed., *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1953), 99-101.

¹⁹⁰ Moulton, *Journals Volume IV*, 85; DeVoto, 103.

¹⁹¹ Moulton, *Journals Volume IV*, 71-81.

¹⁹² U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Theme XV. Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898; The Fur Trade" (Washington, D.C.: National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, 1960), 13.

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Montreal. After the War of 1812, the Missouri River emerged as a third major artery running from the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis.¹⁹³

After the Lewis and Clark expedition, fur traders once again dominated exploration of the Upper Missouri country. Henceforward, St. Louis served as the gateway town to this region, as the Montreal-based North West Company conceded the Upper Missouri country to the Americans and pushed instead into the Saskatchewan and Columbia River basins. A Louisiana Spaniard named Manuel Lisa attempted to establish trade in the Upper Missouri country, the headwaters of the Missouri, and into the Rocky Mountains. Due to Blackfeet resistance and financial setbacks, his Missouri Fur Company would declare bankruptcy in 1824.¹⁹⁴

The War of 1812 effectively halted development of the fur trade in the Upper Missouri country for nearly a decade.¹⁹⁵ However, Federal policy regarding official relationships with American Indians in the frontier continued to evolve. Economically motivated, the policies included protection of American Indian rights to land, controlling non-native access to and disposition of lands, establishing tribal boundaries, monitoring British trade with the American Indians, and curbing illicit traffic in liquor.¹⁹⁶ Regulations were administered by agencies originally under the Indian Department, then the Office of Indian Affairs after 1824. The Upper Missouri Agency was initially established in 1819 at Council Bluffs, Iowa.¹⁹⁷

Fur trade efforts in the future location of Fort Union resumed in 1822, when two St. Louis fur traders, Andrew Henry and William Henry Ashley, formed a partnership that would later emerge as the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Arriving at the Yellowstone and Missouri river confluence on October 1, 1822, they built a rough stockade named Fort Henry. Fort Henry was intended as a trading post, but was abandoned in 1823 after costly encounters with the Blackfeet and the Arikara forced the fur traders to abandon their position on the Upper Missouri.¹⁹⁸ Ashley tried a different strategy in 1824, drawing on Shoshone precedent by sending supplies to a pre-arranged gathering place in exchange for furs. The company men who had formerly traveled in parties and traded with Indians now worked individually and trapped their own beaver. Known as “free trappers” or “mountain men,” these colorful characters adopted a costume and nomadic wilderness existence that was unique on the frontier. The annual trading fair became known as the “rendezvous.”¹⁹⁹

The Rocky Mountain Fur Company’s withdrawal into the mountains left two rival concerns to compete for the Upper Missouri fur trade. The first, the American Fur Company of John Jacob Astor, had been founded in 1808. Although the War of 1812 had forced Astor to abandon his plans in the Pacific Northwest, ultimately the war helped him in the East where his British rivals were forced to withdraw their fur trading operations from United States territory. By the early 1820s, the American Fur Company dominated the fur trade in the United States

¹⁹³ Daniel Francis, “Traders and Indians,” in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, ed. (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985), 58; Catton, *Special History*, 7.

¹⁹⁴ Brown, “Plainsman of the Yellowstone,” 61-64.

¹⁹⁵ Goetzmann, 30-35. Lisa withdrew his Upper Missouri trading operations to the Lower Missouri during the war. John C. Luttig, *Journal of a Fur-trading Expedition on the Upper Missouri 1812-1813* (Missouri Historical Society, 1920. Reprint, New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, 1964).

¹⁹⁶ Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Bison Book, 1962), 2-4.

¹⁹⁷ Chester L. Guthrie and Leo L. Gerald, “Upper Missouri Agency: An Account of Indian Administration on the Frontier,” *Pacific Historical Review* 10 (1941), 47-56.

¹⁹⁸ The second of the two encounters occurred as Ashley led a party of 100 men and two keelboats up the Missouri from St. Louis. Near the mouth of the Grand River, Arikaras attacked the party, killing fourteen and wounding nine, forcing a retreat back down the Missouri. It was the deadliest encounter in the history of the western fur trade. Mattison, “Fort Union: Its Role,” 184.

¹⁹⁹ For approximately 15 years, the rendezvous was an annual event in the Northern Rockies, the exact locale shifting from year to year. Usually held in July, the rendezvous quickly grew in size, attracting free trappers and Indians in addition to company employees. By the early 1830s, the rendezvous drew several thousand Indians and hundreds of white trappers or “mountain men.” Rival outfits initiated their own rendezvous, sometimes within a few miles of each other. There is a large literature on the rendezvous system. See, for example, Ray Allen Billington, *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 43-48.

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throughout the Great Lakes and the Upper Mississippi Valley. In 1822, the company opened a Western Department in the gateway city of St. Louis under the leadership of Ramsey Crooks.²⁰⁰

The American Fur Company's main competitor on the Upper Missouri was the Columbia Fur Company. The Columbia Fur Company employed a number of men formerly with the North West Company who had lost their jobs after that company's 1821 merger with the Hudson's Bay Company. The partners in the Columbia Fur Company circumvented the United States law of 1816 which prohibited foreigners from engaging in the fur trade in American territory by combining with an American named Tilton.²⁰¹ The dominant personality in this partnership was Kenneth McKenzie. A Scot by birth, McKenzie had migrated to Canada at a young age and became a clerk in the North West Company. In 1822 he moved to St. Louis, where he applied for American citizenship.²⁰²

During the next five years, the Columbia and the American Fur Companies moved in tandem up the Missouri River, the upstart Columbia Fur Company in St. Louis building one fort after another on the river and the corporate giant of New York matching each new post with one of its own nearby. In 1825, at the fur traders' behest, the Federal government sent a military expedition up the Missouri River for the purpose of demonstrating United States power and sovereignty to the American Indian tribes. Under the command of U.S. Army Brigadier General Henry Atkinson and accompanied by Indian Agent O'Fallon, the expedition split up at the confluence, with most of the men staying in what was known as Camp Barbour while two keelboats proceeded to the mouth of Red Water Creek. Wherever the expedition met with American Indians, it paraded the soldiers, offered presents, and made treaties. One outcome of this military expedition was American Indians agreement to acknowledge the supremacy of the United States.²⁰³ The other was encouragement to the fur trading companies to re-enter the Upper Missouri country.

About 1825, the Columbia Fur Company began to reap rich harvests of furs in the Yellowstone Valley, proving that it would not be driven out by its larger rival. During 1826–1827, Crooks negotiated terms of a merger with McKenzie. In 1828, the two finally reached a deal: the Columbia Fur Company acquired the name Upper Missouri Outfit (UMO) and operated under the supervision of the American Fur Company's Western Department. In return, it gave up its business on the Mississippi and Red rivers. McKenzie assumed leadership of the UMO and James Kipp, another of the original partners, was his assistant. Tilton, the American front man, disappeared from view.²⁰⁴

McKenzie immediately turned to construction of an imposing fort on the north bank of the Missouri River, three miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Not only did the location provide a point of entry into both the Yellowstone Valley and the Missouri headwaters area in the Rocky Mountains, but the strong fort secured friendly relations with the Assiniboine, the Crow, and the Cree.

Fort Union, Upper Missouri Outfit

McKenzie probably sent James Kipp to oversee fort construction in the fall of 1828. On December 26 of that year, the keelboat *Otter* arrived at the confluence of the Yellowstone "... in sufficient time" McKenzie wrote, "to build a fort and have all necessary preparations made for security."²⁰⁵ Construction continued through the

²⁰⁰ Mattison, "Fort Union: Its Role," 185.

²⁰¹ Although the company was officially named Tilton and Company after its nominal leader, it was better known as the Columbia Fur Company. Ibid., 186.

²⁰² Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 3.

²⁰³ Mattison, "Fort Union: Its Role," 185.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 186.

²⁰⁵ National Park Service Archeologist William Hunt has confirmed this as the construction date of Fort Union, and not Fort Floyd, as suggested by historian Hiram Chittenden in 1935. Hunt draws in particular on the detailed journals of Prince Maximilian

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following seasons, and in early 1830, about 120 American Fur Company employees traveled upriver to finish work on the post.²⁰⁶ That spring, the first use of the title “Fort Union” appeared in a May 5 letter written by McKenzie. McKenzie was living at Fort Union at the time, and possibly before that. His employees represented about one-half of the year’s *engagés* (employees), making it the most heavily staffed American Fur Company post.²⁰⁷

A number of factors contributed to McKenzie quickly gaining a reputation as “King of the Upper Missouri.” His shrewd trading skills and the tremendous power inherent in the wealth of the American Fur Company placed him in a powerful position. Equally important was his choice of site location and his organization of the UMO around steamboats.²⁰⁸ Although early travel upriver depended upon toilsome six-month journeys by keelboat, McKenzie was no doubt mindful of the steamboat *Western Engineer*’s 1819 passage to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and *Walk-in-the-Water*’s 1819 maiden voyage carrying goods to and from Mackinac Island in Lake Huron. McKenzie probably located Fort Union at the confluence of the Missouri and the Yellowstone with steamboat navigation in mind. He may have regarded the confluence as the farthest practical point of navigation for steamboats on the Upper Missouri, as he contended that a shallow-draft steamboat could get all the way to the mouth of the Yellowstone.²⁰⁹ In 1830, he persuaded American Fur Company officials to invest in such a vessel, appropriately named the *Yellow Stone*. On its maiden voyage in 1831, the *Yellow Stone* managed only as far as Fort Tecumseh (near present-day Pierre, SD), but the following year it reached Fort Union with the artist George Catlin on board.²¹⁰ High financial return was immediately realized, with the *Yellow Stone* returning to St. Louis in 1832 with 1,300 packs of beaver pelts.²¹¹ McKenzie’s advancement of steamboat navigation on the Upper Missouri came at a time when popular opinion held that this reach of the river was perilous and unnavigable.²¹²

Ironically, no sooner had the American Fur Company established itself on the Upper Missouri than the trade in beaver pelts began to decline, replaced by bison robes and hides. John Jacob Astor, possibly viewing the shift as the beginning of the end for his business, sold the American Fur Company’s Western Department to Pratte, Chouteau & Company of St. Louis in 1834. This company later changed its name to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., & Company.²¹³ Informally, the company continued to be known as the American Fur Company, and it continued to deal with American Indians at its various forts along the Upper Missouri River.

Wied-Neuwied and determined that Fort Floyd was built at the mouth of the White Earth River. William J. Hunt, Jr., “‘At the Yellowstone ... To Build a Fort’: The Nascent Years of Fort Union Trading Post, 1826, 1833,” 1990, Fort Floyd file, MWAC; William J. Hunt, Jr., “Fort Floyd: An Enigmatic Nineteenth-Century Trading Post,” *North Dakota History* 61 (1994): 7-20. For an example of the use of Chittenden, see Mattison, “Fort Union: Its Role,” 188.

²⁰⁶ Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 40.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 43; Thompson, *Historic Structures Report*, 10-12.

²⁰⁸ “Archeological Overview and Assessment,” Cultural Sites Inventory, 22.

²⁰⁹ This honor would eventually fall to Fort Benton, near present-day Great Falls. Keelboats could carry twenty to forty tons of trade goods and were pulled, poled, or rowed up the Missouri. This tedious task demanded the efforts of from twenty to forty boatmen. At an average rate of 15 miles per day, the trip from St. Louis to Fort Union consumed an entire travel season. Michael M. Casler, *Steamboats of the Fort Union Fur Trade: An Illustrated Listing of Steamboats on the Upper Missouri River, 1831-1867* (Williston, ND: Fort Union Association, 1999), 2-4.

²¹⁰ Each successive year thereafter the American Fur Company would send one steamboat per year to Fort Union. This number was increased to two by 1850, when the AFC contracted with the federal government to supply Indian annuities promised under treaty. Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 18-19; Mattison “Fort Union: Its Role,” 18.

²¹¹ In addition to the steam boats, mackinaws transported furs downstream. Constructed of cottonwood planks at the load site (Fort Union, like other Missouri River posts, maintained a *chantiers* or boat yard), mackinaws were generally 50 feet long and nine feet wide and could carry 300 packs of fur. Powered by crews of six, these boats averaged approximately 100 river miles per day and were the cheapest form of downstream transportation. Casler, *Steamboats*, 12.

²¹² “Resource Management Plan,” 22.

²¹³ Mattison, “Fort Union: Its Role,” 196.

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Although the company would trade in bison robes more than furs, its operations changed little. For example, UMO employee Charles Larpenteur recorded in his journal, "On March 20, 1834, Mr. J. returned to the fort with sixteen packs of robes, and a few wolf and fox skins. Mr. Vasquez, who had been sent to the Crow, traded thirty packs of robes, five of beaver, six of wolf, and one of fox and rabbit." A year later, Larpenteur stated, "D. Lamont and traders arrived at Ft. Union, with, among other things, 4,200 bison robes; 37 dressed cow-skins; 12 dressed calf skins; 450 salted tongues; 3,500 pounds powdered, and 3,000 pounds dried buffalo meat."²¹⁴

By the late 1830s, McKenzie and the American Fur Company maintained virtually uncontested control of the Northern Rocky Mountains east of the Continental Divide and the Northern Plains. From that period to about 1850, Fort Union served as a focus of American economic power and wealth not previously witnessed by the fur trade, and which would not be experienced in the future.²¹⁵ The only serious challenge to the American Fur Company was the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.²¹⁶ Other competing firms working in the area regularly failed within a few years. In 1832, William Sublette, one of the partners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, formed a company with a Scots-Irishman from St. Louis named Robert Campbell. Their short-lived plan to build rival posts wherever the American Fur Company had a presence began in 1833 when the men built Fort William two and a half miles below Fort Union on the same side of the river. By 1834, McKenzie's partner in the UMO, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., bought the company from Sublette in St. Louis. The stockade surrounding Fort William was dismantled and brought to Fort Union where it was erected and provided a protected horse corral and hay storage area, and overflow housing. A garden space was located within or adjacent to its boundary.²¹⁷ Eight years later, another competitor built a fort near Fort Union. The company, known as both the Union Fur Company and Fox, Livingston and Company, constructed the fort near the site of the old Fort William. It was named Fort Mortimer although it was often called Fort William. Originally made of wood, it was later reconstructed with adobe. This fort persisted for three years. In 1845, the Union Fur Company sold its holdings to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company.²¹⁸

Fort Union Inhabitants

Fort Union employees represented a variety of socioeconomic groups divided by ethnicity and occupation. The American Fur Company was organized under four tiers of personnel, with wages and living conditions reflective of ranking. The top level, occupied by owners, partners, and officers, including the post head clerk or *bourgeois*. Second, were those in mid-level management including clerks, traders, interpreters, and guides. Third, were skilled and unskilled employees who manned the boats or who worked about the forts tending livestock, farming, hunting, and performing tasks at the trade shops (blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters, and

²¹⁴ Burlingame, "Buffalo in Trade and Commerce," 268.

²¹⁵ "Archeological Overview and Assessment," Cultural Sites Inventory, 23.

²¹⁶ The American Fur Company also competed in the Rocky Mountain fur trade, sending caravans to the rendezvous, and building a fort on the Upper Missouri in Blackfoot country. Persistence was not the only factor in the American Fur Company's success. The advent of steamboat navigation on the Upper Missouri was crucial to opening trade with the Blackfeet. The American Fur Company could offer premium prices to the Blackfeet for bison robes because these items could now be transported downriver in bulk. The Blackfeet had not been able to get much for the bison robes from the Hudson's Bay Company to the north, because this product was difficult to transport by canoe down the Saskatchewan River. In addition, the American Fur Company lured the Blackfeet trade away from the British by the liberal use of liquor. Mattison, "Fort Union: Its Role," 189; Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1946-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 28-29.

²¹⁷ Harvey, "A History of the Missouri-Yellowstone River Confluence," 38.

²¹⁸ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 47-48. Historian Barton H. Barbour devotes a chapter in his book to the question of whether the Upper Missouri Outfit established a monopoly. He points out that contemporaries often leveled charges of monopoly because monopolies were antithetical to the American ideology of economic development. Barbour concludes that the UMO "never attained a functional monopoly for more than a year or two at a time, and then only during brief interludes between periods of stout competition. It took time for opposition firms to amass capital, purchase goods, arrange for transportation, and establish trading posts in the country. Whenever a competitor failed or sold out to the Company, therefore, a temporary condition of monopoly might prevail, but only by default, and only until a new competitor arrived on the scene." Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 178.

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shipwrights). At the bottom tier were those who supplied goods or services on a non-contractual basis.²¹⁹ By 1851, a craftsman could expect to receive \$250 per year; a workman's assistant \$120 or less. A hunter could receive \$400, in addition to his harvested hides and horn. An interpreter earned \$500, while clerks or traders who spoke Indian languages could demand up to \$1000.²²⁰

All three owners of the American Fur Company's Western Department were of French-North American upper-class backgrounds. The three partners of the Upper Missouri Outfit were Scottish. Below these officers, employees were predominantly French-North American or Metis, from a broad region of North America extending from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi Delta. Boat operators were generally French-North American, tradesmen were a mix of French and Anglo backgrounds, and the majority of the *voyageur* class had French surnames.²²¹ An "occasional" Plains Indian showed on the financial ledgers during the 1830s, all hired not as full-time workers but rather to provide specific services. The servant class included Blacks, none of whom are listed as wage earners.²²² The number of men employed fluctuated dramatically as demanded by the amount and profitability of trade. For example, in 1833, staff was reported to be 100, while 15 years later, during a year of diminished bison herds and poor trade, fort staff numbered 10.²²³

While all employees received free board and lodging, the quality varied by status. For example, the living conditions of clerks, officers, and visitors in 1847 included breakfast fare of fried bison and venison, wheat flour breakfast cakes with cream and butter.²²⁴ A meal described in 1851 by visiting artist Rudolph Kurz provided even further description of class distinction. While the bourgeois' table enjoyed chocolate, milk, butter, omelet, fresh meat, and hot bread, —with soup and pie frequently served on Sundays—a second table for hunters and workmen consisted of meat, biscuit, and black coffee with sugar.²²⁵ Guests and dignitaries enjoyed bourgeois benefits, from dining at the bourgeois' table, to honorific recognition upon arrival and departure. This included raising the flag and firing a three-gun salute from the fort cannon.²²⁶

Nighttime brought only a small degree of parity, with all employed, regardless of rank, compelled to supply their own bedding (bison robes were available for loan in the storeroom). During the heart of winter in 1852, when the cold proved sustained and firewood proved short, UMO trader Denig enjoyed the warmest quarters in the house. Kurz describes the bourgeois as "quite comfortable in his large armchair, smoking his short-stem pipe beside his iron stove that glows with a rousing fire."²²⁷ In contrast, the interpreters' quarters were "rather like an Indian's habitation. On the floor near me were three beds of buffalo robes for three couples of half-Indians and their full-blooded wives." The room, on a subsequent occasion, was "dimly lighted" by an open fire and a candle and housed a gambling session attended by "Indians, whites, and half breeds": "eight Herantsa and seven Assiniboine sat opposite one another on the floor, encircled about a pile of bows, quivers, knives, calico, etc." Kurz's own room (probably in the bourgeois house) was comfortable despite a leaking roof. Furnishings included a "bedstead, two chairs, and a large table."²²⁸

²¹⁹ Ibid., 249-250.

²²⁰ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 62, citing Rudolph F. Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz*, trans. Myrtis Jarnell, ed. J. N. B. Hewitt, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, 1937).

²²¹ William R. Swagerty and Dick A. Wilson, "Faithful Service Under Different Flags: A Socioeconomic Profile of the Columbia District, Hudson's Bay Company and the Upper Missouri Outfit, American Fur Company," *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 252.

²²² Swagerty and Wilson, "Faithful Service," 253-256.

²²³ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 60.

²²⁴ Ibid., 59, citing Journal of John Palliser.

²²⁵ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 61, 63, citing Kurz.

²²⁶ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 66; Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 57, citing Denig; Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 78, citing Maximilian.

²²⁷ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 69, citing Kurz.

²²⁸ Ibid., 63-64.

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Recreation for all men, regardless of race or status, consisted of drinking liquor, despite the U.S. government's attempts to restrict alcohol distribution within Indian territory. Music and dancing also enlivened the long days. *Engages* would host dances, at their own expense, in the dining hall. On occasion, the Fort Union bourgeois or the proprietors of neighboring Fort William would hold a ball.²²⁹

For three decades Pierre Chouteau, Jr., principal of the American Fur Company, hosted or employed scientists, artists, journalists, missionaries, curious European aristocrats, and government explorers at Fort Union. From an ethnographic perspective, the information collected and created by these men represents a very large portion of what is known about the lifestyles of American Indians, about the nature of the fur trade, and about the native flora and fauna of the Northern Plains during the mid-nineteenth century.²³⁰

The most notable include amateur ethnographer and post trader Edwin Thompson Denig, naturalist Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied; artists George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and Rudolph Kurz; missionary Pierre-Jean De Smet; geologist Thaddeus Culbertson; Lewis Henry Morgan, one of the founders of American anthropology; and naturalist John James Audubon. All rendered images (in prose and graphically) of the American Indian, the American West, and of the fort. All of these images, regardless of their artistic quality, are of value for the detail that they provide regarding the physical characteristics of the fort itself and of life at the fort. A notable few are significantly associated with the advancement of American science, art, and ethnography.

Among the most notable was artist and amateur ethnographer George Catlin who traveled to the Upper Missouri in a deliberate attempt to paint peoples and lifeways that he believed would pass into oblivion as American enterprise moved west.²³¹ Catlin arrived at Fort Union in 1832 aboard the second voyage of the steamboat the *Yellow Stone*. During his five-month trip, Catlin produced almost 170 paintings, including landscapes, portraits, and village scenes. Moreover, in 1844, Catlin published a two-volume memoir of his western travels, including a damning indictment of the "contaminating vices and dissipations introduced by the immoral part of *civilized* society" and description of the "most pitiable misery and wretchedness" of the Indian conditions, consequent of the fur trade.²³² Of this effort, historian Barton Barbour wrote:

Catlin was the first artist to work in the Upper Missouri, the first to depict Fort Union, and the first to attempt to create a thorough visual record of Plains Indians. . . [H]is paintings and letters constitute a valuable resource for historians and ethnologists. Catlin's prose, highly colored by romanticism, advocacy for the Indians' cause, and self-aggrandizement, must be read with caution... [but] his speculations on the meaning of the "West" and the deep resonance of the frontier in American consciousness preceded the appearance of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis by half a century. "Few people," wrote Catlin, "even know the true definition of the term 'West'; and where is its location? —phantom-like it flies before us as we travel, and on our way is continually gilded, before us." ... In his varied roles as self-promoting entrepreneur, Indian advocate, wilderness preservationist, and critic of government policy, as well as in his ambiguous relationship with the fur traders, Catlin reflects the contradictory ideology of Young America that fostered simultaneous admiration and loathing for Indians.²³³

²²⁹ Ibid., 67.

²³⁰ Other Europeans who traveled to Fort Union included Prince Paul of Wurtemberg, Lord Richard Grosvenor, Sir William Drummond Stuart, prince William Nicholas of Nassau, Lord George Gore and General Phillipe de Trobriand.

²³¹ Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 69.

²³² Catlin, quoted in Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 71, 73.

²³³ Barbour, *Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 73-74. For further discussion of the prominence of Native Americans in American art and literature in the early nineteenth century, and their suitability as material for American cultural nationalism and romanticism, see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 86.

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A second artist, Karl Bodmer, visited Fort Union in 1833 in the company of Prince Maximilian of Wied Neuwied. While Prince Maximilian—a trained naturalist—compiled notes for a detailed travel narrative, Bodmer painted landscapes of “magical clarity,” Indian portraits of “superb detail,” and natural history illustrations remarkable “for their precision.”²³⁴ Bodmer and Maximilian resided at Fort Union only from June 24th until July 6th. They then moved to Fort McKenzie among the Blackfeet and to Fort Clark among the Mandan before returning to New York in July 1834. During the course of their western travels, Maximilian and Bodmer produced 250 images, several journals, and countless botanical, ethnological, and zoological specimens (additional items were lost in the fire that destroyed the steamboat *Assiniboine*). Between 1839 and 1843, Maximilian published German, French, and English editions of *Travels in the Interior of North America*, each accompanied by an atlas of illustrations prepared under Bodmer’s supervision and each widely distributed. No other nineteenth-century traveler, historian Barton Barbour writes, “amassed as extensive and important a collection of Upper Missouri Indian materials.”²³⁵ From the perspective of influence on American art, Bodmer’s efforts “... presaged a new kind of art that would be appropriate to the spacious vistas of the Far West.”²³⁶

Noted historian William H. Goetzmann extends these men’s influence beyond science and ethnography to cultural history and the nascence of myth. Widely shown in Europe and the eastern states, Catlin and Bodmer’s paintings largely defined the white world’s perception of the “typical” American Indian. This focus on the Plains Indian quickly extended to literature and, ultimately, to film. Moreover, the men’s vast landscapes presented an image of lands inexhaustible in content and in scale, lands offering nineteenth century Americans “the promise of a glorious national future,” a unique and distinct place that defined Americans as a unique and distinct people.²³⁷

Many scientists collected specimens in the Fort Union area and made study skins at the fort before shipping them back to the East. In 1843 famous naturalist John James Audubon traveled to the Upper Missouri, accompanied by artist Isaac Sprague, ornithologist Edward Harris, taxidermist John G. Bell, and Lewis M. Squires. Audubon and party arrived at Fort Union on June 12, 1843. Based out of Fort Union, and enjoying the largesse of the American Fur Company, they gathered hundreds of specimens for Audubon’s last work, *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (1845–1848).²³⁸ Explorer and geologist Ferdinand V. Hayden, who would later be associated with the U.S. Geological Survey, studied in the area in the 1850s. Specimens collected near Fort Union by Dr. George Stuckley and James G. Cooper of the 1853 Pacific Railroad Survey, and by Thaddeus Culbertson, are now housed in the Smithsonian Institution. Accordingly, Fort Union is listed as the type locality for some species such as Audubon grasshopper mouse, Hayden masked shrew, Maximilian pocket mouse, and Audubon bighorn.

Potentially the works most valuable to scholars were three manuscripts produced between 1852 and 1856, by Denig during his time at Fort Union.²³⁹ Denig was without equal in his detailed information on American Indian

²³⁴ Barbour, Upper Missouri Fur Trade, 74.

²³⁵ Ibid., 81.

²³⁶ C. Hunt and Marsha V. Gallagher, annotators, *Karl Bodmer's America* (Lincoln: Joslyn Art Museum and University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 20-21.

²³⁷ William H. Goetzmann in Hunt and Gallagher, *Karl Bodmer's America*, 22. See also John C. Ewers, *Artists of the Old West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 95; and J. Gray Sweeney, “The Artist-Explorers of the American West, 1860-1880” (Ph.D. diss. Indian University, Department of Fine Arts, January 1975), 11.

²³⁸ Barbour, Upper Missouri Fur Trade, 82-87.

²³⁹ The first, found incorporated in the letters of Father De Smet, relates several tales of Plains Indians like that of Gauche. The second, prepared in response to a circular distributed by Henry Schoolcraft in 1847, addressed the Assiniboine and made its way to the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) where it was published as their *46th Annual Report* in 1930. The third is a volume recovered from Alexander Culbertson’s collections that was published in Edwin T. Denig’s *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees and Crows*, John C. Ewers, ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961); David R. Miller, “Introduction,” in Denig, *The Assiniboine* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), xii-xiv, reprinted from the Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1928–1929.

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Tribes on the upper Missouri, and his contributions to the ethnography of the Assiniboiné, Sioux, Arikara, Cree and Crow serve as the predominant early, methodical, and conscious attempts to thoroughly describe the Plains Indians of the upper Missouri. He also published other short articles on the linguistics and medicine of the Assiniboiné and Cree. Denig's second manuscript has been described as particularly insightful regarding Assiniboiné political and social organization, and is "... one of the most definitive for any Plains group in the mid-nineteenth century."²⁴⁰ A great amount of other published knowledge on the Indians of the area has also been attributed to Denig.²⁴¹

Finally, artist Rudolph Kurtz and post employees Charles Larpenteur and Alexander Culbertson all kept detailed journals of their days at Fort Union and their time in the Upper Missouri fur trade. Each provides striking detail on not only the fort's architecture during a specific period of time, but also first-hand accounts of everyday life in the fur trade.

Seminal advances in science and ethnography were made possible by virtue of Fort Union's sheltering presence at the gates of the Upper Missouri Region, by its role as a trade center for disparate and distinct tribal groups who converged on the confluence area, and by the support of the AFC's Pierre Chouteau. However, these same factors wrought great social, political, and economic change to the area's original inhabitants.

Impacts of the American Fur Company and Fort Union

The establishment of Fort Union and other trading posts brought Indians into direct contact with fur trade personnel and their trade policies, often with profound consequences.²⁴² Among these consequences were the spread of disease and the resulting depopulation and loss of military power for most groups, the implementation of the tribal level of leadership where it had previously not been important, and the continued differentiation in wealth among the various Plains groups. Other significant changes included homogenization of the material culture and shifts in the economic, religious, social, and domestic structures of Plains bands. Aside from depopulation, perhaps the most detrimental result was the loss of the bison herds upon which the Plains Indian based much of their culture.

Although these changes in American Indian lifestyles cannot be attributed to the presence of a single fur trading post, Fort Union—as the predominant fort of its kind on the upper Missouri—can be used as a case study. Of the Indian groups that frequented Fort Union, the Assiniboiné were perhaps most affected by their association with the post, and bands frequently resided in the secure pastureland adjacent to the fort. Other groups who were influenced by the activities at Fort Union include the Crow, Blackfeet, Cree, and to a lesser extent the horticultural villagers. The villagers, however, were much more affected by the river traffic to and from Fort Union and the lower Missouri River posts. The Sioux did not frequent the Fort Union vicinity until later historic events pushed them into the area from the east, even though they had frequent earlier interactions with the village groups.

The impact of cholera, whooping cough, influenza, measles, and smallpox epidemics on Plains Indians is a well-documented topic. Although the exact extent of the decrease in native populations is unknown, several

²⁴⁰ Miller in Denig, "Introduction," xiv–xvii.

²⁴¹ Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*. See also Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, *Western Missions and Missionaries: A Series of Letters by the Rev. P. J. De Smet* (New York: James B. Kirker, 1863), and Hayden, "Ethnography and Philology."

²⁴² By 1835 trading posts had been established within the territory of each of the major Plains ethnic groups. These included Fort Clark at the Mandan/Hidatsa Villages, Fort Tecumseh among the Arikara, and Fort Union at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers. Other forts that influenced Plains groups during the nineteenth century included Fort Piegan, established in the territory of the Blackfeet, and Fort Cass established in Crow territory. William R. Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870," *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 4: A History of Indian-White Relations*. Edited by William Sturtevant, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 370.

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sources provide estimates of the loss of life during specific disease episodes. It has been demonstrated that loss of life due to disease epidemics was responsible for shifting the balance of power between the various ethnic groups such as the Assiniboiné and the Blackfeet several times. The Upper Missouri villages suffered greatly due to their settled lifestyles. In some cases, as with the Mandan and Arikara, the epidemic losses caused them to seek retribution on the traders who imported the diseases.²⁴³

The major smallpox epidemic at Fort Union occurred in 1837, when the disease was imported via the steamboat *St. Peters*. By June 1838, the Indian wives of the white traders had succumbed, followed by the post Indians. American Indians residing at the post carried the disease back to the remaining bands. As a result of this single epidemic, the primary band of post Assiniboiné had been reduced from 250 lodges to 30 lodges. Throughout the winter the smallpox epidemic moved north and west and Denig estimated that 1000 Assiniboiné lodges were reduced to 400. Many of the survivors had been lucky enough to be vaccinated by the Hudson's Bay Company at northern posts.²⁴⁴ In some instances, interethnic cooperation and increased opportunities in the market economy allowed the groups to rebuild. Denig provides an account of the recuperation of an Assiniboiné band after an epidemic; the band recruited new members from northern bands and succeeded in rebuilding over the next 17 years as the next generation matured.²⁴⁵

The waves of population growth and decline contributed greatly to the patterns of social and political change on the Northern Plains during the fur-trade era. Nearly every resulting pattern discussed has ties to the need of Plains groups to reconstitute themselves and regain power in the market economy. Decimated populations provided competitors opportunities to take over the trade monopolies. Often, groups less adversely affected by episodes of disease were able to block the previous middlemen and took over the role.²⁴⁶ Opportunities like this allowed the Sioux to become powerful to the east and effectively ostracized the weaker Arikara from the trade system.

Drastic changes resulted from depopulation as entire groups were left without their original roles in the trade economy, either as middlemen or as producers. In order to regain their ability to compete, they formed new alliances, sometimes with previous partners or former enemies. This created "new" ethnic groups and caused the diffusion, and in some cases disappearance, of political, religious, and social ideals. These patterns were widespread as, over the course of the fur-trade years, Denig estimates that the epidemic diseases killed no less than 15,000 to 20,000 individuals.²⁴⁷

The American Fur Company activities in the upper Missouri region affected the traditional Plains Indian economy more than any other fur trade company.²⁴⁸ The new trade pattern removed the position of middlemen from American Indian hands and forced all groups to become producers and clients. Village Indians intensified their role as producers of horticultural products for supply to the forts and the Mandan and Hidatsa made trips to trade their garden products at Fort Union.²⁴⁹ Likewise, the Assiniboiné entered the Plains economy as producers and adapted the homogenous culture of nomadic bison hunters, increasing competition within the system. This shift by the Assiniboiné was a conscious decision on the part of bands to incorporate themselves into the trade

²⁴³ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 67-69.

²⁴⁴ Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*, 71-73; Miller, "Role of the Assiniboiné." This was not the first epidemic to which the Assiniboiné had been exposed. During 1780-1782, the Assiniboiné had carried smallpox north after a raid on the Hidatsa. Early counts do not effectively show population changes from this epidemic, however, Miller's 2000 paper demonstrates that between 1809 and 1823, the Assiniboiné population increased from approximately 5,000 to over 23,000. He references a number of population counts from McGillivray, Fiddler, Henry the Younger, McDonald and Renville from Hudson's Bay Company posts in Canada.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 71; Miller, "Role of the Assiniboiné".

²⁴⁶ Swagerty, "Indian Tribes in the Trans-Mississippi West," 361.

²⁴⁷ Denig, *The Assiniboiné*, 461.

²⁴⁸ Swagerty, "Indian Tribes in the Trans-Mississippi West," 370.

²⁴⁹ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 102.

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economy. Also, as the fur traders became efficient in incorporating Indian custom into the trading operations, they drew bands into the system by creating a dependence upon trade goods. To a certain extent, the relationship between the Indians and the fort personnel was symbiotic, as the whites depended upon the American Indians for a vast majority of their food supply and livelihood. However, as the relationship progressed, the fort personnel were able to make the native population dependent upon them.

As traders came to understand the Plains culture better, they were able to effectively place themselves within the spheres of Indian trade. They developed allegiance to their own posts by adapting traditional fictive kinship ties and trading ceremonies. In several cases Denig describes the ritual behind the arrival of a trading party at Fort Union. These trading rituals were often expensive and ceremonious, with Fort Union firing the cannons in welcome and providing gifts of alcohol, tobacco, and other items.

Kinship ties were used to secure trade through intermarriage. American Indian women's proactive roles in these relationships can be seen as an extension of the kinship relationships already in place. Using their labor and sexuality as a means of ensuring good relations with the new outsiders, native women put intertribal and interracial relationships at the center of trade exchange. They acted as cultural and physical intermediaries, and in the process, regained a measure of their precontact status. In the words of historian Michael Lansing, "through their roles as mediators, economic informants, cultural transmitters, companions, producers and consumers... Native women gained status in Indians and white eyes." In doing so, they helped usher in significant social, economic and environmental changes on the Upper Missouri that helped end traditional Plains Indian ways of life.²⁵⁰

Fur traders represented a new market for native women, and the relationships that grew between the groups was appealing to both in terms of economic, social, and political perspectives. Traders represented material wealth and technological knowledge. Exchanging goods with men placed the women in the same economic arena as their male kin. Edwin Denig reported that the Arikara exchange at Fort Union was carried on by the women, often the prominent traders and consumers at the fort. Denig noted that the women "... bring the corn by the pansful or the squashes in strings, and supply themselves by the exchange with knives, hoes, combs, beads, paints, etc... It may be observed that though the women do all the labor of tilling they are amply compensated by having their full share of the profits." Families of these women also reaped material and political benefits, as sharing and gift-giving among relatives was expected behavior.²⁵¹

As at other fur trade forts, Fort Union's role in the fur trade economy resulted in the intermarriage of fur trade employees and native women. Most Fort Union bourgeois, including Denig and Culbertson, had American Indian wives. United outside the fort in 1840, Culbertson remained married to Natawista or Medicine Snake Woman, from the Blackfeet tribe, for 30 years. Denig married Hai-kees-kak-wee-yah, or Little Deer Woman, until Denig's death. The bourgeois who married into prominent American Indian families found their status in their wife's band or tribe elevated, and their patronage expanded.

These and other cross-cultural marriages facilitated the role of native women as economic brokers and elevated their status as integral to successful trade. Native women served as interpreters, critical for cross-cultural communication. As economic brokers, they allowed their bourgeois and clerks access to "insider information" regarding tribal trading desires, and ensuring trade with her kin. In turn, native women living at fur trade forts

²⁵⁰ Lansing, 413-414; also citing Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, eds., *Women and Power in Native North America* (Norman, 1995); and Devon A. Milhesuah, "Commonality of Difference: American Indian Women and History," *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (Winter 1996): 15-28.

²⁵¹ Lansing, 416-418, citing Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, ed. John C. Ewers (Norman, 1961), 46-47; and George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (1844; reprint, New York, 1973), 1: 120.

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could inform their relatives “updates on the latest goods, company policies, and spousal trading plans.”²⁵² By building real and fictive kinship bonds with trade partners, and understanding kinship responsibilities, trade ties were fostered and expanded—the same strategy that had been used in the Plains Interband Trade System.

This is not to say that native women’s roles were defined solely by their marital relationship to Euroamerican traders. It was not unheard of for women in Plains Indian societies to become warriors. Perhaps one of the best examples is Bar-chee-am-pe, (Pine Leaf or Woman Chief), a Gros Ventre who had been taken captive by the Crow when she was a young girl. Bar-chee-am-pe, an accomplished hunter and warrior, often visited Fort Union to trade. She was a respected and celebrated leader among the Crow and among whites at Fort Union. Her story was recorded by Denig, who wrote that she could kill four or five bison, cut up the animal, and bring the meat and hides home, all on her own. Regarding her prowess as a warrior, Denig wrote of her escape from her enemies, and entering the gates of Fort Union to shouts and praises from whites and her own people.²⁵³

Overall, the trade pattern created displacement. Assiniboiné bands continued their decline as middlemen while the American Fur Company placed their own professionals in the position at every opportunity. This affected ethnic group relations. The new role of the Assiniboiné as clients and customers within the bison economy gave them limited options.²⁵⁴ Their only outlet was their ability to price shop between competing Canadian markets and American posts.²⁵⁵ As a counter result, the fur traders sought effective ways to gain the allegiance of bands. Working within the ceremonial structure of the earlier trade patterns was key to maintaining positive trade relationships with the Indians. Gift giving became the mainstay in trading relationships, a process that the fort personnel viewed as necessary but regrettable, since it cut into the profits. The major items dispensed in the gift giving tended to be alcohol, tobacco, or clothing that demonstrated some sort of allegiance to the post (i.e., military clothing).

Gift giving ceremonies helped foster both allegiance and dependence among the Plains groups. Allegiance was predominantly gained through the distribution of military type accoutrements while dependence was fostered through the distribution of alcohol and tobacco.²⁵⁶ By 1832, the American Fur Company’s use of alcohol as an inducement to trade had become a serious problem for Indians.²⁵⁷ A U.S. ban on the use of alcohol to cement trade relations was ineffective as the competing British companies still continued its distribution. As a result, Fort Union continued to use alcohol illegally to maintain trade relationships.²⁵⁸ Only the Crow, the Ojibwa, and the Arikara were able to forestall dependency on the alcohol trade, but only until after the decline of the bison trade.²⁵⁹ Denig noted the suffering dealt the American Indians by this competition between companies.²⁶⁰

The American Fur Company accommodated the subsistence, consumption, and overall trade patterns of the Indians in order to obtain every marketable commodity they produced for fort profit.²⁶¹ The early expectations were for the production of furs, then robes, meat, grease, and pemmican.²⁶² The robes and furs were marketed for export and the food production served to sustain the fort employees. This is not to say that the tribes were forced into the pattern or had little choice in matters. The groups were still adept at bartering and would take

²⁵² Lansing, 421, 426.

²⁵³ Leslie Coffman, “The Women,” Fort Union Trading Post Site Bulletin, summer 2014, citing Denig.

²⁵⁴ Miller, “Role of the Assiniboiné.”

²⁵⁵ Alan M. Klein, “Political Economy of the Buffalo Hide Trade: Race and Class on the Plains,” in John H. Moore, ed., *The Political Economy of North American Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 148; Miller.

²⁵⁶ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 139, 142.

²⁵⁷ Klein, “Political Economy,” 148.

²⁵⁸ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 70.

²⁵⁹ Lewis O. Saum, *The Fur Trader and the Indian*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), 213-215.

²⁶⁰ Denig, *The Assiniboiné*, 458.

²⁶¹ Swagerty, “Indian Tribes in the Trans-Mississippi West,” 369.

²⁶² Miller, “Role of the Assiniboiné.”

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nothing less than a fair price, as they were not completely reliant upon the trade items. Also, as Denig complained, they were skilled in forgetting about debt from lines of credit.²⁶³

While kinship ties and gift-giving fostered relationships, dependency was the result of continued introduction of trade items into the economy. As the once diverse Plains cultures came to resemble each other more and more, the trade fostered competition over materials, land, labor, and resources.²⁶⁴ The key to success in this competition was in access to horses and guns. Horses were necessary for transportation and were increasingly relied upon for hunting. This became the motivation for raiding.²⁶⁵ Guns, while dispensable for hunting, doubled the chances of success in raiding and gave greater efficiency of killing small animals and humans.²⁶⁶

The increasing number of metal implements introduced to Indians through trade required maintenance. The tribes became very dependent upon the local blacksmith to fix broken items or for the company to replace them. Similarly, as hunting and warfare styles were modified to include rifles, bands needed to obtain sufficient amounts of ammunition and have the weapons and tools maintained.

As Fort Union became the home post for the Assiniboiné, new roles and relationships developed for the Indians and for the fort employees. The Assiniboiné became the fort's primary suppliers of robes, furs, and food, and also acted as interpreters, security, and, once again, as middlemen for longer distance trade. In turn, the fort became supplier of blacksmithing, hospital care, a broker of peace between bands, and a place for safe community recreation with other related bands and ethnic groups.²⁶⁷ The American Fur Company policies succeeded in creating job dependency by giving young men jobs as "security guards" at the fort. These relationships were long term.

As other systems changed within Indian culture, Fort Union also became a place to house the elderly and sick. In observation of the fort's medical options and safety, the Assiniboiné began to look upon it as a retirement home and hospital, sending the sick and infirm to be safe within its confines. For a similar reason, due to the efforts of fort personnel to maintain peaceful interaction between groups, Fort Union became a safe zone where the home guard (Assiniboiné) could be safely visited by relatives or friends. The fort grounds also served as a location for negotiating peace agreements between conflicting groups. Many of these attempts failed and several accounts exist of Indian raids and warfare at Fort Union. Throughout the 40-year operation of the fort these patterns of interdependency between the company and the Indians continued to increase.

Perhaps the most visible change in Plains groups' social and political systems was the consolidation of bands into larger groups, sometimes inter-ethnic, to strengthen themselves in the face of increased competition from other bands. For example, the Assiniboiné and Cree organized themselves into single units, in response to hostilities with the Blackfeet and Sioux.²⁶⁸ As a response to an increase in the size of the basic social and political unit, Plains hunters began to adopt some of the social organizational structures that had previously only been used by the more sedentary, horticultural groups, such as police societies.²⁶⁹ The consolidation of the villages of Arikara, Hidatsa, and Mandan were responses to a similar situation. Reconstitution of the political organizations also helped increase the trading power the groups maintained with the American Fur Company.²⁷⁰

²⁶³ Denig, *The Assiniboiné*, 459.

²⁶⁴ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 180.

²⁶⁵ Miller, "Role of the Assiniboiné."

²⁶⁶ Denig, *The Assiniboiné*, 466.

²⁶⁷ Klein, "Political Economy," 151; Swagerty, "Indian Tribes in the Trans-Mississippi West," 370.

²⁶⁸ Susan Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization on the far northern Plains," *Ethnohistory* 21 (1974), 116.

²⁶⁹ Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, 180.

²⁷⁰ Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West."

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These changes were reflected in each level of social organization of Plains bands, from the individual to that of the entire linguistic group.

The notion of profitability became important within the newly adopted corporate system of exchange, undermining the traditional social and religious systems of hunting and horticultural groups.²⁷¹ Corporate kinship disappeared and was replaced by an individualistic economy where it was important that each individual hunter keep track of his personal kill. This pattern has been attributed to a weakening of kinship structure and traditional patterns of authority.²⁷² Gender class differences developed (often based upon youth and strength) within bands and further erased previous leadership patterns.²⁷³ As class differences became defined, heredity and inheritance began to figure more prominently in a family's retention of power and prestige. This affected the band's external relationships because the chief's personal animosities were often reflected in his personal trade relationships, alliances, and conflicts.²⁷⁴ Hereditary leadership caused these tensions to become ingrained, as it was most likely that a leader's children retained the same animosity or friendships.

As the roles of class and prestige changed, the role of women also changed. A man needed to have as many wives (providing skilled labor to process hides into robes) as he could reasonably afford in order to provide robes to trade in the new economy. As has been mentioned earlier, women's role in the production of marketable goods may have put them at a disadvantage and took away some of their original power.²⁷⁵ Regardless of the outcome, given the loss of population resulting from diseases, the acquisition of wives to contribute to the family economic endeavors became even more difficult. Increased wife raiding, captive taking, and inter-band marriage became necessary.

Various groups often threatened war as a mechanism to protect their territory and defend their personal trade monopolies. Their aggression was aimed toward other Indian groups, but also focused similar aggressions against local forts. They strove to maintain superior relationships by threatening the posts with these aggressive tactics.²⁷⁶ For example, the Crow treated Fort Cass as a component of the Indian economy and included it in their systematic raids, eventually bankrupting the fort.²⁷⁷

The market economy affected the reactions of the traders toward the Indians as well. The typical trader's view of Indians was that they were difficult to civilize and egotistical. The egotism was driven by the Plains Indians' status and prestige system, which the traders viewed only with tolerance because they understood that American Indians maintained a great deal of freedom and autonomy.²⁷⁸ Traders were also aware of the mistakes made by their predecessors and how prior trade policies had placed many of the Plains groups in competition with one

²⁷¹ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 95; Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West."

²⁷² Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, 181.

²⁷³ Klein, "Political Economy," 157.

²⁷⁴ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 55-56.

²⁷⁵ See John C. Ewers, "The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture, With Comparative Materials from Other Western Tribes," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 159 (Washington, 1955), Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, 1935), and Klein, "Political Economy."

²⁷⁶ Klein, "Political Economy," 148.

²⁷⁷ Fort McKenzie provides another example of the Indians' incorporation of forts into their own flexible systems of alliance and aggression. After years of positive trade interactions, several poor choices upon the part of the staff of Fort McKenzie resulted in hostile aggression. The Blackfeet, after enduring several episodes of diseases and mistreatment by the fort, quickly changed attitudes and began to implement hostilities upon white traders. Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 61.

²⁷⁸ Saum, *The Fur Trader and the Indian*, 204.

actively maintained peace treaties, and made numerous attempts at inter-group concessions and compromises.²⁸⁰

The Collapse of the Resource Base and the Fur Trade Economy

The declining years of the fur trade in the Upper Missouri featured the extermination of the region's predominant species, the bison, and more than two decades of war between the U.S. military and one of the West's most powerful tribes, the Sioux. The two factors were integrally linked with the Sioux movement west in partial response to the contraction of bison herds.

A number of historians, beginning with William T. Hornaday in 1888, have tried to reconstruct the chronology and manner of the destruction of the bison as well as the sheer numbers of these animals that once roamed the Great Plains. Hornaday and subsequent historians in the early twentieth century described the hunting pressure that began during the fur trade but characterized it as mere prelude to the wasteful slaughter that accompanied the coming of railroads and hide hunters in the 1870s and early 1880s.²⁸¹ Recent scholarship has tended to show that the decline began much earlier, in the 1820s and 1830s, and that the original numbers of bison were so great as to sustain a heavy excess of killing over reproduction for some fifty years.²⁸² The American Fur Company continued to enjoy a successful profit between the 1840s and the 1850s, regularly marketing 90,000 to 100,000 robes per year in St. Louis.²⁸³ Yet, by 1855, Fort Union employee Edwin Denig observed a shortage of bison robes.²⁸⁴

Estimates vary on the bison population at the beginning of the nineteenth century, from the millions to the billions, as do theories of the impact of native population on those numbers. One study estimates that bison populations were in decline by the beginning of the nineteenth century due to predation, fires, climate change, drought, grazing competition with horses, American Indian preference for bison cows (for the softness of their hides), and American Indian hunting and trading techniques, particularly with the advent of the fur trade.²⁸⁵ In some instances, they deviated from their earlier pattern of using nearly every part of the bison and sometimes killed the animal only for its most marketable parts—its skin or even just its tongue.²⁸⁶

The pressure on the bison in the Northern Plains fell heaviest along the Missouri River, where the fur trade centered in the 1830s and 1840s. Emigrant traffic destined for Oregon and California moved along the Platte River in increasing numbers in the 1840s and 1850s. Hunting was not the only source of pressure on the bison; the spread of the horse and then the introduction of cattle and sheep resulted in competition for food. Trampling of grasses and overgrazing affected the bison's habitat, particularly along corridors such as the Oregon Trail.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 371.

²⁸¹ Burlingame cites William T. Hornaday, "The Extermination of the American Bison," *Smithsonian Reports*, Part II (Washington, 1888), and Isaac Lippencott, "A Century and a Half of Fur Trade at St. Louis," *Washington University Studies*, Vol. 3, Part II, No. 2 (St. Louis, 1916), among other sources.

²⁸² A recent study is Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Dan Flores, "The Great Contradiction: Bison and Indians in Northern Plains Environmental History," in Charles E. Rankin, ed., *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn*. (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996).

²⁸³ Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West." 367.

²⁸⁴ Miller, "Role of the Assiniboine;" Denig, *The Assiniboine*, 620-626.

²⁸⁵ Shepherd Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 136-140. The study notes that Indians did have wasteful tendencies when impounding and driving the animals. A single Indian hunter potentially obtained many more hides each year than his wives could possibly hope to process. As a result, each robe traded represented at least five animals killed. See also Flores "The Great Contradiction," 16.

²⁸⁶ In one notorious incident, some Yanktonai Sioux killed about 1,500 bison across the river from Fort Pierre and took only the tongues for trade. Two contemporaries, Edwin Thompson Denig and George Catlin, described the same incident and variously dated it as 1830 or 1832. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 103-107.

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of grasses and overgrazing affected the bison's habitat, particularly along corridors such as the Oregon Trail. Moreover, a widespread drought commencing in the 1820s stressed many bison herds. Settlers moving up the Missouri River Valley took lands formerly considered unsuitable for white development. Because the pressure on the bison was not spread evenly throughout the Northern Plains, fur posts on the Upper Missouri probably experienced a decline in the trade sooner than scattered fur posts elsewhere. Fort Pierre reported a trade of 75,000 bison robes in 1849—over two-thirds of the robes produced in the Northern Plains that year. But by the early 1850s, the bison were practically eliminated from this area. Even as the total number of robes shipped to St. Louis increased through 1860, the number of robes collected by the Upper Missouri River posts declined—from an estimated 110,000 in 1849; to 89,000 in 1853; then to 50,000 in 1859.²⁸⁷

Regardless of the level of responsibility attributed to native populations or increasing levels of non-native hunting after 1860, the levels of bison exploitation virtually guaranteed the collapse of the resource.²⁸⁸ Bison would be nearly extinct by 1883, and the final shipment of hides took place in 1884. The results of the depletion of market opportunities for native groups were devastating. Along with their acceptance of the market economy and the resultant changes to social and political patterns, the groups lost their knowledge of past subsistence strategies. This plunged them into a state of poverty, reliance on newly created government Indian agencies, and the first major step towards loss of freedom.²⁸⁹ The fur trade also lost its main source of labor.²⁹⁰ The groups who had contributed the most to the trade economies of the upper Missouri and Northern Plains (namely the Assiniboiné, Blackfeet, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Crow) became increasingly dependent upon the Indian agents and rejected opportunities to join the Sioux—with whom they had been in conflict for decades—in their battle with the government.

When Fort Union was established in 1828, it occupied the territory of the Assiniboiné and served as a threshold to the territory of the Blackfeet. But in the following decades the Sioux tribes pushed westward. By the 1850s the tribes of the Sioux or Lakota were the most forceful and aggressive of the Northern Plains alliances. The Sioux were relative newcomers to the area, having retreated westward from the Great Lakes in the eighteenth century in the face of pressure from the Ojibwa to the east. In the early nineteenth century the Sioux alliance was composed of seven groups or divisions. The four eastern divisions (the Mdewakantons, the Wahpetons, the Wahpekutes and the Sissetons) were known collectively as the Santee Sioux and lived along the Minnesota River. The middle divisions were the Yankton and Yanktonai and lived east of the Missouri. The western division, known as the Teton Sioux, was in turn divided into seven bands: Oglala, Brule, Miniconjou, Two Kettle, Sans Arc, Hunkpapa, and Blackfeet (not to be confused with the Blackfeet farther west). Although the Sioux were spread across a large area and their culture varied widely from the village-dwelling, rice-gathering Santee in the east to the nomadic, bison-hunting Teton in the west, nevertheless they had an effective alliance and were able to push into their neighbors' territories.²⁹¹

In the course of their long westward movement the Sioux formed many enemies.²⁹² In an effort to end intertribal warfare, as well as to obtain Indian consent to the building of roads and railroads across the plains, the U.S. negotiated the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1851. The council, held on the North Platte River, drew some

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 106.

²⁸⁸ Miller. "Role of the Assiniboiné."

²⁸⁹ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 212.

²⁹⁰ Rhoda R. Gilman, "Last Days of the Upper Mississippi Fur Trade," in *People and Pelts: Selected Papers of the Second North American Fur Trade Conference*, Malvina Bolus, ed. (Winnipeg: Peguis Publishers, 1972), 127.

²⁹¹ Robert M. Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 4.

²⁹² Ethnologist John Ewers has written that the Sioux fought no fewer than twenty-six other Indian tribes, as well as the Red River Métis and the U.S. Army. They fought at least ten woodland Indian tribes, all the tribes of the Assiniboiné-Cree alliance, the Mandan-Hidatsa tribes, and the Blackfeet and their allies. To the south, they fought the Iowa, Omaha, Oto, Ponca, and Pawnee. John C. Ewers, "Intertribal Warfare as the Precursor of Indian-White Warfare on the Northern Great Plains," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 6 no. 4 (October 1975), 407.

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10,000 Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Gros Ventre, Assiniboiné, Arikara, and Shoshone. For most of the Northern Plains tribes, it was their first treaty with the United States. Each tribe was recognized to be in possession of a certain territory, and each territory was marked off from the others. Although the tribes maintained the right to hunt elsewhere, they had agreed in essence to restrict themselves to certain boundaries that would supposedly keep them at peace.²⁹³ The federal government promised an annuity of \$50,000 for ten years, which could be extended another five years at the discretion of the President. Each year, the annuities—goods of various kinds purchased from suppliers in St. Louis—were taken up the Missouri River by steamboat, often via contracts with the fur trading companies.²⁹⁴ Increasingly, the Sioux and other nomadic tribes divided into two groups: those who continued to pursue the dwindling herds of bison and those who depended in varying degrees on the food stuffs dispensed at the forts.

More years would pass before the Sioux and other powerful tribes of the Northern Plains would accede to reservations. The contraction of the bison herds forced the Sioux to seek new hunting grounds to the west. By 1855 the first major military action against the Sioux took place, following the death of Lieutenant John Grattan and his entire command of twenty-nine soldiers in a foolish attempt to intimidate the Sioux.²⁹⁵ A small military force occupied Fort Pierre (downriver in what is today South Dakota) for the next two years, and General William S. Harney negotiated a peace with various bands of Sioux. The force withdrew in 1857, leaving the Upper Missouri once more to the American Indians and the fur traders.²⁹⁶ However, by the 1860s the Sioux were attacking fur forts up and down the Upper Missouri from Fort Pierre to Fort Union. Most of the engagements between the Sioux and the U.S. Army in the dozen years following the Civil War were fought west of the territory assigned to the Sioux in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.

At Fort Union, troubles had mounted by 1855. On the way down the river to St. Louis in 1855, bourgeois Alexander Culbertson was detained by some Yankton Sioux who threatened to kill him and his party. Later that spring, a group of seven white traders suffered an attack by a Sioux war party between Fort Union and Fort Sarpy. Five days after this party struggled into Fort Union, another Sioux war party surrounded the fort but was dissuaded from attacking it.²⁹⁷ The largest Sioux attack on Fort Union came in the summer of 1860, when approximately 250 mounted Sioux charged the post. Refusing to speak with Indian Agent Schoonover, the warriors killed two dozen cattle outside the walls, burned the outbuildings and tons of hay, cordwood, and building lumber, fired two large mackinaws, and cut them loose. Traders opened fire after about a dozen Sioux attacked the pickets of the fort with hatchets and firebrands. The attack ended after the death of one Sioux and wounding of two or three others.²⁹⁸ The Sioux threatened Fort Union again in 1861, and yet another time in 1863, a foreshadowing of events leading to the final days of the now dilapidated fur trading fort.

²⁹³ The Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1851 was a milestone on the road to reservations, allowing future actions by the Federal government to force individual groups onto more restricted reserves without upsetting their neighbors. Robert A. Trennert, Jr., *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 194.

²⁹⁴ Annuities were supposed to include farm implements and seed, items that would encourage Indians to adopt farming in place of a roaming, hunting life. The Indian service was also supposed to provide schools and demonstration farms. These aspects of the new federal Indian policy were slow to develop. Guthrie and Gerald, "Upper Missouri Agency," 47-56.

²⁹⁵ This incident was provoked by Mormon emigrants who complained in 1854 that a band of Sioux had stolen a cow that had strayed from their wagon train near Fort Laramie. See also R. Eli Paul, *Blue Water Creek and the First Sioux War, 1854-1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

²⁹⁶ Paul; Robert G. Athearn, *Forts of the Upper Missouri* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 51; Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, 169-171.

²⁹⁷ Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, 165.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

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Changing Federal Indian Policy and Fort Union's Abandonment

The Sioux wars in the 1850s were emblematic of a decisive change in federal Indian policy that occurred around mid-century. It represented a change in U.S. relations with American Indians from one of commerce to conflict, driven by a change in perception about the viability of the Great Plains for white settlement, and popular opinion that native peoples should be confined to reservations and taught the arts of "civilization" (made to farm the land). The concept of a previously-established "permanent Indian frontier" west of the Mississippi River, was becoming untenable. Although the reservation policy had all the markings of a system aimed at appeasing white greed, it was motivated as well by a growing concern for the Indians' future. Humanitarians saw that the Plains Indian cultures were doomed by the destruction of the bison and recognized the fallacy of leaving Indian-white relations in the hands of the fur traders. They believed that the Indians must be insulated from whites while they were given a chance to assimilate white values and skills.²⁹⁹

Further pressures would develop with military surveys in advance of establishment of a transcontinental railroad. In 1853, Congress required the U.S. Army to survey several possible routes. Chief of the survey, Isaac I. Stevens (also governor and Indian agent for Washington Territory), led the northernmost survey, which included civilian artist John Stanley Mix and naturalists Dr. George Stuckley and James Cooper. It was Stevens' intent to create treaties with American Indians along the proposed route. The survey stopped at Fort Union for ten days. Knowing he would be passing through Blackfeet territory, Stevens appointed Culbertson as special agent to the Blackfeet in 1853, due to the bourgeois' marriage to Natawista. Insisting that she travel with her husband and the survey crew, it was Natawista, not her husband, who convinced her tribe and her cousin, a prominent Blackfeet leader, to allow the railroad to pass through tribal lands. As an agent of cultural change, and with obvious conflicts of loyalty and emotion, Natawista decided that her knowledge of the two cultures could shape future relations between whites and her people. Her actions, and the actions of other American Indian women involved in the Upper Missouri trade, reflected lives changed by the dynamics of the fur trade, to the point where they themselves acted as agents of change, transforming Plains societies from within.³⁰⁰

Other military explorers traveled through the area in the late 1850s with the goal of developing a military strategy for the upper Yellowstone River area, involving American Indians and their relation with railroad builders and immigrants. The 1859 Topographical Survey led by Captain William F. Reynolds met with opposition by most Sioux bands.³⁰¹

Troubles between the Sioux and the Army mounted in the early 1860s. Gold discoveries in Idaho in 1860 and Montana in 1861 prompted increases in overland migration through the Sioux country, as did the 1861 creation of Dakota Territory. The nation's plunge into Civil War distracted attention away from the Indian frontier, but it also heightened the military's standing. In 1862, when the Sioux in Minnesota took up arms against the whites because they were not receiving annuity payments, the Army received swift Congressional support to quell the revolt. Commanding officer General John Pope focused on the Sioux in eastern Dakota Territory. In the summer of 1863, he sent two columns westward under the commands of General Henry H. Sibley and General Alfred Sully, the latter moving up the Missouri River to Fort Pierre. The campaign against the Sioux was resumed in the summer of 1864, with Sully pursuing the Sioux all the way into Montana.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 194.

³⁰⁰ Lansing, 430-432, citing "Report of Isaac Stevens, Governor of Washington Territory," *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1854* (Washington, DC, 1855), 195-196.

³⁰¹ Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, 88-91.

³⁰² Ronald Phil Warner, "Fort Buford: Sentinel on the Northern Plains, 1866-1895," (Master's thesis, University of North Dakota, 1986), 10-13.

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As Sully marched overland through the Badlands to the Powder River, he sent Company I of the Thirtieth Wisconsin Regiment to occupy Fort Union and hold it as a supply base for operations in the Yellowstone Valley. The first troops arrived on June 13, 1864, on board the steamboat *Yellow Stone*. The remainder of the company arrived four days later on the steamboat *Welcome*. Sully himself arrived on August 12. Sully had given thought to establishing a fort at the site of Fort Union but he was not impressed by the location or the condition of the fur post, describing the fort as “an old dilapidated affair, almost falling to pieces.” Instead, he had his engineer survey a site for a new military post a few miles below at the mouth of the Yellowstone.³⁰³

Company I remained at Fort Union through the winter of 1864–65, guarding supplies and making the fort a target for more Sioux demonstrations. By then, the Sioux had killed all the livestock at the post, destroyed the kitchen garden, and suppressed most of the post trade with the Assiniboine. The fort itself was in poor shape.³⁰⁴ There were no incidents with the Sioux until a few weeks before the troops’ departure. On April 27, 1865, a party of three soldiers went out to hunt and was attacked by about two dozen Sioux. One soldier and one Sioux were killed. On June 4, 1865, the company was relieved of its duty at Fort Union by two companies of the First U.S. Volunteer Infantry, and boarded the *Yellow Stone*.³⁰⁵

The replacements were Confederate prisoners of war who had volunteered to serve on the frontier rather than languish in prison camps. On August 13, most of this company departed, leaving only a lieutenant, a doctor, and eighteen soldiers to guard the government supplies. In the meantime, a steamboat had arrived with the news that the North Western Fur Company had purchased Fort Union from Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company.³⁰⁶

The end of Fort Union followed a series of councils with representatives of nine Sioux tribes in October 1865, and a promise by the government to provide annuities in exchange for a promise that emigrant trains could pass unmolested through Sioux country. The Army then undertook the establishment of a chain of forts along the Upper Missouri—one of two routes the military determined could be properly defended. With this aim in view, Sherman ordered Colonel Delos B. Sackett, of the Department of the Inspector General, to proceed up the river and recommend sites for the various forts.³⁰⁷ On June 11, 1866, Colonel Sackett arrived at Fort Union to reconsider whether the Army could adapt the old fur post for its own use. Originally considered a strategic site for successful trade with the native populations, the confluence area would be identified as an equally strategic location for military undertakings against those same people. Colonel Sackett agreed with General Sully’s earlier disparaging appraisal of Fort Union, and recommended instead either the site of old Fort William, seven miles by river below Fort Union, or a location at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone.³⁰⁸ One day after Sackett made his inspection, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel William G. Rankin arrived at Fort Union with Company C of the Thirteenth Infantry. Two days later, Rankin commenced work on Fort Buford at the confluence.³⁰⁹

The final days of Fort Union passed ingloriously, with the deteriorated facility dismantled in 1867 for reuse at Fort Buford or burnt as firewood. Constructed to convey power, solidity and permanence in a wilderness frontier, Fort Union had enjoyed tremendous success for many of its 40 years. The next era of development at

³⁰³ Doreen Chaky, “Wisconsin Volunteers on the Dakota Frontier,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 80 (1997): 166-172; Mattison, “Fort Union: Its Role,” 200, citing Sully.

³⁰⁴ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 79-85; Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, 260.

³⁰⁵ Chaky, “Wisconsin Volunteers,” 175-176.

³⁰⁶ Thompson, *Fur Trade Empire*, 86-89. For a history of James Hubbell’s Northwest Fur Company enterprise, see William E. Lass, “The Northwest Fur Company in the Fort Union Region,” *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium Proceedings, September 13-15, 1990* (Williston, North Dakota: Friends of Fort Union Trading Post, 1994): 69-88.

³⁰⁷ Warner, “Fort Buford,” 28-29.

³⁰⁸ U.S. Congress. House. *Protection Across the Continent*, 39th Cong., 2d sess., Ex. Doc. 23, 1867.

³⁰⁹ Warner, 29-30.

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the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri areas would focus on Fort Buford and increasing confrontation between the Sioux and the U.S. military, culminating in the Great Sioux War.

Comparative Fur Trade Properties

In addition to Fort Union, five other fur trading establishments have also been designated as National Historic Landmarks, National Historic Sites, or National Monuments for having exceptional national significance. Though each one shares Fort Union's direct association with the fur-trade era, they also each represent important and distinct geographic and geo-political subthemes. **Grand Portage National Monument**, MN, commemorates the North West Company's important role in the eighteenth-century fur trade. **Fort Michilimackinac**, MI (NHL, 1960), built by the French on the south shore of the Straits of Mackinac in approximately 1715, was a strategically located fortified trading post built not as a military facility but as a link in the French fur trade system. This system extended from Montreal through the Great Lakes region and northwest to Lake Winnipeg and beyond. Today the fort is an archeological site with reconstructed buildings. Built by the British in 1780, Fort Mackinac on **Mackinac Island**, MI (NHL, 1960) was once the most important fur trading post and military center in the entire Great Lakes region. After the island came under the control of the United States, it became the northern headquarters for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company until 1840. Reconstructed **Fort Vancouver National Historic Site**, WA on the Columbia River has been determined nationally significant for its association with the Hudson's Bay Company's hegemony in the Pacific Northwest. **Fort Laramie National Historic Site**, WY served the Rocky Mountain trade area and therefore represents distinct trade patterns and cultural alliances. **Bent's Old Fort**, CO (NHL and authorized a National Historic Site, 1960) was reconstructed in 1975–76. It served the southern Rocky Mountain trade and is most-clearly associated with the Mexican-American War.

Archeological Theoretical Context: The Fur Trade, Fortifications, and Frontiers

Archeological investigations at fur-trading posts were among the earliest undertaken in the emerging discipline of historical archeology. This owes in no small measure to the fact that much of historical archeology in its formative years was associated with the mission-oriented goals of site reconstruction and heritage tourism. For example, the fur-trade post at Grand Portage, Minnesota, was first excavated in the 1930s,³¹⁰ whereas excavations began at Fort Michilimackinac, in northern Michigan, in 1959 and have continued every summer since that time.³¹¹

Not until much later, however, did archeologists begin to build a body of theoretical literature applying to the more general topic of frontiers. Historians, of course, had been examining the subject of the frontier in America, since Frederick Jackson Turner's controversial essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," written in 1893 and read at the American Historical Association meetings held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1894.

Given the early interest of historical archeologists with frontier outposts, it is not surprising that the frontier experience would be one of the earliest topics of theoretical discussion once the discipline began to develop beyond its initial descriptive phase. One of the first archeological attempts to address frontier theory was

³¹⁰ Alan R. Woolworth and Nancy L. Woolworth, "Grand Portage National Monument: An Historical Overview and an Inventory of Its Cultural Resources," 2 vols., 1982, MWAC.

³¹¹ Moreau Maxwell and Lewis Binford, "Excavation at Fort Michilimackinac, Mackinaw City, Michigan, 1959 Season," *Cultural Series* 1 no. 1 (East Lansing: The Museum, Michigan State University, 1961); Lyle M. Stone, "Fort Michilimackinac, 1715-1781: An Archaeological Perspective on the Revolutionary Frontier," *Anthropological Series* 2, (East Lansing: The Museum, Michigan State University, 1974).

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Kenneth Lewis's doctoral dissertation using data from the Jamestown excavations,³¹² later built upon by his work in the Southeast.³¹³ This work was largely focused on the development of settlement systems associated with frontier towns, however, and did not deal with remote trading establishments such as Fort Union.

Historical archeologists began to address the topic in many regions of North America during the 1970s and 1980s, when several influential books and articles were published, most notably Stanley South's *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology*, in which he defined the so-called Frontier Pattern, among others, using artifact assemblage data from the Southeast.³¹⁴ Other interesting studies of this period include Ray's examination of native populations on the frontier of the Canadian sub-arctic, Waslekov's study of Zumwalt's Fort, one of several dozen early nineteenth-century settler forts in Missouri, Hardesty's study of the Intermountain West, Ostrogorsky's examination of the frontier experience in Idaho, Ewen's study of the fur trade in Wisconsin, and Lightfoot and Martinez's critical analysis of frontiers and boundaries using the example of Fort Ross, a nineteenth-century Russian trading outpost in northern California.³¹⁵

One of the most important articles published during this period was Waselkov and Paul's analysis of the frontier concept, which included a critical examination of frontier models promulgated in archeology up to that point. They pointed out the failure of most models of frontier adaptation to consider fully the interrelationships of both intrusive and indigenous cultures in frontier situations, which they defined "as a transitional area, a zone of mixture and interaction, where societies meet in open competition. They also discussed several archeological implications of their frontier model, which focused on "changes in Euro-American and Indian settlement-subsistence patterns, economics, and material culture."³¹⁶

Later studies of the frontier were highly influenced by the theoretical writings of Immanuel Wallerstein, who advocated world-system analysis using a so-called "core-periphery" model that defined relationships between the parent society and remote colonial outposts.³¹⁷ Historical archeologists have adapted Wallerstein's concepts

³¹² Kenneth E. Lewis, *The Jamestown Frontier: An Archaeological Study of Colonization*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, Department of Anthropology, 1975).

³¹³ Kenneth E. Lewis, "Camden: A Frontier Town. University of South Carolina, Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology," *Anthropological Studies*, 2 (1976); Kenneth E. Lewis, "Pattern and Layout on the South Carolina Frontier: An Archaeological Investigation of Settlement Function," *North American Archaeologist* 1 no. 2 (1980), 177-200; Kenneth E. Lewis, *The American Frontier: An Archaeological Study of Settlement Pattern and Process*, (New York: Academic Press, 1984); Kenneth E. Lewis, "Functional Variation among Settlements on the South Carolina Frontier: An Archaeological Perspective," *The Archaeology of Frontiers and Boundaries*, ed. S.W. Green and S.M. Perlmann (New York: Academic Press, 1985), 251-274.

³¹⁴ Stanley South, *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology*, (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

³¹⁵ Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Arthur J. Ray, "History and Archaeology of the Northern Fur Trade," *American Antiquity* 43 no. 1 (1978), 26-34; Gregory A. Waslekov, "Zumwalt's Fort: An Archaeological Study of Frontier Process," *Missouri Archaeologist* 40 (1979); Donald L. Hardesty, "Historic Sites Archaeology on the Western American Frontier: Theoretical Perspectives and Research Problems," *North American Archaeologist* 2 no. 1 (1980), 67-82; Michael Ostrogorsky, "An Idaho Model of Frontier Settlement," *North American Archaeologist* 3 no. 1 (1982), 79-84; Charles R. Ewen, "Fur Trade Archaeology: A Study of Frontier Hierarchies," *Historical Archaeology* 20 no. 1 (1986), 15-28; Kent G. Lightfoot, and Antoinette Martinez, "Frontiers and Boundaries in Archaeological Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), 471-192.

³¹⁶ Gregory A. Waselkov and R. Eli Paul, "Frontiers and Archaeology," *North American Archaeologist* 2 no. 4 (1981), 309.

³¹⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*, (New York: Academic Press, 1980). See Charles E. Orser for a critique of these concepts in archeology, "World-Systems Theory, Networks, and Modern-World Archaeology," *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, ed. T. Majewski, and D. Gaimster, (Springer, New York, 2009), 253-268.

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in examining the frontier and even urban areas such frontier communities as Denver and even Alexandria, Virginia.³¹⁸

Although interest in developing theoretical models for explaining frontiers and boundaries was largely eclipsed by the diversification of historical archeology after the 1980s, scholars still examine questions related to the frontier experience.³¹⁹ Naum, for example, recently performed a comparative analysis of the frontier between Denmark and the Northwestern Slavic area and the colonial frontier in northeastern North America.³²⁰ Accordingly, analysis of archeological data derived from the site of Fort Union Trading Post can potentially contribute much to the continuing discussion and debate concerning the establishment and maintenance of frontiers in North America. Nationally significant questions concerning the frontier thus may be addressed and possibly answered. Such questions would also apply to the NHL themes of Peopling Places and Developing the American Economy.

Among the many questions that could be potentially investigated using data from the site of Fort Union Trading Post are the following:

- Does the artifact assemblage at Fort Union conform to South's Frontier Pattern or differ from it? What cultural behaviors can be inferred to account for any similarities or differences noted in the archeological record?

The site of Fort Union is ideally suited to examining this question, given the size and scope of its artifact assemblage. In light of the large artifact sample, which is essential to such analysis, the relative proportions of certain artifact categories in the assemblage can be calculated and compared with South's classic Frontier Pattern. Any similarities or differences might then be interpreted in terms of cultural behaviors and historical circumstances. This analysis would be highly informative, since South merely recognized patterning in the archeological record and did not take the next step of explaining it.

- Does Wallerstein's "core-periphery" model have any utility for explaining the frontier experience at Fort Union Trading Post? How was Fort Union linked to its headquarters in St. Louis and to the larger world economic system?

Again, the uniquely large artifact sample from the site of Fort Union is key to exploring this research question. The huge assemblage, and the even larger one that might be derived from continued field investigations at the site, can be assumed to be representative of the whole to a greater degree than collections derived from other contemporary sites. Analysis of the assemblage may reveal the extent to which Fort Union (at the "periphery") was linked with its headquarters in St. Louis (the "core"). Was Fort Union in a dependent relationship with headquarters or does the assemblage seem to indicate that it operated with a certain amount of autonomy? Sourcing of artifacts that can be identified with attention to place of manufacture should also be able to show the extent to which Fort Union was linked to the larger global economic system.

- Does Fort Union seem to fit any of the frontier models already developed in the archeological literature for other regions of North America? Can a new theoretical model be developed for the Upper Missouri?

³¹⁸ Sarah M. Nelson, K. Lynn Berry, Richard E. Carrillo, Bonnie J. Clark, Lori E. Rhodes, and Dean Saitta, *Denver: An Archaeological History*, (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008); Pamela J. Cressey and John F. Stephens, "The City-Site Approach to Urban Archeology," *Archeology of Urban America, The Search for Pattern and Process*, ed. R.S. Dickens, Jr., (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 41-62; Pamela J. Cressey, John F. Stephens, Stephen J. Shephard, and Barbara H. Magid, "The Core-Periphery Relationship and the Archaeological Record in Alexandria, Virginia," *Archeology of Urban America, The Search for Pattern and Process*, ed. R.S. Dickens, Jr., (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 143-174.

³¹⁹ Bradley J. Parker and Lars Rodseth, eds., "Untaming the Frontier," *Anthropology, Archaeology, and History*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005).

³²⁰ Magdalena Naum, "Re-emerging Frontiers: Postcolonial Theory and Historical Archaeology on the Borderlands," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 17 no. 2 (2010), 101-131.

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As indicated above, scholars have developed theoretical models to explain the frontier experience in various regions of North America, but none have yet been developed for the upper Missouri region in which Fort Union is situated. Comparisons of the artifact assemblage at Fort Union with data derived from other frontier sites elsewhere in North America may be able to show whether those other models are applicable at Fort Union. If key similarities cannot be discerned in the archeological record, perhaps a new model can be developed to explain observable traits of the upper Missouri region for which Fort Union is the best analytical example.

- How was the early nineteenth-century bison-robe trade at Fort Union similar to or different from the fur trade as it was carried out in different eras and different regions of North America? What social mechanisms helped to sustain the trade at Fort Union?

The archeological literature is replete with studies of the eighteenth-century fur trade as it was practiced in such places as the Great Lakes and Canadian Subarctic. The fur trade in those regions was focused on the pelts of small game, such as the beaver, as well as other commodities, such as corn, fish, baskets, and other products of native manufacture. Fort Union is a site that best represents the lesser known bison-robe trade of the nineteenth century, and so it is critical to an understanding of differences between those economic systems. Gift giving, for example, was an important social mechanism supporting the trade that was employed by the French in the New World. Is there evidence at Fort Union for similar practices in maintaining relationships with native trading partners?

Other questions that potentially can be addressed with profit through analysis of the archeological record at Fort Union include the following:

- Does the archeological record suggest how improved means of transportation influenced the way the trade was carried out at Fort Union?
- Is social stratification among the fort's workforce evident in the archeological record? How did the lives of routine workers differ from managers and those who provided specialized labor?
- What does the archeological record indicate about subsistence practices at Fort Union? Were occupants of the fort more reliant on local resources or imported foodstuffs? Can subsistence differences be discerned among the Fort Union population?
- It is known that at least 10 different tribes traded at Fort Union. Is such diverse ethnicity among trading partners evident in the archeological record? What can be inferred about mechanisms for boundary maintenance on the frontier at Fort Union?
- How did the local cultural landscape influence the siting of Fort Union and affect the way trading relations were carried out?

Comparative Sites, Forts Clark, Primeau, and Pierre Chouteau

There are three other early nineteenth-century fur trading posts in the general region of Fort Union Trading Post that conceivably can be used for comparative analysis: Fort Clark, Fort Primeau, and Fort Pierre Chouteau. All four have been subject to limited archeological investigation and have the potential to yield additional comparative data that could prove useful in enhancing our understanding of Fort Union.

Fort Clark

The Mandan built an earthlodge village in 1822 on the bluffs of the west bank of the Missouri River at the confluence of Chardon Creek and Clark's Creek, downstream from the Knife River confluence with the Missouri. Nearly a decade later, in 1830–1831, James Kipp, representing the American Fur Company, built Fort Clark Trading Post immediately south of the Mandan village to initiate trading relations with the villagers. The first steamboat to journey to the Upper Missouri, the *Yellow Stone*, arrived at Fort Clark on its second voyage in

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1832 delivering a supply of trade goods before continuing upriver another 150 miles to Fort Union Trading Post.³²¹

The trade was much diminished after a smallpox epidemic swept through the Mandan village in 1837, killing most of its population. The survivors abandoned the village, which was subsequently occupied by neighboring Arikara who had fared better in the smallpox outbreak. The trade continued at Fort Clark for some years, but cholera in 1851 and smallpox again in 1856 devastated the population and spelled an end to the trade at Fort Clark, which was abandoned in 1860 after a fire.³²²

Archeological interest in the site of Fort Clark began as early as 1883, when Theodore H. Lewis reported on it while making a trip downriver from Stanton, North Dakota. The first excavations, however, did not occur until 1903-1904, when Emil R. Steinbrueck investigated a number of Mandan sites in the upper Missouri and briefly reported on the site of Fort Clark.³²³ The fort and village sites would later come under the protection of the State Historical Society of North Dakota in 1931 and together were designated a state historic site in 1938.³²⁴

Investigations related to the Mandan village were carried out by Donald Lehmer (Dana College) and W. Raymond Wood (University of Missouri) in the summer of 1966, but the trading post was not examined at that time. That would wait until the 1973-1974 excavations of site supervisor Chris Dill. Wood returned to Fort Clark in 1985-1986 to produce a map of the site and perform limited test excavations. These investigations, in part, led to the site's listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The most intensive investigations were conducted in 2000-2001 by a multi-institutional team lead by the late Stanley Ahler of PaleoCultural Research Group of Flagstaff, Arizona. Not only did they carry out extensive excavations at the site, they also employed several geophysical prospection techniques to examine broad areas of the site. This two-season study produced a wealth of new information on the site and showed its promise for future investigations.³²⁵ A National Historic Landmark nomination is in development for the site of Fort Clark.

Fort Primeau

This relatively short-lived trading post was built in 1846 between Fort Clark and the Arikara village by a competitor, the St. Louis Fur Company. Named Fort Primeau for one of the company principals, all of whom were former employees of the Upper Missouri Outfit of the American Fur Company, the post is not well described in the historical record. The business changed hands several times after 1854, eventually being purchased in 1860 by Pierre Chouteau, Jr. & Company. When Fort Clark burned in the summer of 1860, its occupants moved into Fort Primeau and continued business from that location until 1861, when the Arikara abandoned the village and moved to a new location upriver from the post. Operations then ceased at the post and it was abandoned.³²⁶

Archeological investigations at the post to date have been extremely limited, but showed promising results. Carried out in 2000-2001 by the same crew that was working at Fort Clark, the project included both geophysical survey and limited test excavations. Magnetic and electrical resistance surveys showed anomalies that seemed to correspond to a rectangular, U-shaped range of buildings about a central plaza and provided other details that appeared to conform to an 1860 sketch of the post by William Jacob Hays. The north and

³²¹ W. Raymond Wood, William J. Hunt, Jr., and Randy H. Williams, *Fort Clark and Its Indian Neighbors: A Trading Post of the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 45-46, 142-143.

³²² *Ibid.*, 141, 159-160, 164-166.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 213-216.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 219-228.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 192-193. See also *Twilight of the Upper Missouri River Fur Trade: The Journals of Henry A. Boller*, W. Raymond Wood, ed. (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2008).

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south palisades were inferred from linear anomalies, but other results were problematic. Of the two test units excavated after the geophysical survey, one yielded negative results while the other contained evidence of a burned structure.³²⁷ Although the results are more tantalizing than substantive, they do indicate that integrity of cultural resources at the site is good, and the site is likely to yield important information on operations at Fort Primeau if they were to be continued at some future date.

Fort Pierre Chouteau

Located on the Middle Missouri across the river from modern-day Pierre, South Dakota, Fort Pierre Chouteau was the largest and most important trading establishment in that region. Established in 1832 by the American Fur Company's Western Department, the establishment served nearly 25 years as a place where goods out of St. Louis were exchanged for bison robes. Yankton, Santee, Yanktonais, and Teton Sioux tribes all came to this spot on the river to participate in the brisk commerce. By 1855, however, the trade had waned, and the fort was sold to the U.S. Army for use as the first military installation in the region. That episode in the fort's history was very brief, as the Army abandoned this position on the river in 1857 and moved salvageable materials to Fort Randall, which had been established the previous year downriver near the present South Dakota-Nebraska border.³²⁸

Held in private ownership at the turn of the twentieth century and used for pasturing buffalo, the site of Fort Pierre Chouteau was deeded to the state in 1930, and in 1931 the South Dakota State Historical Society took responsibility for its management. A stone marker with bronze plaque was placed at the site in 1933, but little else was done with the site. Fort Pierre Chouteau was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 and would later achieve National Historic Landmark status in 1991 under NHL criteria 1 and 6.³²⁹

Archeological investigations were first undertaken at the site of Fort Pierre Chouteau in 1980–1981. Those efforts focused on delineating recognizable elements of the fort to obtain basic information on its location and layout. Investigations were continued in the years 1997–2001 with particular attention to assessing site integrity and the amount of damage that may have occurred from erosion of the river terrace.³³⁰ Subsequent geophysical survey of the property in 2007 ultimately formed the basis of a recent Master's thesis out of the University of Arkansas.³³¹ All of the work performed at the site to date has shown that integrity of the site is still good in spite of post-depositional disturbances, both natural and cultural.

Fort McKenzie

Some 750 miles up the Missouri River from Fort Union, near its confluence with the Marias River, lies the site of Fort McKenzie. Founded in the summer of 1832 by David D Mitchell of the American Fur Company, the post was named for Kenneth McKenzie who was at the time a factor at Fort Union. The fort was intended to reopen trade with the Blackfeet, replacing an earlier, short-lived post at this general vicinity called Fort Piegan (1831–1832), which had been burned by Indians after it was abandoned in the spring of 1832—not quite a year after it was established. The post was visited in the fall of 1833 by Maximillian, Prince of Wied, and the artist Karl Bodmer during their tour of the region. Maximillian's journal and a painting by Bodmer provide a view of the post as it looked soon after its founding. The post became an important source of beaver pelts and buffalo

³²⁷ Ibid., 229.

³²⁸ Will Stark, Amanda Adams, and Greg Ingraham, "Fort Pierre Chouteau Historic Site Management Plan, Fort Pierre, Stanley County, South Dakota." (Report prepared for The South Dakota State Historical Society-Historic Preservation Office, Pierre, SD, 2010), 5-7.

³²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Margaret M. Patton, "Geophysical Surveys and Archaeological Insights at Fort Pierre Chouteau, a Frontier Trading Post on the Middle Missouri," (Master's thesis, University of Arkansas, Department of Anthropology, 2013).

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robes as time went on. Eventually, however, relations with the local Indians deteriorated severely and continuation of the trade at this location became untenable. The post was abandoned early in 1844 and burned, either by the departing traders or by Indians after the traders had gone.³³²

The site of the old fort was visible for many years after its abandonment, though it would eventually be covered by silt from flooding episodes, particularly the Flood of 1908. The site was located in 1926 by a group of local businessmen, and according to a newspaper account, various trade items were found under about a foot of alluvium. Relict collectors thereafter began to loot the site, and in 1952 the site was leveled and planted by the farmer who owned the property. Prior to that event, however, an avocational archeologist, Maynard Shumate, surveyed the area, recording various surface features and collecting a considerable number of artifacts, which he reported in a 1973 article for the journal *Archaeology in Montana*. More extensive investigations were undertaken in 1976, when Garvey C. Wood, a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Montana, was permitted to excavate several 2-m-x2-m test units at the site. His excavations showed that, in spite of many years of disturbance, the site of Fort McKenzie still held the potential to yield archeological data sufficient for meaningful analysis.³³³

CONCLUSION

Currently designated an NHL for its association with the theme of Westward Expansion and the subthemes of the Fur Trade and Military and Indian Affairs, Fort Union has been recognized as historically important in the complex discussion of cultural interaction and impacts of manifest destiny and westward expansion. This NHL update re-emphasizes the Fort's historic significance under Criterion 1, drawn from recent scholarly research, and presents Fort Union as a representation of the impact of white settlement and resource extraction upon native cultures, alliances, and economies, including changes in the relationships between established tribal groups. The fort also represents American Indian response to non-Indian incursion; United States political hegemony secured first through commerce and ultimately through force; and the central role of geography and topography—of natural space—to historical process. The expanded historic district, including various sites, the landscape and reconstructions, incorporates resources important to these topics.

The site of Fort Union has already yielded a tremendous wealth of archeological data and interpretations pertaining to the early nineteenth-century bison-robe trade of the Upper Missouri. This is evident from the numerous completed reports and theses that have been produced. If no further field investigations were ever undertaken there would still be sufficient existing data to support any number of additional research studies, but there is also reason to believe that the remaining archeological record at Fort Union (estimated at 50% of the total site area) has the same outstanding integrity that was shown to be true in areas already excavated. These facts indicate that the potential for this site to yield archeological information of national significance is great. Not only can the site of Fort Union shed new light on a dynamic period of economic expansion in the Trans-Mississippian West, data derived from the site taken in context with data from related sites of the region may also contribute meaningfully to a continuing theoretical debate concerning the frontier experience in North America. Accordingly, the site of Fort Union (32WI17) meets the high standard of NHL Criterion 6 for archeological research significance.

³³² Maynard Shumate, "Fort McKenzie (1832-1843): Historic Site Salvage Archaeology," *Archaeology in Montana* 14 no. 2 (1973), 20-43; Garvey C. Wood, "Fort McKenzie (24CH242): A Study in Applied Historical and Archaeological Methods," *Archaeology in Montana* 18 no. 1 (1977), 43-62.

³³³ *Ibid.*

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

X Previously Listed in the National Register.

X Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

X Designated a National Historic Landmark.

___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #

___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

X State Historic Preservation Office

___ Other State Agency

X Federal Agency National: Park Service, Omaha, Nebraska and Fort Union National Historic Site

___ Local Government

___ University

X Other (Specify Repository): National Archives and Records Administration, Suitland, Maryland

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 600 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	13	572080	5317970
B	13	572385	5317975
C	13	572385	5317575
D	13	572080	5317575
E	13	572490	5316800
F	13	572505	5315300
G	13	570900	5316136
H	13	570842	5317153

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary incorporates all Federally-owned land within the National Park Service Fort Union Historic Site. This is an irregular boundary containing approximately 300 acres of federally-owned land within part of Sections 5, 7, 8, 17, 18 of T152N R104W; and part of Sections 13 and 24 of T26N 59E. Within the NHL boundary is included approximately 300 additional acres of land owned by the states of Montana and North Dakota below the OHWM on either side of and including the Missouri River. See attached site map and USGS topographic maps.

Boundary Justification:

Historically, there was no legally defined property boundary for the American Fur Company's property at Fort Union. The NHL boundary therefore has been drawn to include those areas above and below ground that retain the most integrity. Areas with less integrity were excluded, including areas with greater degrees of development that are outside of the period of significance. The built environment associated with the eras of exploration, fur trade, and military conflict includes the Fort Union archeological remains and reconstructions; the powder house, cemetery (location has not been confirmed, but it is within this proposed NHL boundary), and the archeological remains of the historically reconstructed Fort William outbuilding to Fort Union. Additional cultural resources include those natural features adapted to cultural use: the level plain west and north of the fort upon which the American Fur Company's American Indian partners established their villages; where livestock was fed and grasses cut and stored; where gardens were planted; and the ravines that served as secondary travel corridors. Included is the Missouri River and riparian areas in the immediate vicinity of Fort Union, which addresses the importance of this resource both as a travel corridor and as a source for construction material and fuel. The Bodmer's Overlook that inspired the most significant pictorial and narrative images of the confluence area is also included.

The boundary has been drawn so as to exclude evidence of major changes to the historic viewshed. The east and west boundaries of the NHL are defined by a combination of the natural landscape and property ownership. The south part of the NHL encompasses riparian areas on both sides of the river, forming a natural visual boundary to the NHL. This vegetation screen provides an important historic setting for the fort; areas further south were excluded due to the extent of irrigated croplands that have almost entirely replaced the native deciduous forests that once covered the area between the bank of the river and the base of the bluffs. The riparian vegetation within the NHL is also critical to assist in screening oil and gas development infrastructure south of the fort, a relatively recent phenomenon.

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The Missouri and Yellowstone River confluence area, although clearly a significant part of the fur trade story, is not included within the boundary. It has not only shifted over time in response to natural causes but has more importantly been impacted by intensive irrigation within the lower river bottom terraces, most notably through the Bureau of Reclamation's Lower Yellowstone Irrigation Project (1904). That work has made possible cultivation of specialty crops—small grains, flax, sugar beets, and hay—and has resulted in dramatic changes to historic vegetative species composition and to land-use patterns. This change in vegetation—from broad bands of deciduous forests to the regularity of irrigated, cultivated crops changes the historic viewshed from the early nineteenth century period.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

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Date: June 19, 2013

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1201 Eye St. NW (2280), 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

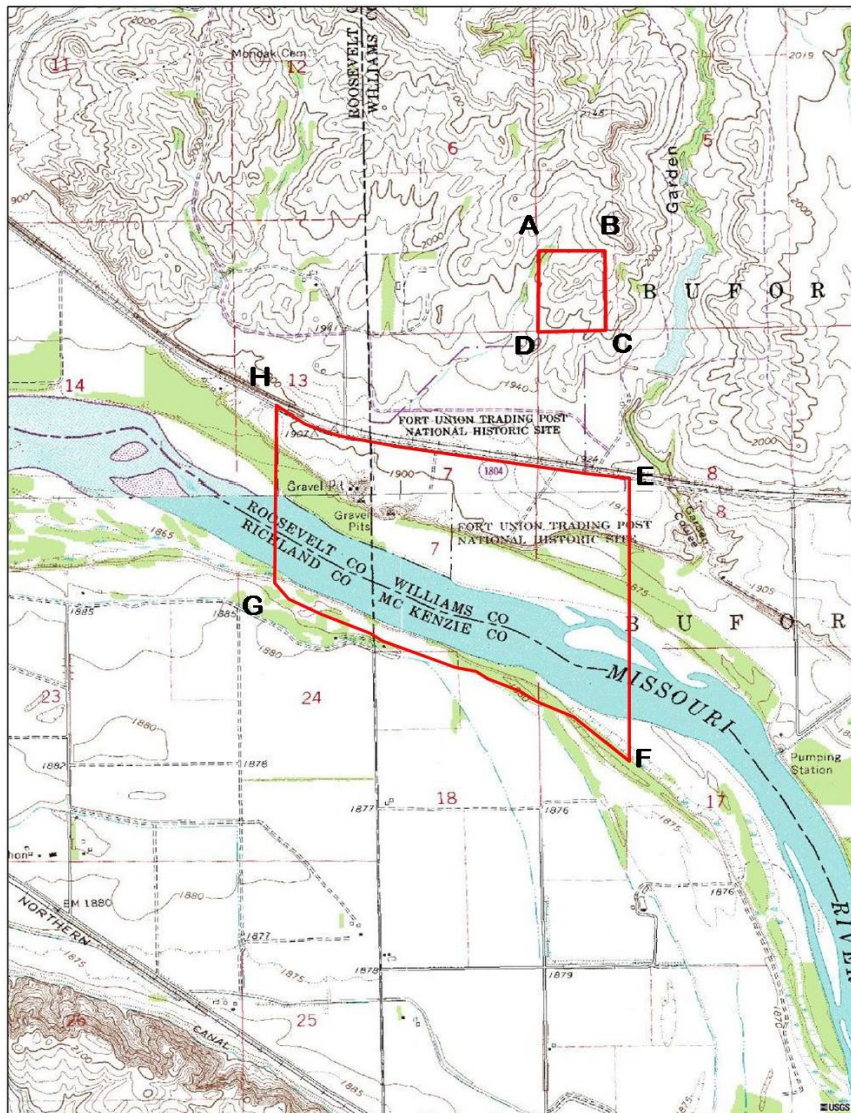
Telephone: (202) 354-2217 and (202) 354-2216

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM

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NHL Boundary/USGS Map

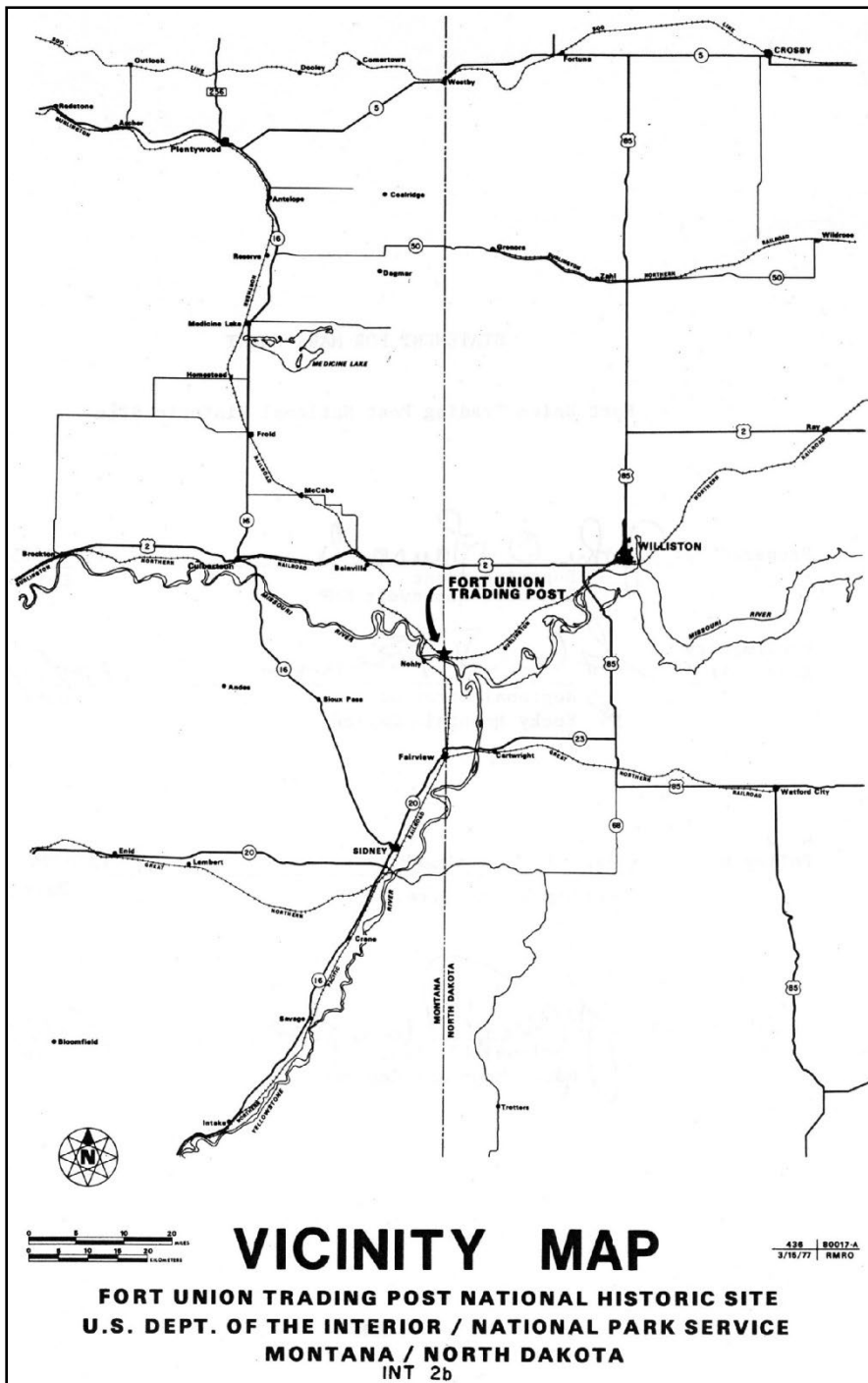
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A	13	572080	5317970
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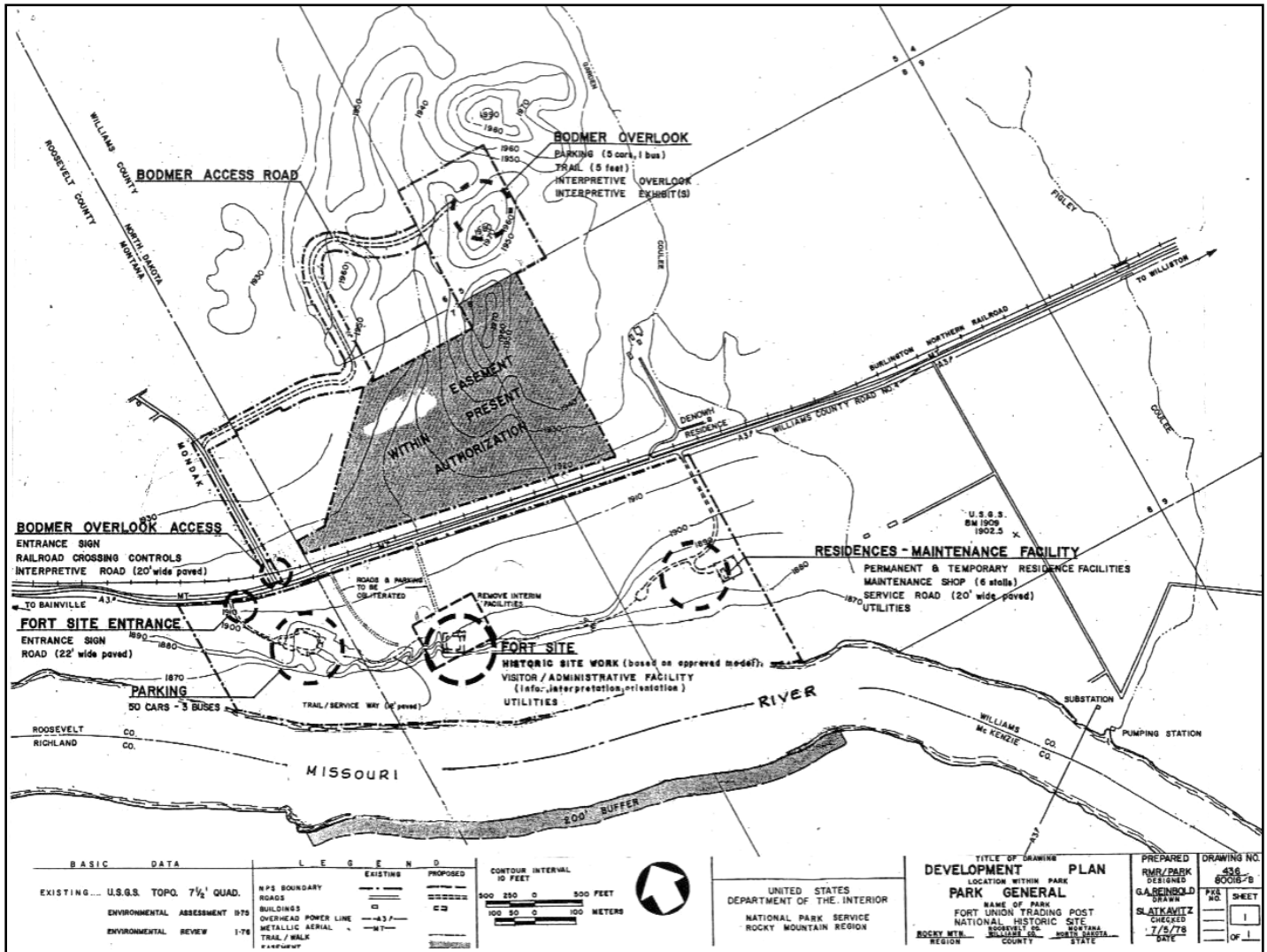


National Park Service, "Vicinity Map," Drawing No. 436/80017-A, March 15, 1977, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver Colorado.

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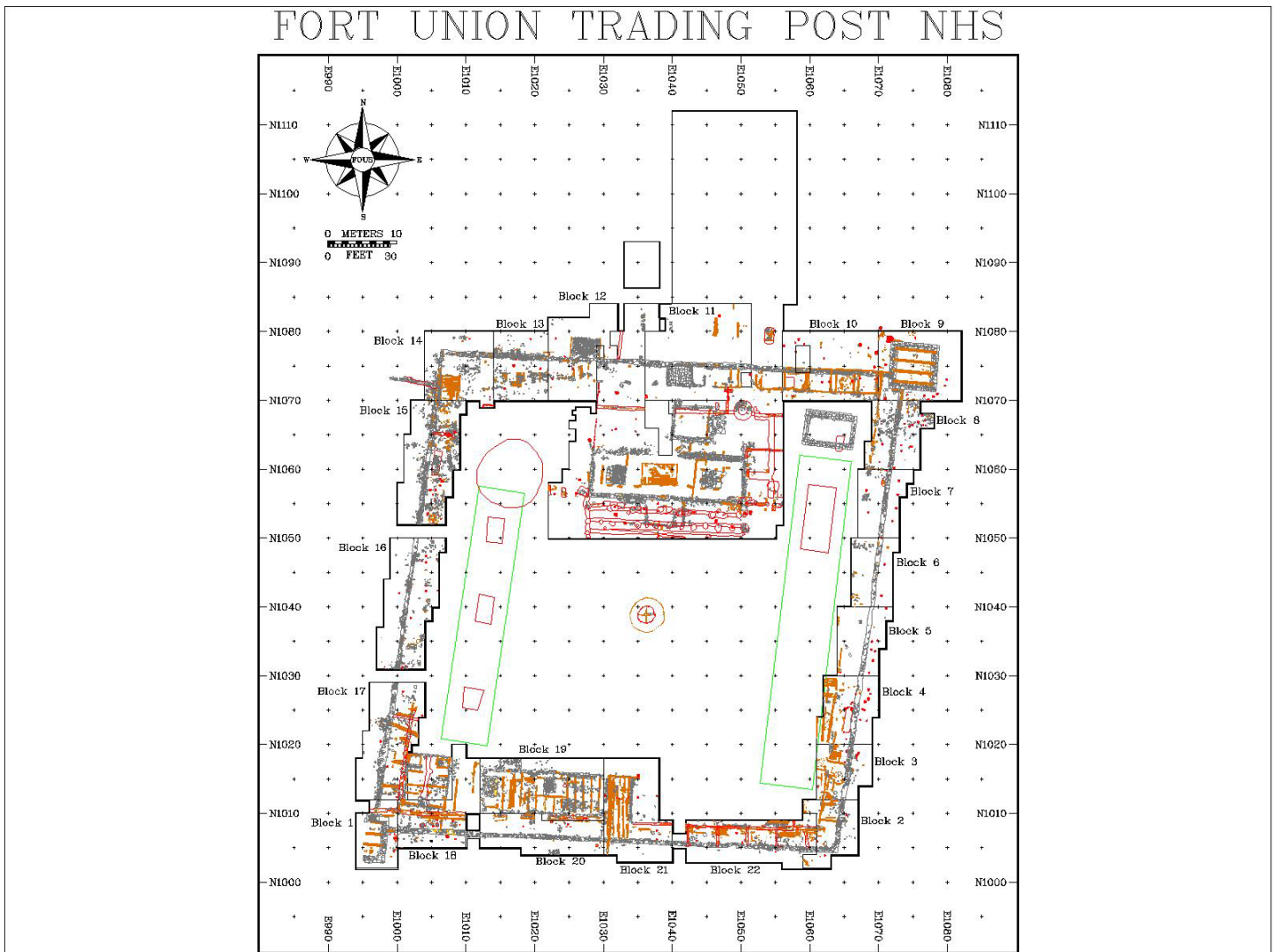


National Park Service "Development Plan," Drawing No. 436/80016-B, 1978, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver, Colorado.

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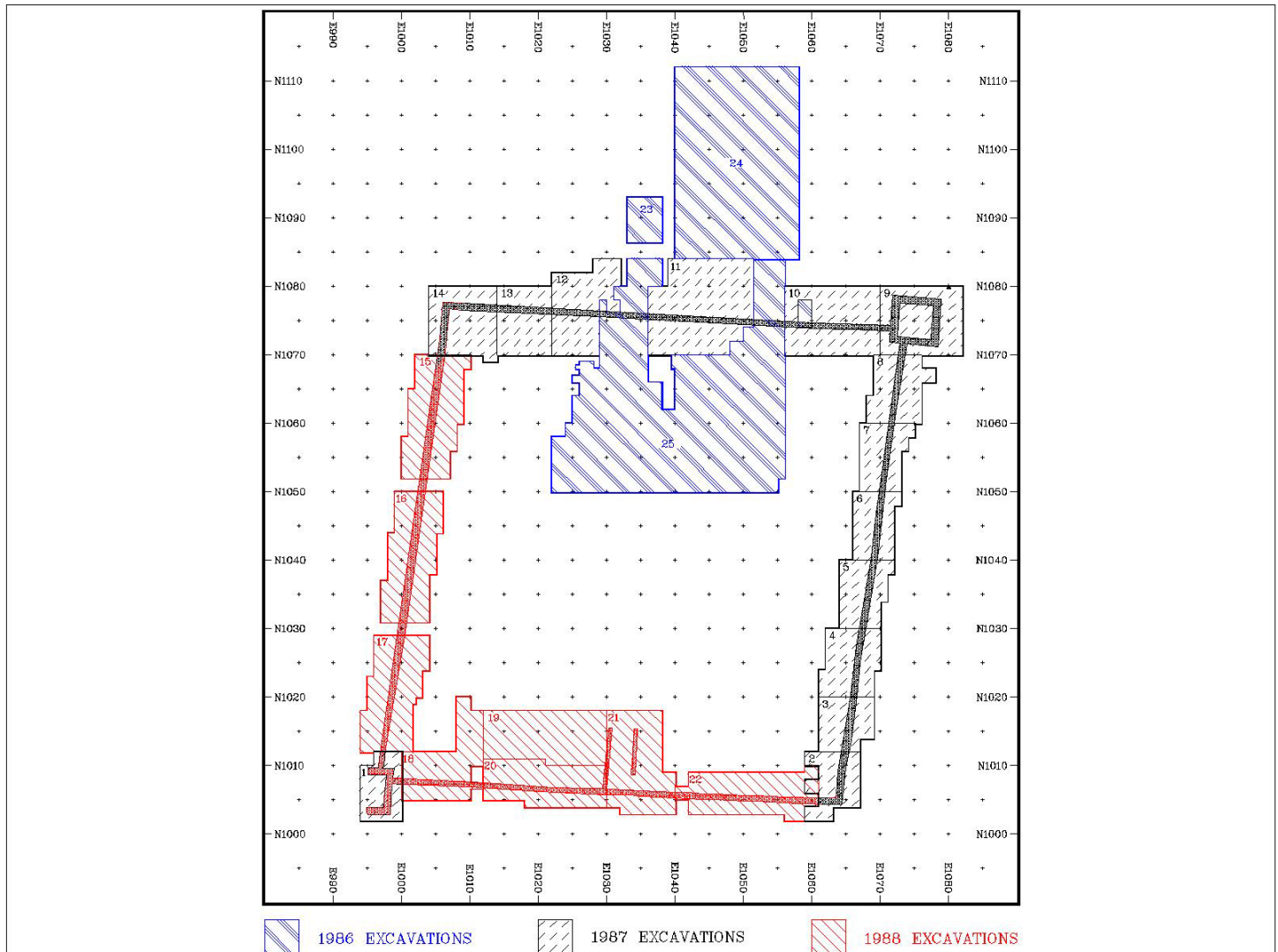
Fort Union site excavated areas with feature details. National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center graphic, Lincoln, NE.

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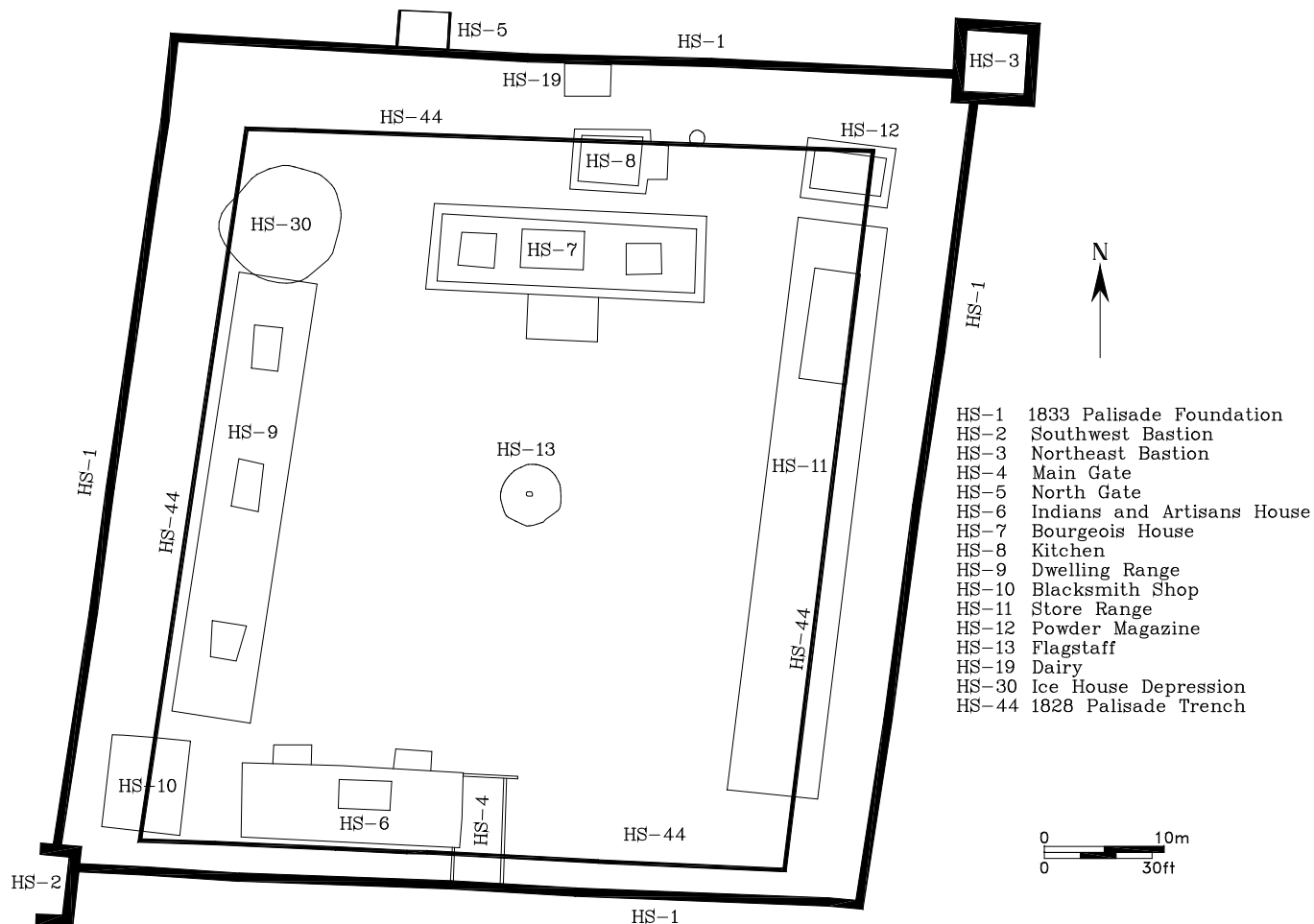


Extent of 1980s archeological excavations. National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center graphic, Lincoln, NE.

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Location of Fort Union Trading Post primary archeological resources. National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center graphic, Lincoln, NE.

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After Karl Bodmer, Swiss, 1809-1893; Charles Beyer and Lucas Weber, engravers, *Fort Union on the Missouri*, engraving and hand-colored aquatint on paper, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, Gift of the Enron Art Foundation, 1986.49.517.28.

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Fort Union circa 1843 watercolor by Jean-Baptiste Moncravie. From the Midwest Jesuit Archives, Missouri Province Collection, De Smetania Series IX C9 108, St. Louis, Missouri.

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Bourgeois House, 1851, by Rudolph Kurz. From the Midwest Jesuit Archives, Missouri Province Collection, De Smetania Series IX C9 107, St. Louis, Missouri.

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MISSOURI RIVER, TERRACE, FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION, UPLAND AREA
Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to north

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

Photo #1 of 13

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VIEW FROM BODMER OVERLOOK TOWARD FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION,
TERRACE AREA, AND MISSOURI RIVER

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to south

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

Photo #2 of 13

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VIEW FROM BODMER OVERLOOK TOWARD TERRACE AREA AND MISSOURI RIVER, GARDEN COULEE TO LEFT

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to southeast

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to east

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION, TERRACE AND RELATIONSHIP TO MISSOURI RIVER

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to east

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION AND RELATIONSHIP TO MISSOURI RIVER,
PARKING LOT TO LEFT

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to east

Photograph by Historic Research Associates, 2001

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FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION WEST PALISADE, DWELLING RANGE
FOOTPRINT, VIEW TO MISSOURI RIVER

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to southwest

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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**FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION EAST PALISADES, STORE RANGE FOOTPRINT,
VIEW TO MISSOURI RIVER**

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to southeast

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION BOURGEOIS HOUSE PORCH, FLAGSTAFF,
SOUTH PALISADE, INDIANS' & ARTISANS' HOUSE
Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to south

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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**FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTION, LOCATION OF ORIGINAL PALISADE
FOUNDATION AND ORIGINAL STONES**

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to northeast

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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FORT UNION TRADING POST RECONSTRUCTIONS BOURGEOIS HOUSE AND FLAGSTAFF

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to northeast

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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MODERN NATIONAL PARK SERVICE HOUSING BELOW UPPER TERRACE LEVEL

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to northeast

Photograph by Dena Sanford, 2012

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AERIAL OF FORT UNION TRADING POST EXCAVATION WORK, RECONSTRUCTED BOURGEOIS HOUSE AND FLAGSTAFF

Williams County, ND and Roosevelt County, MT

View to south

Photograph by National Park Service Midwest Archeological Center, 1988

Photo #13 of 13