



Name of Property: Fort Benton (Boundary Study)
City, State: Fort Benton, Montana
Significant Dates: 1860-1890
NHL Criterion: 1
NHL Theme: V. Developing the American Economy
 3. Transportation and Communication

Previous Recognition: 1961 National Historic Landmark

National Historic Context: 1963 *Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898: Transportation and Communication*
 XII. Business
 L. Shipping and Transportation
 XIV. Transportation
 B. Ships, Boats, Lighthouses, and Other Structures.

NHL Significance:

- Fort Benton is nationally significant in the area of transportation as the head of steamboat navigation on the Missouri River during the period 1860-1890.
- Although Fort Benton is an historic fur trading post, its NHL national significance is tied solely to its associations with steamboat navigation and transportation.

Integrity:

- The district encompasses the heart of the historic riverfront commercial area which developed during the period when steamboats traveled the Upper Missouri.
- The district includes the fort, levee, bridge, firehouse, city hall, merchant’s shops, hotels, Masonic Hall, saloon, hardware store, banks, and a residence that are linked to the nationally significant history of the community.
- The NHL includes resources that have a high degree of integrity, such as the Grand Union Hotel and the Fort Benton Bridge.
- Most of the contributing resources, even those that have been altered, are in similar



condition as when they were designated an NHL district in 1961. The NHL district, as a whole, has integrity of location and setting.

Owner of Property: private and local public

Acreage of Property: 20.2 acres

Origins of Nomination: This most recent boundary study was completed by the NPS at the request of the River & Plains Society of Fort Benton; the MT SHPO has also asked for clarification of the NHL boundary. Fort Benton became an NHL before documentation requirements were established for physical descriptions of resources and defined boundaries. The National Sites Survey form upon which the designation was based specifically noted the fort's historic blockhouse and partial adobe walls as well as the riverfront, which it described as "unchanged." The original form did not give a precise boundary nor did it describe or even list all the resources. In 1972, the Fort Benton Historic District, encompassing several blocks, was listed in the National Register with a period of significance of 1846-1900. In 1980, the NPS prepared a boundary study for the NHL which considered a boundary much larger than the one currently proposed (and similar to the National Register boundary), but it was not adopted because of issues regarding integrity.

The proposed boundary includes the largest concentration of Fort Benton resources that date to 1860-1890. Although the district retains less than 33 percent of contributing resources, Fort Benton meets the designation standards of the NHL program during the period of its designation. The contributing resources within the proposed boundary, as well as the general area, are largely unchanged from the time of the 1961 NHL designation.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- The River & Plains Society, which is the main preservation organization in Fort Benton and which is reconstructing the fort, supports the proposed boundary.
- The MT SHPO supports the boundary, which has been recommended for approval by the MT State Review Board.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- The National Register district has a wider period of significance (1846-1900) encompassing several areas of significance. By contrast, the NHL designation is focused on the steamboat era of 1860-1890. These somewhat subtle distinctions may confuse the public.

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of):



Advisory Board Recommendation: