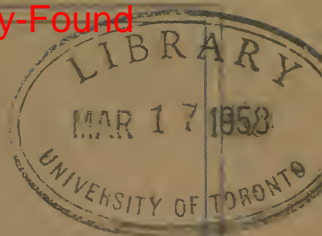


Harper, Frank B
Fort Union and its
neighbors on the upper
Missouri



Fort Union
and Its Neighbors
on the
Upper Missouri

A Chronological
Record of Events

By Frank B. Harper



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Fort Union
and Its Neighbors

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Upper Missouri

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Fort Union and Distribution of Goods to the Assiniboines



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Fort Union and Its Neighbors on the Upper Missouri

A Chronological Record of Events

By Frank B. Harper

In 1829 the imposing Fort Union, chief establishment of the American Fur Company on the upper Missouri, stood upon a grassy plain on the north bank of the Missouri, three miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. Its predecessor was Fort Floyd, said to have been erected in the vicinity by Kenneth McKenzie, Joseph Renville, Daniel Lamont and William Laidlaw, who withdrew from the Northwest Company of Montreal in 1821 and established themselves on the Missouri near the mouth of the Yellowstone, and were thereby instrumental in founding the Columbia Company. In the year 1827, through the purchase of the Columbia interests by the American Fur Company, the establishment known as Fort Floyd seems to have passed away, leaving no trace of its exact location. But four years of building saw lifted in its place the most formidable fur-trading establishment (with the probable exception of Fort Garry) ever erected in the Northwest. From then on, or until the decline of the fur trade, a period of forty years, the American Fur Company held sway on the upper Missouri, directing its affairs from Fort Union. This was a palisaded fort with stone bastions thirty feet high and pierced for cannon, surmounted with pyramidal roofs, and possessed of a gallery for observation and the usual banquette extending around the inner walls; the interior, roomy and secured by powerful gates, provided commodious barracks, a reception room for the Indians and apartments for the bourgeois; and all this was conducted upon the lines of formality and pomp, as became the dignity of notables formerly of the great Northwest Company of Montreal.

Practically nothing of the old fort remains today. A worn cedar post, used by the blacksmith at Fort Union, still stands on the original site and a declivity in the bank along the Missouri marks the probable location of an old tunnel which led from the kitchen of the early days to the river; presumably used for securing water during periods of Indian raids.

In 1830, Berger, a wandering trapper who had served with the Hudson's Bay Company at the posts on the south Saskatchewan



Photo by Courtesy of Charles N. Kessler, Helena, Montana
Kenneth McKenzie, Founder of Fort Union

frequented by the Blackfeet, appeared at Fort Union. He was the only individual who could accomplish for McKenzie his desire—the acquisition of the Blackfoot trade. Berger spoke their language and understood their characteristics, so he undertook to carry McKenzie's message to this warlike tribe. After a perilous journey of many hundred miles along the north bank of the Missouri to near the mouth of the Marias, he reached the village of the Blackfeet, the sworn enemy of the white man! When he and his party were perceived, the Indians rushed upon them, and they expected a speedy and barbarous death, but the Indians recognized them as former acquaintances from the Saskatchewan, and greeted them in a friendly manner. A delegation reluctantly agreed to accompany Berger to Fort Union, which was reached after a long and arduous journey. The conference there resulted in the signing of a treaty the following year, whereupon Captain James Kipp departed from Fort Union in 1831 and went into the country occupied by the Piegan branch of the Blackfoot nation at the mouth of the Marias River; there he erected Fort Piegan for the American Fur Company, the most advanced post in the habitat of this warlike Montana tribe.

In 1831, with Captain B. Young as master, the steamboat *Yellowstone*, first to ascend the upper Missouri, reached Fort Union. The *Yellowstone* left St. Louis April 16, having as its principal passenger Pierre Chouteau, Jr., director of the American Fur Company at St. Louis, who made the journey for the purpose of investigating the several posts along the river, and to satisfy himself as to the possibility of steamboating on the Missouri. The *Yellowstone* did not reach Fort Union until June 19, progress having been delayed by a low stage of water.

In 1832, D. D. Mitchell of the American Fur Company left Fort Union on the keel-boat *Flora*, bound for Fort Piegan at the mouth of the Marias. He carried a cargo of thirty thousand dollars worth of goods, including presents from McKenzie to the Blackfeet, where Mitchell was to assume charge of affairs. A storm at the mouth of the Musselshell swept the keel-boat from its moorings and she was lost with all the valuable goods. Two of the crew were drowned. When Mitchell reached Fort Piegan, he found it burned down by the Blackfeet, but instead of rebuilding Fort Piegan, he erected another post six miles above on the north bank of the river, known as Brule Bottom, which he called Fort McKenzie in honor of Governor McKenzie of Fort Union. In this year Pierre Chouteau, Jr., again visited Fort



Fort Benton

Union on the steamboat *Yellowstone*. In June he wrote his St. Louis partners from Fort Union that "Mr. McKenzie is preparing an outfit for the Yellowstone country in order to establish a post at the mouth of the Big Horn River for the trade of the Crows and surrounding tribes." The Yellowstone post was built in the fall of this year and was called Fort Cass. During the same summer, the distinguished artist Catlin visited the upper Missouri and was entertained at Fort Union.

In 1833 the notable traveler-writer, Maximilian, Prince of Wied, visited Fort Union. On April 10 he departed from St. Louis on the steamer *Yellowstone*, bound for the upper Missouri; among the passengers were Kenneth McKenzie and Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and family, the latter coming only as far as St. Charles. Below Fort Pierre they were joined by Daniel Lamont and D. D. Mitchell, who had come down from Fort Pierre to meet the steamer and return to the post with them. At this place, which was named for Pierre Chouteau, Jr., the *Yellowstone* returned to St. Louis and the continuation of the voyage to Fort Union was made on the steamer *Assiniboine*. Fort Clark was also passed on the way to Fort Union. Maximilian says that its site was eight miles below the mouth of the Big Knife River, on the west bank and about three-quarters of a mile lower down and on the opposite

side of the river from Fort Mandan (Lewis and Clark's wintering place, 1804-05), and that Fort Clark was built in 1831 by the American Fur Company, who were desirous of a post among the Mandans. He describes their arrival at Fort Union on June 24th:

1. "A short distance beyond the mouth of the Yellowstone lay Fort Union, with the handsome American flag, gilded by the last rays of the evening, floating in the azure sky, while a herd of horses grazing animated a peaceful scene. As the steamer approached, the cannon of Fort Union fired a salute with a running fire of musketry to bid us welcome, which was answered in a similar manner by the steamer. When we reached the fort we were received by Mr. Hamilton, an Englishman, who during the absence of Mr. McKenzie had performed the functions of director, as well as by several clerks of the company and a number of their servants (engages or voyageurs) of many different nations, about one hundred in number, with many Indians, half-breeds, women and children. It was the fifty-seventh day since our departure from St. Louis when the Assiniboine cast anchor at Fort Union . . . one of the principal posts of the American Fur Company . . . the central point of two other trading stations still higher up towards the Rocky Mountains, and having the superintendency of the whole of the trade of the interior, and in the vicinity of the Mountains (Fort Cass and Fort McKenzie). The proprietors of the American Fur Company are Messrs. Astor (at New York), General Pratte, Chouteau, Cabanne, McKenzie, Laidlaw and Lamont . . . Fort Union is built in the territory of the Assiniboines, of whom a certain number generally live here. The Assiniboines are real Dakotahs, or Sioux, and form a branch which separated from the rest of that nation a considerable time ago in consequence of a quarrel. They still call themselves by that name, though they seem generally to pronounce it Nacota. They parted from the rest of the tribe after a battle which they had with each other at Devils Lake, and removed further north. The tribe is said to consist of twenty-eight thousand souls, of whom seven thousand are warriors. They live in three thousand tents; the territory which they claim as theirs is between the Missouri and the Saskatchewan, bounded by Lake Winnipeg on the north, extending on the east to the Assiniboine River, and on the west to Milk River. The English and Americans sometimes call them Stone Indians, which, however, properly speaking, is the name of only one branch. The language of the Assiniboines on the whole is the same as that of the Sioux, altered by their long separation, and the influence of time and circumstances."

In this year, 1832, in September, there arrived at the mouth of the Yellowstone a party of Rocky Mountain traders and trappers from Pierre's Hole, Teton Basin. They were under the leadership of Sublette and Campbell, whose purpose it was to erect an opposition post on a spot about the same distance below the mouth of the Yellowstone as Fort Union was above it. This was accordingly done, and the name Fort William was given the new establishment. In the following year, however, Fort William was absorbed by its rival, Fort Union, of the American Fur Com-

1. *Travels in the Interior of North America*, by Maximilian, Prince of Wied. Translated from the German by Hannibal Evans Lloyd; edited with notes by Reuben Gold Thwaites. Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Co. (1905).

pany which left the latter master of the field. The old Fort William was dismantled and the timbers used within a year or two to build a new Fort William, which was said to have been re-erected one hundred and fifty yards from Fort Union. But another Fort William was built on the original site, which post was called Fort Mortimer in the forties, and upon this site the Fort Buford sawmill was erected in 1871. Fort William, or Mortimer, was in ruins in 1858, according to the author-trader Boller who saw it then and again in 1863. He says: "of old Fort William nothing was standing save a chimney or two. . . . The ruins are in plain sight of Fort Union, and the mountaineers speak regretfully of the good old days when both parties were in full tide of success." Buford station on the Great Northern Railway commemorates this historic place.

In 1834, with the transfer of the Fort William property to the American Fur Company at Fort Union, Charles Larpenteur, engagee and clerk with the former company, signed articles with Kenneth McKenzie and thereafter spent the greater part of his life in the service of the American Company. Larpenteur left a journal, under the title *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri*. This Journal, under date of November 15, 1834, contains the following entry:

"A party of Assiniboines under La Lance went to war with the Gros Ventres of the Missouri; on the 23rd, they (the former) were surrounded, thirty of them killed and ten wounded; fate of La Lance (Assiniboine Chief) uncertain, but he is supposed to have been killed. It was a sad sight that of the wounded, who reached Fort Union after a long journey (of several hundred miles), with hardly anything to eat, and the thermometer below zero. The Assiniboines were greatly excited over this defeat, and soon dispatched several war-parties to surround and if possible destroy the Gros Ventres village."

In 1835, the steamer Assiniboine which had rendered great service to the posts along the river was destroyed by fire on June 1st, being on the return journey of her annual voyage from Fort Union to St. Louis. The boat had grounded at the head of Sibley Island, near Little Heart River, about eight miles south of the present Bismarck. The river was falling at this time, and she had been left high and dry. A lighter was to be built to float her cargo down to St. Louis, and the steamer was to be left until the river should rise, but before her cargo could be discharged, fire broke out from a stovepipe in the cabin, and she was totally destroyed. The cargo, which consisted of 1,183 robes and peltries, and a large collection of Indian curios belonging to Maximilian,

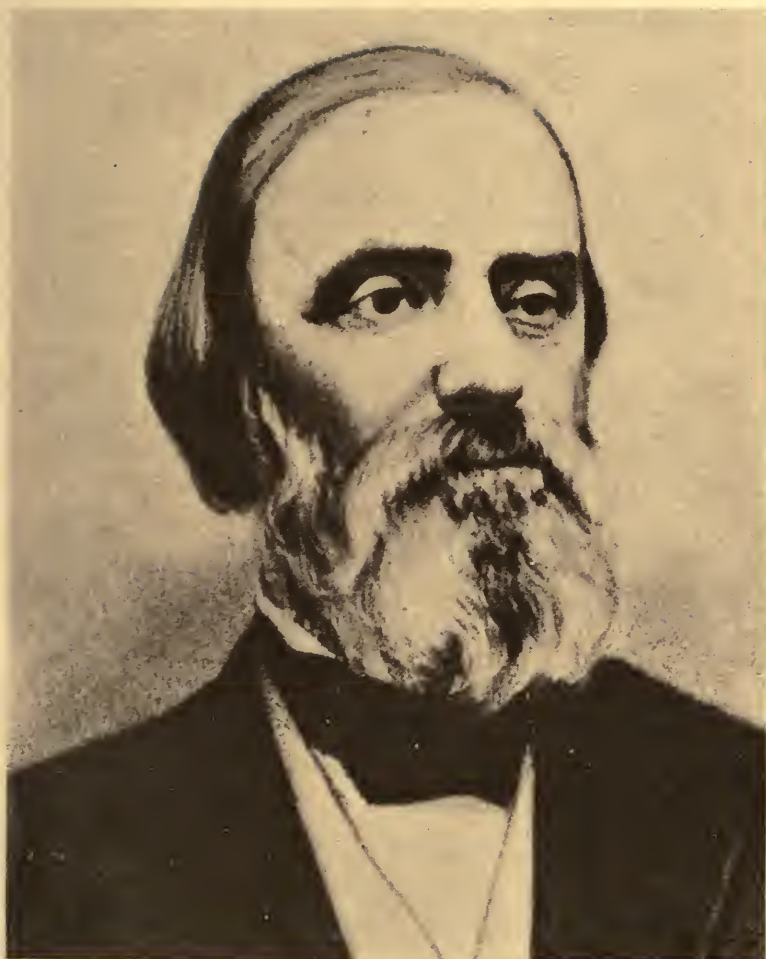


Photo by Courtesy of Charles N. Kessler, Helena, Montana

*Major Alexander Culbertson
Succeeded Kenneth McKenzie As Bourgeois of Fort Union in 1839*

Prince of Wied, was also lost. In this year Larpenteur's Journal contains the following entries:

"March 28th, 1835, Fort Assiniboine, an outpost of Fort Union, was abandoned, and on April 2nd, Mr. Lamont and the traders from that post arrived at Fort Union by the steamer which had been obliged to winter at Assiniboine on account of low water . . .

"April 24th, 1835. Mr. Kipp arrived at Fort Union from Fort McKenzie (the Blackfoot post near mouth of Marias River). His returns were brought down in a keel-boat and two Mackinaws, with a force of thirty-five men . . .

"May 17th, 1835. Party of Assiniboines at war with Gros Ventres and Mandans arrived at Fort Union at ten o'clock that night. Rapped on gates, proved to be war party of twenty men on return from Gros Ventres; admitted them. Soon afterward more knocking at gates. Indians in fort said it was rest of their party, consisting of seventy men. Things looked unpleasant. Hamilton gave orders to admit them. Suspected trouble. Made preparations. Laid eight or ten muskets on table in dining room; put small cannon in passage; raised window blinds and lit candles showing muskets, cartridges, etc., scattered over table, with four men ready for action; small cannon rolled back and forth in passage making great noise; two men mounted on guard with muskets and fixed bayonets. Indians amazed, but soon went peaceably to sleep without asking questions. At break of day, opened gates and in a few minutes none of party were left in fort. All hands tired; no sleep during night."

In 1836, the renowned Assiniboine chief, Gauche, otherwise Left Hand, who was feared by the surrounding tribes and the whites as well, raised a band of three hundred warriors to war on the Blackfeet. Gauche, said by Larpenteur to be Robert Campbell's chief, at times established his rendezvous in the vicinity of Fort Union and Fort William. De Smet says of him, "He was a crafty, cruel, deceitful man, a bad Indian in every sense of the word; his life was full of horrors. He seems to have been particularly infamous as a secret poisoner, and his arts as such, together with his theological juggleries made him the most feared and best obeyed man in the tribe he led for forty years." Gauche led his band of three hundred warriors toward Fort McKenzie, where he picked up the trail of his Blackfeet enemies, rich in trade-goods and horses. He fell upon their camp before daylight, when they were sleeping off the effects of liquor obtained from the fort, destroying thirty lodges and capturing three hundred head of horses.

In 1837, the smallpox plague ravaged the west and north, brought into the country by the steamer St. Peters (Audubon says the Assiniboine) which arrived at Fort Union on June 24. The plague ran well into the year 1838. It had made its appearance about the time the boat reached Fort Pierre on the upward

journey, but in passing the Mandan villages, an Indian purloined a blanket from one of the sufferers. Here it spread with unexampled fury, and this tribe was exterminated, with the exception of thirty persons, it is said. The Gros Ventres and Arickarees (four thousand souls) were reduced to less than half their former numbers. The Assiniboinés, nine thousand in number, were all but annihilated. The Crows and Blackfeet endeavored to fly in all directions, but the plague pursued them and left the dead in the mountain passes, along the rivers, on the plains and in the villages. The accounts from the Blackfoot country were almost unbelievable. According to statistics gathered from all sources, the number of Indians swept away by the scourge on the western plains was placed at 60,000, and some authorities gave the list at 150,000 victims. The whites at Fort Union had difficulty in preserving themselves from the wrath of the Indians for placing the scourge at their door as they believed.

In 1838, D. D. Mitchell was in charge of Fort Union and F. A. Chardon at Fort Clark. A change in the affairs of the American Fur Company took place in this year. A prior change had been made in 1834, when the Northern Department of this company was sold to a company of which Ramsay Crooks was the principal partner; and the Western Department to Pratte, Chouteau & Company of St. Louis. By this arrangement the American Fur Company retired permanently from the western trade, which now reverted to the control of the western traders; and in 1838 the company management of the Western Department underwent a modification in which the name was changed from Pratte, Chouteau & Company to Pierre Chouteau, Jr. & Company. These changes, and the fact that Kenneth McKenzie, who was called "King of the Upper Missouri Outfit", had erected a distillery at Fort Union for the purpose of evading the laws of the United states, bringing wide-spread odium on the company and seriously threatening its charter, seems to have closed McKenzie's career in the Indian country. He came down the river in 1834 and visited Europe. Upon his return, he went back to Fort Union for a short time, and again in 1838 and 1846, but soon left the country and established himself in the wholesale liquor trade. But with his habits of lavish hospitality, he soon spent the greater part of his fortune, dying in St. Louis on April 26, 1861. It is a sad commentary on the lives of these resolute men, that liquor served by them, which brought the red man's doom, was also the cause of their own downfall. Laidlaw, McKenzie's able assistant, died

a poor man. He built a house at Liberty, Missouri, where he kept open house for his friends as long as his money lasted. Hard drinking finished him. Jacob Halsey, partner of the Upper Missouri Outfit at Fort Union, met a similar end. Late in the summer of 1842 while on a visit to Laidlaw's home at Liberty, he became intoxicated and rode on horseback at a rapid gait through some woods. His head struck a tree and he was instantly killed. Halsey had come through the smallpox epidemic of 1837-38 at Fort Union, having been the first white man there to contract the disease.

In 1840 August Chouteau reached Fort Union, bringing an outfit up the river to trade with the Crows on the Yellowstone. In this year, also, the desperado-trader, Alexander Harvey, arrived at Fort Union on the steamer *Trapper* to take charge of Fort McKenzie. "He was one of those men who could never be convinced, and with whom it is no use to argue unless one wishes to get into a fight." Harvey, at an earlier period, about the time Fort McKenzie was built, found his way to the mouth of the Yellowstone. He engaged with the American Fur Company for that post, where he remained for a number of years (until the fall of 1839), but he became so troublesome and was so feared by all hands at the fort that reports were sent to Chouteau, who sent him his discharge. Although it was now midwinter, he started off for St. Louis, two thousand miles away, with nothing but a



Keel-boat

rifle and a dog. Eventually he reached his destination! So surprised was Chouteau at this remarkable exploit that Harvey was re-engaged. Upon returning up the river, the first thing he did by way of retaliation was to pound nearly every man from Fort Clark to Fort McKenzie who had opposed him. In the following year (1841) he killed his bitterest enemy, a Spaniard named Isadore. His killings were numerous, both among foes and former friends. He was finally driven from the country, but hovered around the northern military posts as late as 1876.

In 1840, Pierre Jean de Smet, the Belgian Jesuit priest, noted for his extensive travels, literary contributions and missionary work among the Indians, reached Fort Union. He came in the latter part of the summer from the Flathead country, enroute to St. Louis. Larpenteur makes this the year 1842, and Coues concurs in the blunder. As a matter of fact, the date was 1840. Father de Smet had reached the Bitter Root Valley by way of the Oregon Trail and Green River rendezvous; according to his own records, he said Mass to the Indians for the first time on July 5. From that date until August 27, he spent his time teaching and baptizing.^① "I remained two months only among these good people, and on the 7 of August took leave of my dear Neophytes." Escorted by a band of Flathead warriors, soon augmented by a party of Crows, he proceeded by way of the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers to Fort Union. On September 23, he "left Fort Union accompanied by three trappers for the Mandan villages, whence he proceeded to Fort Pierre, leaving there October 6, thence to Independence and St. Louis. . . . and in the spring of 1841, accompanied by two other priests, Nicholas Point and Gregory Mengarini, he departed on another tour to the west by the Oregon trail. . . . and again to the country of the Flatheads."

In 1842, the American Fur Company was perturbed by the presence of considerable opposition. No fewer than six rival companies were in the field, some of them for the first time. The principal opposition on the upper Missouri was Fox, Livingston & Company, who established themselves on the Yellowstone for the trade of the Crows. The American Fur Company had already entered the Crow country. In 1832, McKenzie had sent

^① *Letters and Sketches of a Year's Residence Among the Indian Tribes of the Rocky Mountains*, by P. J. De Smet. In Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, v. 27, pp. 135-150. Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Co. (1906)

Tulloch with forty men to build a post on the south side of the Yellowstone River, two miles below the Big Horn, to trade with the Mountain Crows. These Indians were dyed-in-the-wool scoundrels of treacherous and lying character, but their trade was valuable. Tulloch, accordingly, erected a large fort which he named Fort Cass. The Crows often wished this trading post removed to some other point, and to suit their whims Fort Van Buren was built on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Rosebud in 1835. This post lasted seven years until burned down in 1842 by Larpenteur, who then built for the American Fur Company Fort Alexander, at Adams Prairie, twenty miles above by land and forty by water. Fort Sarpy, which lasted six years, was built in 1850 by Culbertson at the mouth of the Rosebud. This was the last trading post built on the Yellowstone by the traders who alternately fought and courted the warlike tribes, and was abandoned in 1855.

In 1843, John James Audubon departed from St. Louis on April 25 for the upper Missouri, as passenger on the steamer Omega, captained by Joseph A. Sire, one of the most notable of early day rivermen. Sire left a valuable journal dealing with river events. The Omega's first pilot was Captain La Barge, another riverman and trader of distinction identified with the early history of the upper Missouri. On May 18, below Fort Pierre, they passed four barges bound for St. Louis, in charge of William Laidlaw, assistant to Kenneth McKenzie in the American Fur Company. Laidlaw was accompanied by Major Andrew Drips, former partner of Lucien Fontenelle in the Rocky Mountain trade. On the 21st they passed an establishment formerly conducted by Le Clerc, but now abandoned, and completed its destruction by cutting pickets from the fortifications for firewood for the steamer. Lower Cedar Island was passed the next day, and between it and upper Cedar Island, near White River, S. D., a flotilla of north-bound Mackinaw barges belonging to Fox, Livingston & Company, the opposition traders, was passed. On this latter island, Fort Recovery, now abandoned, was once maintained. Above this was Grand Detour, four miles across by land, and twenty-six around by water. Audubon with some companions walked across and camped within the woods at night, connecting with the steamer next afternoon at 2 o'clock. The spot, according to Audubon, is fifty miles below Fort Pierre, which was reached Wednesday, May 31, on the 33rd day of the voyage. Messrs. Picotte and Chardon were there. Audubon gives no information

about this post, but devotes copious space to other details. He says:

① "On June 4th we passed the old Ricaree (Arikara) village where General Ashley was so completely beaten as to lose eighteen of his men, with the very weapons and ammunition that he had trafficked with the Indians of that village, against the remonstrances of his friends and interpreters; yet he said it proved fortunate for him, as he turned his steps toward some other spot, where he procured one hundred packs of beaver skins for a mere song."

On June 5, they passed the spot where the steamer Assiniboine was burned with all her cargo uninsured in 1835. Heart River was passed on the 6th, and there they met four barges belonging to the American Fur Company, in charge of James Kipp. "Mr. Kipp has a peculiar looking crew who appeared not much better than a set of bandits among the Pyrenees or the Alps, yet they seemed to be the very best sort of men for trappers and boatmen. We exchanged four of our men for four of his, as the latter were wanted on the Yellowstone." On June 7, Fort Clark and the Mandan villages were reached. "The site of the fort appears a good one, although it is placed considerably below the Mandan villages. The fort and village are situated on the high banks, rising somewhat to the elevation of the hills."

"We came in sight of Fort Union at five o'clock (June 12th) and reached it at seven, passing the opposition fort (William or Mortimer) three miles below, whose flags were hoisted and ours also. We were saluted from Fort Union. The gentlemen of the fort came down on horseback and appeared quite a cavalcade. I was introduced to Mr. Culbertson (in charge) and others, and of course the introductions went the rounds . . . We visited Fort Mortimer (below Fort Union, June 23rd) and found the place in the most miserable condition, and about to be carried away by the falling of the banks on account of the great rise of water in the Yellowstone that had actually dammed the Missouri. The current ran directly across, and the banks gave way at such a rate that the men had been obliged already to tear up the front part of the fort and remove it to the rear . . . On June 30th word came to us from Fort Mortimer that a party of Sioux had had a battle with the Gros Ventres, and had killed three of the latter, including a white man who had lived among them as a blacksmith. The Gros Ventres, on the other hand, had killed eight of the Sioux and put them to flight. The blacksmith killed two Sioux and the enemies cut off one of the blacksmith's legs and one arm, scalped him and left the mangled body behind them . . . July 6th, we were visited by a band of fourteen Assiniboines, part of a war party of fifty who had returned from raiding the Blackfeet several hundred miles away, their faces painted black made them look like so many devils. The leader was a notorious rascal, painted red. They had only three guns, a few carried common lances, and all had a knife; the leader was armed with a stick in which were inserted three blades of butcher's knives."

① *Audubon and his Journals*. Maria R. Audubon. With notes by Elliott Coues. 1897.



Reproduced from Maximilian, Prince of Wied
Indian Bull-Boat

In Audubon's description of Fort Union, written by Edward T. Denig, clerk of the establishment, is the following: "Attached to the 'old fort', one and a half miles below the fort (Union) is a garden of one-and-a-half acres which supplies peas, turnips, radishes, lettuce, beets, onions, etc., and in the season of 1838, Mr. Culbertson raised five hundred and twenty bushels of potatoes." What old fort this was Denig does not say. On August 16, Audubon departed from Fort Union on the Mackinaw barge *Union* and reached St. Louis October 19.

In 1843, according to Larpenteur, the firm of Fox, Livingston & Company took possession of Fort William, now called Fort Mortimer by Larpenteur for the first time. It was in charge of a man named Cotton. One of the members of this firm was an old gentleman named Kelsey, who came up the Missouri with the trade-goods, but left soon after for the chief establishment of that company below Fort Pierre among the Sioux. Four men who had taken possession of a small cabin, on or adjoining this company's property below Fort Pierre, were ordered off by Kelsey, but refused to go. Arming himself, Kelsey went to the cabin, killed two of these men, wounded another so badly that he never

fully recovered, and allowed the fourth to escape. Kelsey departed within a day or two for Mexico and was not seen again.

In 1844 the famous Jim Bridger visited the upper Missouri. He had left the mountains with a picked party of thirty men to trap beaver on Milk River, and having come to Fort Union, made his camp about half a mile from the fort. The month was November, and Mr. Laidlaw, who was in charge of Fort Union, endeavored to make the visitor's quarters pleasant and comfortable. In the latter part of December a large band of Sioux appeared in the vicinity, made a demonstration before Fort Mortimer, and dared the whites to fight. Bridger's men, who had come up, halted at the foot of a hill, refusing to cope with the Indians whose numbers were greatly superior, but the bookkeeper of Fort Mortimer, and a Cree half-breed, to show their bravery, rode towards the enemy, expecting to be followed by Bridger's party. The two were ambushed. The Sioux, expecting the whites to accept the challenge, had left concealed in the ravine a small body of their party, ready to attack the whites in case they should follow. Such were the tactics practised by the Sioux in the Fort Phil Kearney massacre of U. S. troops in 1866, and on the Little Big Horn in 1876.

In 1844 word came to Fort Union of a fight which F. A. Chardon had had with the Piegan Indians the year previous at Fort McKenzie. It appears that these Indians had killed a negro belonging to Chardon, who swore vengeance against the band. Communicating his designs to Alexander Harvey, desperado-trader, and to Berger, McKenzie's early emissary to the Blackfoot country, he arranged to invite the Indians concerned in the negro's killing to the fort, and to shoot them down with the cannon in the bastion when they had assembled before the gates. The plot succeeded only partially. Only three or four were killed and two wounded. Harvey finished the wounded braves with his knife and compelled the Blackfoot squaws of the fort to dance the scalp dance around the bodies of the fallen Indians, whose scalps he himself had taken.

In 1845-46, preparations were made to occupy the Blackfoot country again, Culbertson having effected a reconciliation with the Piegans, but it was found difficult to induce men to go there, and desertions were frequent. In this year Harvey was driven out of the country by Malcolm Clark, Berger the trapper and

James Lee, a bravo and bully engaged for the purpose. When Harvey arrived at Fort Pierre, he succeeded in organizing a company to oppose the American Fur Company. The members of the new company were Harvey, Charles Primeau, Joseph Picotte and Bonise, bookkeeper for the American Fur Company, all of whom were old employees of the latter company at Fort Pierre. In the spring of 1846 this new company, which was called Harvey, Primeau & Company, started operations with a large outfit sufficient to establish themselves at the posts of the American Fur Company. Harvey came up to the mouth of the Yellowstone on the steamer, and went on to Fort Benton, which had been built that year by Culbertson for the American Fur Company. Culbertson had erected a post on the south side of the Missouri to replace Fort McKenzie, calling it Fort Lewis, but this fort was dismantled in 1846 and its timbers floated down the river seven miles to the place where Culbertson founded Fort Benton. In this year Kenneth McKenzie returned to Fort Union and assumed charge for a short time.

When Kenneth McKenzie was establishing the Yellowstone post, Fort Union, in 1828-29, for the American Fur Company, he organized a party of men under Henry Vanderburgh; the latter left St. Louis in April, 1829, with thirty men, twenty-five horses and fifty traps, to meet the Rocky Mountain trappers. Vanderburgh plunged at once into the heart of the mountains and was as bold and enterprising as were any of his rivals in the mountain country. It is said that he made the acquaintance of the Blackfoot at a very early day, and in the summer of 1830 he had a hard battle with them, in which he was victorious. He killed a large number of Indians, and lost but one man. But fate decreed that Vanderburgh was to die at the hands of the Blackfeet. In 1832 (the year in which Wyeth finds him at the rendezvous), as a direct result of rivalry existing between the Rocky Mountain and the American Fur Company, a melancholy incident occurred near the Three Forks of the Missouri, in which Vanderburgh, American Fur Company leader, lost his life. His party had been lured to the fatal spot by the trappers of the Rocky Mountain Company, under the leadership of Bridger and Fitzpatrick; the latter were exasperated at the tactics of their rivals, who made it a practice to follow them with the object of being piloted to good trapping grounds. On the 11th of October, 1832, the Rocky Mountain Company started off up the Madison to trap the sources of that stream. Vanderburgh did not move until the next day, when he went down the Madison about fifteen miles, crossed over eighteen miles in a northwest direction to one of the branches of the Jefferson, Alder Creek (destined to world-wide fame in later years). The party likely tramped over ground glistening with gold. On the 14th, on Stinkingwater River, a tributary of the Jefferson, they were ambushed by the Blackfeet. Vanderburgh's horse was shot under him and his companions fled, although he asked them not to run. He was taken prisoner and died by torture. Later the bones of his arms were exhibited as trophies of victory, at Fort McKenzie on the Missouri. Two others of the white party were killed in this affair, and others wounded. Andrew Dripps, who was associated with Vanderburgh in this expedition, had separated from the latter to trap in another direction but seeing that he was being tricked, he turned southward to Horse Prairie and escaped the fate that befell his associates.

In 1846 the firm of Fox, Livingston & Company were convinced that it was a losing venture to oppose the American Fur Company and sold out to them, leaving the American Fur Company again monarch of its field. This year, prior to the abandonment of Fort Lewis, Larpenteur had been ordered to proceed to it and take charge. He made his journey in a keel-boat which required seventy days from the time of departure from Fort Union to make the trip. In this year Father de Smet reached Fort Lewis on September 24, enroute from the Columbia to the states. He departed on the 28 and reached Fort Union October 11; reached Westport, Missouri, November 28 and proceeded to St. Louis by stage. In the meantime Malcolm Clark had come to Fort Lewis and relieved Larpenteur, who thereupon resigned; and immediately, or shortly afterwards, Clark took charge at Fort Benton.

In 1847, Captain James Kipp was in charge of Fort Union. Kipp was probably the most picturesque figure in the fur trade of the upper Missouri, and he and his associates in earlier years had exciting careers. Kipp had built a post called Fort Tilton for the Columbia Company in 1822, on the opposite side of Big Knife River from the Mandan villages, and a little above the site of the future Fort Clark. According to Coues, it was built on a prairie between the future Fort Clark and "the forest in which the inhabitants of Mih-Tutta-Hang-Cush live in the winter." According to Chittenden, Kipp, driven from his position by the Arikaras in 1823, crossed Big Knife River and established a post in the Mandan villages. In the winter of 1825-6 he went to White Earth River, one hundred and forty miles above, and built a post for the Assiniboine trade, which establishment passed into the hands of the American Fur Company in 1827. During this time, Major Pilcher of the Missouri Fur Company had arrived on the scene and directed a post to be built above the Minnetaree villages in 1822. This post is said to have been Lisa's old post, reoccupied and renamed Fort Vanderburgh by Pilcher, but abandoned when the Missouri Company dissolved. It is said by Chittenden to have been twelve miles above Big Knife River, near Emanuel Rock on Emanuel Creek. In the winter of 1830-31, Kipp caused wood to be prepared for a new post, and the palisades were erected in the spring of 1831. D. D. Mitchell then undertook the direction of this new post, which he completed to some extent and named Fort Clark.

These activities were on the south or west bank of the Missouri, and on the opposite side of the Missouri from Lewis and Clark's old Fort Mandan.

In 1827 Pilcher made one of the most remarkable journeys of the day. With forty-five men, one hundred horses and a complete outfit of merchandise, he started from the Missouri River for the Rocky Mountains, following the Platte and Sweetwater Rivers, but while he was in the vicinity of the South Pass, now in



Photo by Courtesy of Charles N. Kessler, Helena, Montana

*Captain James Kipp
Founder of Fort Clark and for a Time in Charge at Fort Union*

the State of Wyoming, his entire herd of horses was run off by the Indians, and he was compelled to cache his goods. He spent the winter of 1827 on Green River, and after meeting with a series of disheartening experiences, departed for Fort Colville on the Columbia with one companion, arriving September 1, 1829. With a party of British traders he went up the Columbia to Boat Encampment (so named by David Thompson in 1811), crossed the Athabasca Pass, and arrived at the Jasper House on November 11. Departing from there on December 17 with dog sleds and snow-shoes, he reached Fort Edmonton, on the Saskatchewan River on the 4 of January, 1830. He left again on the 15 and on February 1 passed Forts Pitt and Carlton House. Eleven days later he was at Cumberland House. On March 1 he set out from Moose Lake for Selkirk's settlement on the Red River, leaving there on the 29, and proceeding up the Assiniboine River to Brandon House, where he arrived April 4. With a half-breed Indian he started out the next day for the American Fur Company's post, Fort Union, at the mouth of the Yellowstone, which he reached April 22. In the absence of Kenneth McKenzie at St. Louis, Daniel Lamont, grandfather of President Cleveland's Secretary of State, was in charge of affairs. Here he met Prince Paul of Wurtenburg, then on his second tour of exploration through the interior of North America, whose published narratives are of great historical value. Leaving Fort Union, Pilcher descended the Missouri and arrived at St. Louis in June, 1830. In this year the Missouri Company, in which he was a partner, retired permanently from the fur trade.

In 1853 the Pacific Railway Exploring Expedition which had been sent into the field by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis reached Fort Union on August 1. The purpose of this expedition was to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railway from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. Isaac I. Stevens, an experienced army officer who had served in the Mexican War and held a position in the Coast Survey Office until appointed Governor of Washington Territory in March, 1853, was in command. His instructions were to operate from St. Paul or some convenient point on the Upper Mississippi, toward the great bend of the Missouri and thence on the table-land between the tributaries of the Missouri and those of the Saskatchewan to some eligible pass in the Rocky Mountains. Governor Stevens determined that the exploration should be conducted in two divisions, operating respectively from the



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An Old "Wheel Gun" Similar to The Cannon Used at Fort Union

Mississippi River and Puget Sound; that a supply depot should be established by a third party at the St. Mary's village at the western base of the Rocky Mountains, to facilitate the winter operations of the exploration and to enable the exploring parties to continue in the field the longest practicable period; and that all parties should be organized in a military manner for self-protection, and to be able to force their way through whatever difficulties might be encountered.

There has probably never been a railroad surveying party put into the field which contained so many future great men. Captain George B. McClellan of the corps of engineers, who was assigned to the charge of the western division, afterward became Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Potomac, and later the democratic candidate for president. Lieut. Saxton, who explored the Rocky Mountain regions, became a brigadier-general in the Civil War. F. W. Lander was afterward a brigadier-general. Cuvieir Grover, then a lieutenant, was afterwards a major-general of volunteers and colonel in the regular army. Lieut. John Mullen later built a wagon road from Fort Benton to Walla Walla. A. W. Tinkham, corps of engineers, Lieut. Donel-

son, Captain Gardiner, James Doty, J. M. Stanley, and many others afterwards obtained fame as officers or men of science.

Accompanying the expedition from St. Louis, as a member of Lieut. Donelson's party making a survey of the Missouri River, was Alexander Culbertson, sent as special agent among the Blackfeet. The interpreters and guides were Pierre Bottineau, Henry Boulieau, La Framboise and Le Bombard. The expedition usually travelled in several detachments. "Coming in sight of the Missouri River the whole party gave three cheers as the beautiful bluff banks, dotted with timber, came into view. As we rounded the hill cutting off our view of Fort Union, Lieut. Grover came up (he had made a survey from Lake Traverse to Mouse River), and was received with cheers. On the coming out of Lieut. Donelson and Mr. Denig, in charge of the post, I ordered a volley of small arms, to express admiration of his arrival (he had made a survey of the Missouri River in the steamer Robert Campbell as far as Poplar River and had returned to Fort Union), which was answered by a salute of thirteen guns." (Stevens)

In his report to the Secretary of War, Governor Stevens gives the following description of Fort Union and of the movements of some of the detachments connected with the eastern division:

"Fort Union is situated on the eastern bank of the Missouri River, about $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. It was built by the American Fur Company in 1830, and has from that time been the principal supply store or depot of that company. It is framed of pickets of hewn timber, about 16 feet high, and has two bastions, one at the northwest and one at the southeast corner. The front or main entrance is on the side opposite the river. This fort is probably 250 feet square. The main buildings, comprising the residence of the superintendent and the store, are on the front or eastern side. They are two stories high and built of wood. The shops and dwellings of the blacksmith, the gunsmith, the carpenter, the shoemaker, the tailor and others, are of adobe or of wood, and occupy the other sides. These mechanics are mostly French half-breeds, and have half-breed or Indian wives, and many children. There is a grassy plain around and near the fort, extending to the base of the rising ground, which is a full mile distant on the eastern side. The Assiniboinés, the Gros Ventres, the Crows and other migratory bands of Indians, trade at this fort, exchanging the skins of the buffalo, deer and other animals for such commodities as they require. Mr. Culbertson, who has occupied the position of chief agent of the company during the past twenty years, has under his supervision not only Fort Union, but Forts Pierre and Benton also. He is a man of great energy, intelligence and fidelity, and possesses the entire confidence of the Indians. His wife, a full-blood Indian of the Blood band of the Blackfoot tribe, is also deservedly held in high estimation. Though she appears to have made little or no progress in our language, she



The Broadway, St. Louis, 1853

has acquired the manners and adapted herself to the usages of the white race with singular facility. Their children have been sent to the States to be educated in our best schools.

"From the second to the ninth day of August we were closely occupied in preparing for the continuation of the survey westward of the mountains. The men were occupied in making Pembina carts, and additional transportation was purchased of the Fur Companies. Our experience thus far had shown how well ox-trains were adapted to transportation, and accordingly two additional teams were added at Fort Union. In all these arrangements both the Fur Companies zealously cooperated; placing at my disposal not only all the animals they could spare, but guides, hunters and their information in regard to the country. We were much pleased and benefited by the good offices of the Indian women at the two posts, the wives of the factors and officers of the companies, who fitted us out with a good assortment of moccasins, gloves and other guards against the severity of the weather in the fall and winter. On the 5th of August, Mr. Lander reached Fort Union, and from his reconnoissance of the River of the Lakes, Coteau du Missouri, and the upper waters of Mouse River. This reconnoissance was a very extended one, and enabled me to report as to the source of the River of the Lakes, the character of the coteau in the vicinity of the 49th parallel, and the most favorable lines for crossing it and descending to the valley of the Missouri. He found lignite on the River of the Lakes, and in his trip was brought in contact with several bands of Indians, who, although somewhat uncertain and even hostile at first, became entirely satisfied with the operations of his party, and offered no obstruction to his progress.

"I have referred to the fact that on my arrival at Fort Union not a man desired his discharge, although every man was offered an honorable discharge who desired to be relieved from duty at that point. The men, however, became in a few days exceedingly alarmed as to the difficulties to be expected from snow on the westward journey. The voyageurs belonging to the Fur Companies' posts thought it a good practical joke to spread bug-bear stories about the immense snows to be expected early in

the season, and many of the men got to believe that they would find snow knee-deep before they reached Fort Benton, and that it would be twenty feet deep in the passes of the Rocky Mountains in October. Fortunately I had with me some books of travel in that country, particularly de Smet's Oregon Missions, and had carefully, to the best of my ability, investigated the climates of the country west of the Rocky mountains. Mr. Culbertson and the officers of the companies also gave me reliable information in reference to the lightness and lateness of the snow this side of the mountains, and therefore little difficulty was found in satisfying the men that they had been trifled with in this matter. There were also some little differences of rank between two of the military gentlemen growing out of a mistake of my own, soon after leaving the Mississippi, which were adjusted on terms honorable to both, and in the most satisfactory manner to myself.

"On the 7th of August there was a distribution of presents to the Assiniboines, at which I was present. I took a deep interest in the welfare of these Indians, from their kind treatment of my party at their camp before crossing the Coteau du Missouri, and I took this occasion to give my mite in the way of cultivating friendly feelings on their part towards their own agents and the government of the United States.

"The same day the steamer St. Ange arrived from St. Louis, bringing some supplies from the quartermaster's department and giving a most favorable opportunity for the return of such of the hunters and guides whose engagements expired on their arrival at Fort Union. I determined to send the quartermaster and commissary clerk, Mr. Everett, to Washington, by this steamer, to report in person as to the progress of the expedition. I did not think he was strong enough to encounter the fatigues and hardships of the remainder of the journey and his return was deemed a matter of necessity.

"Mr. Stanley, the artist, was busily occupied during our stay at Fort Union with his daguerreotype apparatus, and the Indians were greatly pleased with their daguerreotypes. The scientific parties were also diligent in making their observations. As I have before observed in a former part of this narrative, I had suffered greatly from debility on the route, and I determined to make my arrangements so that I should be relieved from much of detail duties. I was anxious to cover as much of the country as possible, and determined to organize two parties to explore the country—one party, under Lieut. Donelson, to pursue the general course between the Missouri and the Saskatchewan towards the Cypress mountains; and the other, under Lieut. Grover, to continue on the usual travelled wagon road, via Milk River to Fort Benton. The supposed point of separation of the two parties was the Big Muddy River, and it was determined that the final arrangements should be made at that point. Accordingly, on the 9th of August, both Lieut. Donelson and Lieut. Grover's parties started, and I remained behind until the following day to settle my accounts and to complete my arrangements generally with the companies. Dr. Evans had not yet arrived from his examination of the Mauvais Terres, and a letter was left for him, expressing my strong desire to meet him at Fort Benton. An expressman, whom I despatched to Fort Benton on the 6th of August with a letter of instruction to Lieut. Saxton, was, unfortunately, obliged to return, in consequence of the loss of his horse and some difficulties he experienced with the Indians, and I concluded not to despatch him again until my arrival at the Big Muddy."

In 1854-56, the expedition of Sir George Gore arrived at Fort Union. Sir George was an Irishman, from county Sligo, and travelled for adventure only. His retinue consisted of 40 men, 112 horses, 40 dogs and 21 carts. The party, according to *Montana Historical Society Contributions*, left St. Louis in 1854, wintering at Fort Laramie. With James Bridger as guide, the following year was spent in the Powder River country, the winter being passed in the fort which was built by Sir George, fifteen miles above the mouth of the Tongue River. At this place he lost one of his men by illness—the only one of his party who died in the three years of wandering life. In the spring of 1856, Gore sent his wagons overland to Fort Union, and himself with a portion of his command descended the Yellowstone to Fort Union in two flat boats. At the fort he contracted for the construction of two Mackinaw boats, the fur company to take payment in wagons, horses, etc., at a stipulated price. But a quarrel arose on the completion of the boats, Sir George insisting that the company was disposed to take advantage of his remoteness from civilization to overcharge him, and in his wrath he refused to accept the Mackinaws, burned his wagons and goods in front of the fort, and sold or gave away his horses and cattle to Indians and the vagabond white men rather than have any dealings with the fur company. Having satisfied his choler, he disbanded his party, and with a portion of his followers proceeded on his flat boats to Fort Berthold, where he remained until the spring of 1857, when he returned to St. Louis by steamer.

James Bridger, Sir George's guide, was said by Marcy in *Thirty Years of Army Life* to be an illiterate man, tall, thin and wiry, with a complexion well bronzed by toil and exposure, and with an independent, generous, open cast of countenance indicative of brave and noble impulses. Bridger was born in Washington, D. C., in 1807, and joined Ashley's fur trading company for the mountains in 1826. In his long experience in the mountains he became acquainted with every part of them, and was the most skillful and reliable guide ever known. There was no part of the Big Horn country, the Green River Valley, the Salt Lake Basin, the Yellowstone, the upper Missouri, the Snake River region, and all that arid region between the Colorado and Columbia, with which Bridger was not familiar. In the early Indian troubles in Utah he was chief guide for the United States troops; and in the fifties acted in the same capacity for titled hunters from Europe, who sought the Rockies for wild

adventure. Bridger on one occasion was taken by the Blackfeet, who rejoiced in the capture of such a famous foe. His life was spared on the condition that he lead a band of Blackfeet warriors to the Wind River rendezvous, where the fur companies, whom the Blackfeet hoped to defeat, were then assembled. The whites were here gathered in larger force than the Blackfeet were led to believe, and when the place was reached they accused Bridger of lying and threatened to take his scalp. But the wily Bridger tactfully induced them to send several of their party forward for a parley; and the whites acting upon Bridger's shouted instructions—misinterpreted by the Blackfeet—immediately seized them, and did not release them until Bridger was surrendered to his friends. The route followed by the Union Pacific, the first transcontinental railroad, through Wyoming, is said to have been suggested to its engineers by Bridger, who had been sent for to meet with them at Denver. While in the east in 1856-57, Bridger purchased a farm near Westport, Missouri, but the change in his habits was unendurable, and he returned to the mountains and resumed the occupation of guide, which he fol-



Photo by Courtesy of Charles N. Kessler, Helena, Montana

*Actual Photograph of Fort Union, Made in 1866, by A. J. Fisk,
One Year Before It Was Abandoned*

lowed until age compelled him to abandon it. He then went back to his life on the farm, and died there in 1881.

From 1854 to 1863, a string of fur-trading posts was planted along the north bank of the Missouri between Forts Union and Benton. Among those which have endured historically are Fort Stewart, Fort Kipp, Poplar Fort, Fort Galpin, Dauphin's Cabin, Campbell's Houses and Fort La Barge. During the years 1854 to 1863 the Indians were particularly troublesome. Stormy was the day that a bunch of mounted Blackfeet, Assiniboine, or Sioux did not find its way to the white man's post, where beads and calico in profusion, the fragrant tea and trinkets, were wont to catch the Indian eye; although much of the red man's interest in these places had fled with the order to deal out no more rum, to the Indian the most desired and highly prized of all the white man's goods. Of these spectacular posts, Fort Stewart, erected in 1854, was located about fifty-seven channel miles above Fort Union, or thirty-five miles by wagon road from the same place. It was conducted as a trading-post by the firm Frost, Todd & Company, but not being successful, they were obliged to give it up. Within two hundred yards of Fort Stewart was Fort Kipp, and both posts were burned down about the year 1860. For many years the chimneys were standing, a gloomy reminder of bygone days. In 1860-61, Larpenteur built a post thirty-five miles above this latter point and called it Poplar Fort, although it was also known as Malcolm Clark's Fort. The post was located on the left bank of Poplar River, near its mouth and close to where the modern Great Northern Railway crosses, at the site of Poplar station. Fifty miles by land above Fort Stewart stood Fort Charles on the north bank of the Missouri also, on a point of land below Little Dry or Elk Prairie Creek. Its site was long ago washed into the Missouri. Wolf Point station, on the Great Northern, commemorates the situation. In 1862, Larpenteur selected a site for a post, twelve miles above the mouth of Milk River, and called it Fort Galpin for Galpin, La Barge & Company. It was here that Malcolm Clark killed Owen McKenzie, natural son of Kenneth McKenzie, in a quarrel. Of this trading establishment Doctor Matthews writes in Larpenteur's Journal:

"He was called 'Major' Galpin, but I never knew why, perhaps he was once an Indian agent—all Indian agents were dubbed 'Major' in those days; perhaps he had belonged to a militia regiment; but most likely the title was sort of 'Kentucky brevet'. I have heard that when he was well on in his cups he used to

introduce himself to the whole world as 'Major Galpin of Dakota, a gentleman of the old school.' He must have been a long time in the country. I met him twice; once at Fort Berthold in 1865 when he was in the Indian trade; and once at Fort Rice, in 1868, when he kept a sutler store and did some Indian trading. From Fort Rice he went to one of the then newly established agencies—Grand River, I think—where he died about 1870. He was a tall, fine looking man of good presence and had evidently good early advantages. He was married to a Sioux woman of unusually fine character, and by her had several children, all of whom I think are dead. In Doctor F. V. Hayden's *Indian Tribes of the Missouri Valley* there is a picture of her, with one of her children on her knee, and a flattering notice of her."

In 1865, all the trading posts of the American Fur Company, with the exception of Fort Benton, were sold to Hubble, Hawley & Company, otherwise the Northwest Fur Company. In this year a company of regulars arrived and took up their quarters at Fort Union. At this time Fort Buford had been established very close to Fort Union—two and a half miles east by land and eight by water. In 1866, Colonel Rankin was in command of Fort Buford with one company of soldiers; in 1867 five companies were garrisoned in the fort.

During the summer of 1867, Colonel Rankin purchased Fort Union to use the materials in completing the construction of Fort Buford. Larpenteur's *Original Journal* states that the old kitchen of Fort Union was demolished for fuel on August 4 by the steamer *Miner*, which arrived that day, and that the general demolition of Fort Union was begun by the soldiers on the 7. This ended what may be regarded, on the whole, as the most historic structure that had ever existed in the Northwest.

As previously stated, the first steamer to navigate the Yellowstone as far as Fort Union was the *Yellowstone*; the *Assiniboine* was the second. In 1850 the steamer *El Paso* succeeded in reaching the mouth of the Milk River. For the twelve or fifteen years following, the American Fur Company did all the steamboating that was done above Kanessville (now Council Bluffs), Iowa, making such improvements on their boats as experience suggested. Many efforts were made to ascend the Missouri River higher than Poplar Creek, but it seems that none were successful until the summer of 1850, when the *El Paso* reached Milk River, but during this time Fort Union was really the head of navigation. The steamboats running farther up the Missouri than Kanessville were owned and operated by and for the American Fur Company alone. Western Iowa began settling up about this date, preparing the way for general commerce.



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Mandan Earth Lodge, Upper Missouri. Elbow-woods Region

In 1856, several boats besides those owned by the Fur Company ran as far up as the then new settlement of Sioux City, loaded with supplies suited to the wants of the country. This trade grew rapidly, and until the spring of 1857, boats ran from St. Louis to Sioux City weekly. Above Sioux City there was little change; the fur company sent up from two to four boats as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone River each season. In 1859 they built a small boat called the *Chippewa*. She was the first stern-wheel boat that navigated the upper Missouri, and was better adapted to this river than any of her predecessors. She was accompanied by the *Spread Eagle* as far as Fort Union, and from thence pressed forward alone, passing Milk River, the highest point reached by the *El Paso* in 1850, and reached Fort McKenzie June 17, 1859. From this place, only a few miles below Fort Benton, she turned back. The *Chippewa* reached Fort Benton on her trip July 2, 1860, being the first steamboat that ever reached the present head of navigation. However, the *Key West* reached Fort Benton a little later the same day.

In 1863, the steamer *Robert Campbell*, Captain Joseph La Barge, was fired upon in July by a party of Sioux who were wooding, but no one was hurt. The steamer then proceeded to a place called Tobacco Garden, about one hundred miles below the mouth of the Yellowstone, where there was a large war party of Sioux on the south side of the river. The *Campbell* had aboard Jerry Millington, clerk; one McKinney, pilot; the two Indian agents, Latta and Reed; Alexander Culbertson and his Blackfoot

wife; and a number of mountaineers and adventurers, the latter bound for the newly discovered gold fields of Montana. The Indians had gathered on the bank, insulting and defying the whites continually. The passengers were behind their breast-work of flour sacks. To their surprise, a boat put off from the steamer and headed for shore. As the boat landed, the Indians crowded ominously upon her. The chief sprang into the yawl, shook hands with each of the crew; a score of dusky warriors were at his heels. Presently those on the steamer saw weapons gleaming, white smoke puffing, and heard sharp reports that told of slaughtered men. The firing was answered, not without effect as was seen by the hurried movements of the Indians. The yawl with its load of dead and wounded was soon floating down the stream; one man was seen clinging to her stern. Another boat was sent to her, and the victims of this senseless affair were brought aboard. Two only of the crew escaped: one of them had been wounded, feigned death; the other was the steersman who had the presence of mind to throw himself overboard and cling to the boat till rescued. So reluctant had these men been to start that the mate, named Miller, drove them into the yawl with an axe. The wounded man recovered. Next day the dead were decently buried on the river bank, and stones piled over their graves to protect them from the wolves.

About this time there was much interest exhibited in the Montana gold mines, which started a migration in that direction. Boats were at once fitted out, loaded with provisions, tools, clothing and such supplies as promised rich profits, and sent to Fort Benton. During the first years of the Civil War the government established a number of posts on the Missouri above Fort Randall. This also increased the demand for boats, so that in 1864 there were a dozen boats above Sioux City. In 1868 the first railroad reached Sioux City. Before the railroad had its warehouses built, a company was formed which owned and operated the *North Alabama*, the *Fannie Barker*, the *Deer Lodge*, the *Huntsville*, the *Tennessee* and other boats between Sioux City and Fort Benton. This line carried private, military and Indian freight and was quite successful. It operated in connection with the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad. In 1870 it sold its shore property to the Peck line, operating on the river at that time. The Fort Benton Transportation Company was organized in 1875.

In 1864 there was placed on the Missouri a line of steamers intended to facilitate immigration to Idaho. This was called the Idaho Steam Packet Company. On account of low water, only two of the boats reached Fort Benton, the *Benton* and the *Cutter*; the *Yellowstone* landed at Cow Island, and the *Effie Deans* at the mouth of the Milk River. The *Benton* brought a part of the freight left at other places down the river by other boats, to Fort Benton, but the passengers had already been set afoot in the wilderness to make the best of the way to the mines, a matter of 300 miles or so, through a hostile Indian country, and a large part of the freight had to be forwarded in small boats.

In 1865 there were eight arrivals of steamboats, four of which reached Fort Benton, the other four stopping at the mouth of the Marias River. *In 1866* there were thirty-one arrivals of steamboats, seven boats being at Fort Benton at one time in June. One, the *Marion*, was wrecked on the return trip. These boats were built for the trade of St. Louis. They brought up 2,000 passengers or more, and 6,000 tons of freight valued at \$6,000,000.

In 1868 thirty-five steamers arrived at Fort Benton with 5,000 tons of freight. One steamer, the *Amelia Poe*, was sunk thirty miles below Milk River and the cargo lost. The passengers were brought to Benton by the *Benton*. This year the Indians were very hostile, killing wood-cutters employed by the steamboat company, and murdering hunters and others. There was also a sudden dropping in prices caused by the Northwest Transportation Company of Chicago, which dispatched its boats from Sioux City competing for the Montana trade.

The completion of the Great Northern in 1889, ended for all time the day of the wagon train and steamboat in Montana transportation. In this change of epochs, consummated so suddenly, the pioneer could hardly realize what had happened. The old West was no more!

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Harper, Frank B
Fort Union and its
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