TEACHER'S GUIDE
FOR
FORT UNION TRADING POST
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska

Assiniboine at Fort Union
by Karl Bodmer

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Dear Teacher:

This Teacher Guide was produced to give grade school teachers background information to provide students in the classroom in preparation for their visit to Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site. It may also be used independently in the classroom without a visit to the site but we strongly encourage a visit to Fort Union to complete the students' understanding of the significance of this center of 19th century fur trade operations on the Upper Missouri.

At Fort Union, Indian tribes – Assiniboine, Crow, Cree, Ojibway, Blackfeet and Hidatsa – traded buffalo robes and other furs for trade goods such as beads, guns, blankets, knives, kettles and cloth. Fort Union was a center of peaceful economic and social exchange between Euro-Americans and the Plains Indians from 1828-1867.

The Teacher Guide is a combination of background information for the teacher, some questions for the students, and some exercises at the end of each chapter that teachers might use with the students.

The Teacher Guide is designed for 4th – 6th grade classes but can be used by teachers in earlier or later grades.

For further information on Fort Union Trading Post check out our web site at: www.nps.gov/fous

When Lewis and Clark saw the Confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers in 1805, Lewis noted this area would be good for a fur trading post. Fort Union, a trading post for the Assiniboine, was built near the Confluence in 1828. For 39 years, it would be the largest, most profitable fur trading post on American soil.

Chapter One – The Fur Trade

Fur played a major role in North America from the beginning of European exploration. Jamestown, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay colonies were all heavily involved in the fur business, bartering European goods for Indian-processed pelts.

Many North American cities – Montreal, New York, Charleston, and Pittsburgh among them – began as trading posts. Indians brought their furs to trade for guns, kettles, cloth, metal implements and beads.

One such trade metropolis was St. Louis, established in 1764, on the Missouri River. Its river location made it a prime site to deposit fur, hides and pelts from the rich hunting grounds of the Upper Missouri.

Several French (and later French-American) families controlled that fur trade. These merchants in fur and trade goods – among them the Pratte, Berthold, Chouteau and Cabanne families - allowed no outsiders to join them in business.

Others were interested the lucrative Upper Missouri fur trade, principally John Jacob Astor, German entrepreneur who had arrived in America in 1784. By 1808, Astor had created the powerful American Fur Company, operating mainly in Canada and the eastern United States.

National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institution
John Jacob Astor

Guided by Ramsay Crooks, a Scot and Astor's second in command, the American Fur Company gradually worked its way into that closed St. Louis society. Crooks' marriage to Emilie Pratte, daughter of Bernard Pratte, in 1825, further solidified American Fur Company interests among the St. Louis titans of the Upper Missouri fur trade.

By 1826, Bernard Pratte and Company (which included the Chouteau family) became western agents for the American Fur Company. Astor was now poised to do business on the Upper Missouri.

Others were also interested in the Upper Missouri, principally the Columbia Fur Company. With "token" American citizens to make the company legal in the U.S., the Columbia Fur Company had been created by Canadians out of work after the merger of the Northwest Company with Hudson's Bay Company.

These Canadians – the Scot Kenneth McKenzie among them - came south to U.S. soil, trading in Minnesota and the Knife River region of present-day North Dakota.

From the American Fur Company's standpoint, something had to be done about the Columbia Fur Company. Ramsay Crooks of the AFC, and Kenneth McKenzie of the CFC, entered into serious negotiations.

After many frustrating months, Crooks and McKenzie suddenly struck a bargain in 1827. The Columbia Fur Company entered the western division of the American Fur Company – based in St. Louis – as the Upper Missouri Outfit. The UMO retained its independence as a subsidiary, but now had the vast capital of Astor's empire behind it.

By 1828, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., was assuming more and more control in Pratte and Company. His business genius, coupled with Astor's wealth, and McKenzie's field tactics, put the western division of the American Fur Company in a most powerful position on the Upper Missouri.

South Dakota State Historical Society – State Archives
Pierre Chouteau

Astor retired in 1834, and Chouteau eventually assumed control of the western division. Although it was called Pierre Chouteau, Jr. & Company, it was commonly known as the American Fur Company, or simply, "The Company."

The fur trade was a global enterprise, with Fort Union serving as the pivot. Pelts, hides, and buffalo robes were collected at Fort Union from smaller forts, shipped to St. Louis, then to the great fur markets in New York, Montreal, London and Leipzig. These furs ended up in the farthest corners of the world.

In exchange, agents of the American Fur Company scoured the world for goods to trade for the furs. Woolen cloth and blankets from England and Germany, beads from Venice, steel knives from Sheffield, vermillion face paint from China, brass kettles, trade guns, and mirrors – the list of demands from Indian trading partners was long and sophisticated.

For a brief time, the independent trapper – the so-called mountain man – was part of the picture, especially in the Rocky Mountains. However, the Indian trade in pelts and robes continued much longer at established trading posts.

For this trade to occur, Indian and whites had to work together. Without this mutual commitment to business, there would have been no fur trade.

From its beginnings in 1828 to its conclusion in 1867, Fort Union came to symbolize the best of Indian and white worlds. For a remarkable 39 years, this society existed peacefully, each partner giving the other what he needed.

Comprehension questions:

1. What were fur pelts traded for?

2. What cities began as trading posts?

3. What families controlled the fur trade on the Upper Missouri?

4. Name several important trade items bartered for fur.

Extending thinking:

1. Why was the location of Fort Union excellent for the fur trade?

Chapter Two
Fort Union: A Brief History

Map of Upper Missouri

Fur traders had been traveling into the region since the 1700s, looking for trade routes, encountering tribes and tapping into the region's resources.

Fort Union was established in 1828. According to the map what two rivers join near it?_____

_____

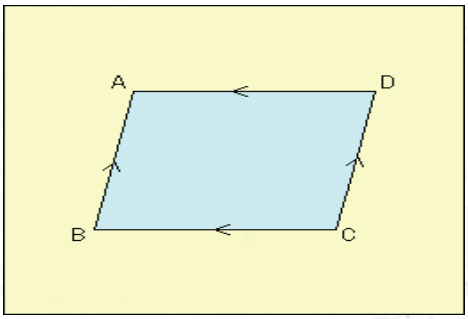
Looking at the map again, what is the distance between Fort Union and Fort Pierre?_____

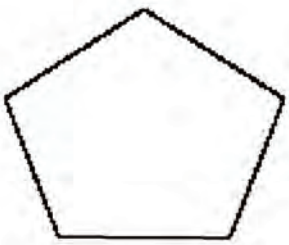
Read on to learn more about the history of the area.

Map of Upper Missouri

General agreement among historians now dates Fort Union's founding to the fall of 1828. Fort Union was built at the request of the Assiniboine, who lived in the region. A hastily built fort of palisades, dwellings and the all-important trade house went up that fall on the northern bank of the Missouri River. The original fort – 198 by 178 feet – was a parallelogram rather than a square.

Word Definition: What is the correct definition of Parallelogram?
A. When both sides are equal and the ends are slanted.
B. There are five sides to it.





Fort Union's setting was ideal for both river commerce, and for convenient access by Native American trading partners. The broad plain north and east of the fort was ideal for visiting Indian nations to put up many camps and tipis.

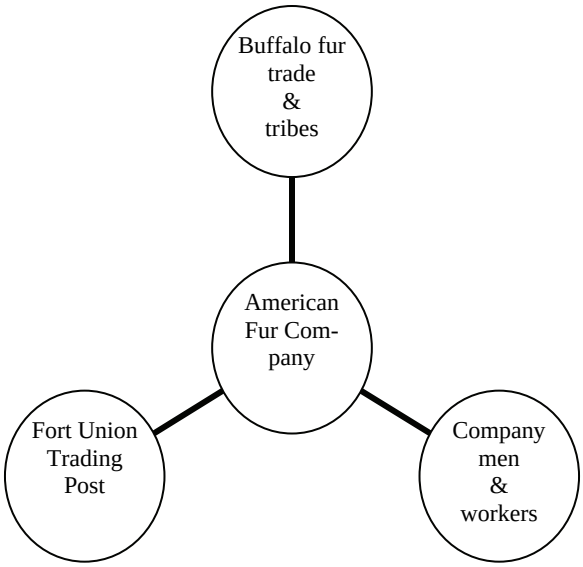
Company Spheres of influence

Upper Missouri Outfit

Companies like the American Fur Company were divided into groups or categories. Each level identifies an area of the company. The Western Department of AFC was headquartered in St. Louis. This branched into the Upper Missouri Outfit headquartered at Fort Union Trading Post.

Workers at Fort Union consisted of the company manager or bourgeois, clerks, hunters, interpreters, craftsmen and engages (laborers).

Trade ties for the company relied on good relations with the local tribes. Northern plains tribes who traded at Fort Union brought furs to the fort for trade. Tribes hunted the buffalo, skinned it and tanned it. A well-tanned buffalo hide was highly valued during the trade.



Fort Union employed around 100 workers, many from various European backgrounds. Fort Union needed two main resources in order for the company to succeed: partners and transportation for goods received from the partners.

Questions:

Ten percent of the work force was upper management and 70 percent were laborers. Thinking about the company makeup, what other kind of workers could benefit fort operations? Discuss.

About 10 Northern Plains tribes came here to trade. On average a tipi could hold around 10 people. In one estimate, the famous artist George Catlin who came to Fort Union in 1832 said 10,000 Indian people came to Fort Union that year. Based on this information how many total tipis could have been on site?

Fort Union History

Timeline

1828	1832	1837	1848	1851	1864	1867
Ft. Union Built	First Steamboat Arrives	Smallbox Outbreak	Bourgeois House Expanded	Tribes leave here for Fort Laramie Treaty	Army arrives	Fort closes

From its beginning to the final days of trading on the Upper Missouri, Fort Union lasted close to forty years as a fur trading hub for many of the Northern Plains tribes.

The trading post was high enough to avoid the notorious ice jams and "June rise" of the river from snowmelt that could cause disastrous flooding. The river location meant keelboats, mackinaw boats, Native American bullboats and later steamboats could dock directly at the bank.

Fort Union's setting was ideal for both river commerce, and for convenient access by Native American trading partners. The broad plain north and east of the fort was ideal for visiting nations to put up many camps and tipis.

No one really knows why the trading post was named Fort Union. Possibly, the name "union" symbolized the Upper Missouri Outfit's control over the fur trade from the rivers to the mountains.

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site
Kenneth McKenzie

Kenneth McKenzie was Fort Union's first bourgeois, or general manager. He was a shrewd, often ruthless, businessman nicknamed "The King of the Upper Missouri." The construction of Fort Union at the confluence of two major rivers proved to be a wise strategy. Fort Union soon became the headquarters for the Upper Missouri fur trade. In addition to the Assiniboine trade, Crow came up from the southwest. The Blackfeet came from further west. More than 10 different tribes traded at Fort Union.

At its height, Fort Union employed up to 100 men, many of whom had Indian wives and families. Many races and nationalities lived at the fort in relative harmony: Euro-Americans, African-Americans, English, Germans, Scots, French, Spanish, Italians, Russians, and Native Americans.

Many families lived in the dwelling range, located on the west side of the courtyard. Others lived in tipis, and some lived in shacks built into the fort's interior walls. There is evidence that some lived in the bastions, too.

Midwest Jesuit Archives Saint Louis, Missouri
Bourgeois House

Befitting his station, the bourgeois lived in what became known as the Bourgeois House. The bourgeois shared his home with visitors, as well. The magnificence of the Bourgeois House served notice to trading partners and potential competition that the powerful American Fur Company was here to stay.

Other important members of the fort's staff included the *clerks*. These men, generally Euro-Americans, were responsible for keeping records, and conducting inventories of trade goods, furs and hides. They also kept track of the fort's tools, equipment, animals, and the all-important meat supply. It was often the clerk's duty to open and shut the massive gates.

Interpreters knew several Native American languages, as well as English and French. *Hunters*, often men of mixed blood, supplied the fort with fresh meat: buffalo, elk, and deer. *Craftsmen* - carpenters, masons, blacksmiths and gunsmiths - were essential to the fort's maintenance. *Traders* carried on the actual trading of goods to the tribes in exchange for their furs. The fort's common laborers were called *engages*.

The American Fur Company's policy of hosting travelers brought many famous adventurers, scientists, artists, and priests to Fort Union. The artist George Catlin arrived in 1832 on board the *Yellow Stone*, the first steamboat to reach Fort Union. Prince Maximilian of Wied Neuwied, Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, John James Audubon, Karl Bodmer, and Rudolph F. Kurz also left their mark. Many painted, and others wrote vivid accounts of life at the fort; some did both.

But the business of the fort was the fur trade. Beaver pelts were in demand early, but fashions changed and the demand for beaver hats lessened. Tanned buffalo robes proved to be the most valuable commodity shipped downriver.

The demand for buffalo robes, along with improved river transportation, caused an increase in fur trade activity at Fort Union. Brain-tanned buffalo robes illustrate the global nature of the fur trade. A robe tanned on the Upper Missouri might be turned into a soldier's overcoat in the Russian army. Between Fort Union and St. Petersburg, there would be a trip downriver to St. Louis, and then to New York City, and then across the Atlantic Ocean to the fur market in Leipzig, Germany.

Buffalo Robe

The brisk trade was interrupted in 1837, when smallpox came up the Missouri River on the steamboat St. Peter. Although fur traders tried to warn Native Americans away from Fort Union, they came anyway. Many contracted the disease and carried it back to their own regions. Thousands died.

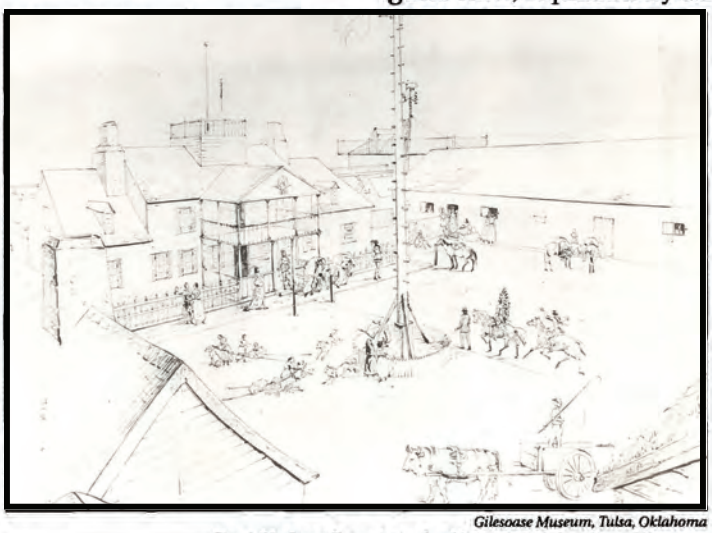
Despite the tragedy, the robe trade continued. Gradually, it reached pre-smallpox levels again. The pictures of Fort Union that Rudolph Kurz painted in 1851-1852 show a trading post at its height of power and influence. The Upper Missouri has never seen anything like it since.

By the late 1850s, the Upper Missouri was changing. Buffalo herds were still immense, but white civilization was moving onto the homelands of the Plains tribes.

Sioux, finding themselves crowded out of their Minnesota woodlands onto the plains, became more and more hostile to the fur trade. In 1856, smallpox struck the Upper Missouri again; many of the tribes broke into smaller groups and scattered to escape the disease. By the time the Civil War began in 1861, trade had declined and the once-proud post was in need of repair.

The military arrived at Fort Union in 1864, in response to Sioux hostilities and to protect overland routes to the Montana goldfields. Soldiers stayed at the trading post during 1864-65. In 1866 at the Confluence, the army built Fort Buford to protect growing American interests in the region.

In 1865, Pierre Chouteau's upriver empire came to an end as Fort Union was sold to the Northwest Fur Company, which tried to continue trading. The harmonious relationship between Native American people and traders was gone now, replaced by hostility and warfare.



Gilcoase Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Fort Union Courtyard – Kurz

In 1867, the Northwest Fur Company gave up and sold old Fort Union to the army. Troops dismantled what remained of the fort and used the materials to expand Fort Buford. The only thing left at Fort Union was the foundations.

Fort Union Today

Although the most famous fur trade fort in the United States was gone, interest never disappeared entirely. Two expositions organized by the Great Northern Railroad in the 1920s focused attention on Fort Union. In 1966, Fort Union Trading Post was established by Congress as a unit of the National Park Service.

Facts . . .

The Organic Act of 1916 was an important law for the national parks. This law established the National Park Service and promotes the use of the parks' cultural and natural resources. It also regulates this use so future generations will be able to enjoy them.

The National Park Service gets assistance from volunteers and non-profit groups who help provide additional resources to the parks.

The Fort Union Muzzle Loaders Association is actively involved with park interpretation at Fort Union. The group participates in special events, recreates historic furnishings and assists in historic reenactments.

Fort Union Trading Post began reconstruction of the site in 1985 with the building of the flagpole. In 1986 the Bourgeois House was built. In 1989, the walls and 1991 the trade house. The reconstructed fort is a valuable tool used to promote and learn about the history of the fur trade on the upper Missouri.

Before reconstruction began, archaeology had to be done to find the exact location of original items buried in the ground. This was a very large project which lasted from 1968 to 1972 and 1986 to 1988.

Photo courtesy of "Midwest Archeological Center"

Archeological Technician Pat Ashley and Volunteer-In-Parks Cece Zoesch (July 2, 1986), excavating materials found at Fort Union.

Questions:

How many years did Fort Union last? _____

How many years passed between the years Fort Union closed and when the National Park Service took over? _____

The word fort has different meanings, what best fits it's meaning here?

Fort Union was a place for _____ to trade their fur hides.

A. the military b. fur traders c. French d. Native tribes e. none of the above

Fort Union stands today where it stood more than 175 years ago: a potent, striking reminder of America's first global enterprise. A reproduction of a fur trade scene mounted over the south entrance underscores something else about Fort Union. It is a depiction of fur traders in tall hats shaking hands with their Native American trading partners. For 39 years, two peoples came together in relative harmony at a place aptly named Fort Union.

Comprehension questions:

1. When was Fort Union built?
2. What were the dimensions of the original fort?
3. How far was Fort Union from St. Louis?
4. Who was Fort Union's first bourgeois? Where was he from?
5. At its height, how many men worked at Fort Union? List their nationalities.
6. What event happened in 1837?

Extended thinking:

Why did demand for beaver pelts decrease? What replaced them?

Harpers Ferry Center, National Park Service – NPS/Max Ramirez

Aerial View – Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site

Chapter Three
The Assiniboine: Fort Union's Principal Trading Partner

The Assiniboine people have lived in the Upper Missouri since at least the mid-1600s. In the early 1800s, starting with the introduction of the horse and gun, Assiniboine life began to change. The tribe invited the fur traders into their country to secure access to trade goods.

The Assiniboines' vast knowledge of fur trading was of great value to the American Fur Company. As the dominant tribe in the region, they exerted much influence and contributed greatly to Fort Union's success.

Origins

Assiniboine (uh-SIN-uh-boin) An Oijbwa word meaning, "Those who cook with stones." This refers to stone boiling, the practice of heating stones directly in a fire and then placing them in water for cooking.

British explorers and traders also used the name "Stoney" for the tribe. The term they use for themselves is "Nakodabi".

Considerd an offshoot of the Nakota Sioux, the Assiniboine have their own oral tradition that tells this history as well.

Assiniboine Nation

- Left Hand
- Little Girl
- Rock or Stone
- Red Bottom
- Paddlers & Canoes

This list is an example of how the Assiniboine broke down into bands.

In journals, fur traders recorded the Assiniboine had as many as 30 bands.

Oral Traditions

Written accounts of history are one way of telling a history. The Assiniboine, like most plains tribes, recorded their history by handing down tribal stories to the younger generation. Another way of recording their history was through winter counts.

Winter counts were records of major events that took place during the history of the tribe. Each picture represented a year in that history.

Library of Congress

Battiste Good (Winter Count, 1230-1907) (1821- ca. 1907)

Lifestyle

The Assiniboine, once part of the Yanktonai Sioux, speak a Siouan dialect. In their early history the population numbered around 10,000. As they migrated on to the plains, they adopted the Plains Indian nomadic culture of living in tipis, acquiring horses, trading with other tribes or fur traders and hunting buffalo.

Facts . . .

Plains tribes acquired the horse through tribal trade networks which came from the southwest in the early 1700s.

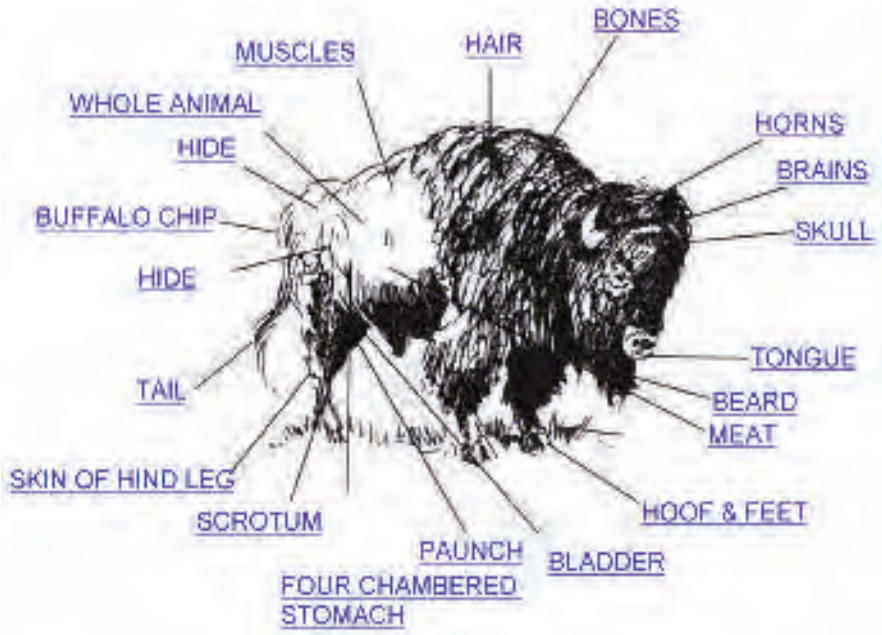
The buffalo was a valuable resource for the Assiniboine. The hides were used for covers, tipis and clothes. The meat was used for food and the bones were made into various tools or weapons. Just about every part of the buffalo was used; nothing was wasted.

Language activity

Practice saying these words in the Assiniboine (Nakodabi) language.

Hello.....hau (how)
Dog.....suga (shoe-gah)
Boy.....hoksina (hok-she-nah)
Girl.....winkoskeskena
Winter.....waniyedu
Summer.....mnogedu
Bear.....mato (mah-toe)
Twenty.....wikecemna nuba
Trader.....wopetu

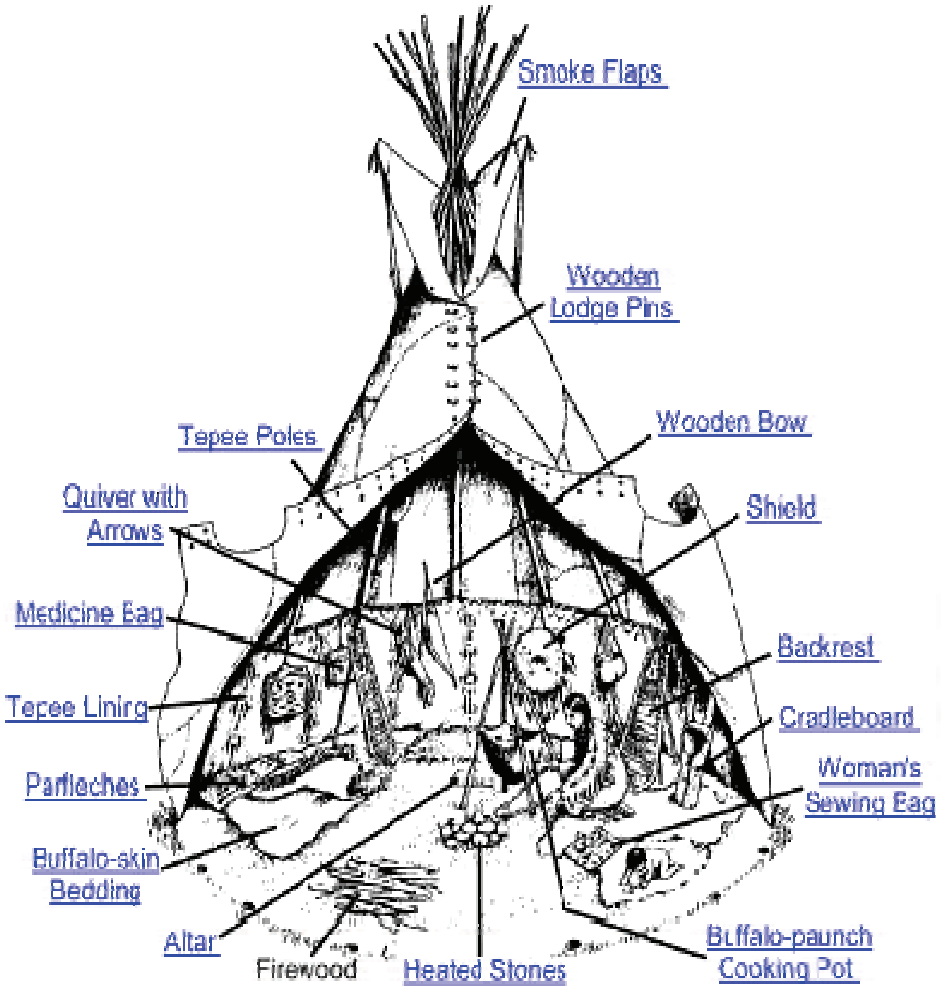
Diagram:



This diagram shows parts of the buffalo used by the Assiniboine people.

Question:
Looking at the diagram, what uses could you find for the items of materials listed?

Life in a tipi was controlled by the women.
The women owned the lodge and did all the work associated with it.



Questions:

Looking at the picture of the tipi, which of the items could be traded for?

Thinking back to the early chapter, what was the average number of people that could fit in a tipi?

During the fort's 39 years, the Assiniboine also protected the fort and its inhabitants from other tribes. Fort Union's employees found them to be generous and hospitable; intermarriage was common. Marriage alliances with the fort's bourgeois, clerks and traders strengthened relationships between Fort Union and its trading partners. In later years, no military post was needed to police the Assiniboine, and no American troops ever warred against them.

Since encountering the fur traders, the Assiniboines' world was changed by gaining access to metal trade goods, inter-marriages with the traders, and diseases, such as smallpox in 1837, that reduced their population by half. Wars with enemy tribes further reduced their population.

Today in Montana, the Assiniboine share the Fort Belknap reservation with the Gros Ventres and the Fort Peck reservation (some 70 miles west of Fort Union) with the Sioux.

In Saskatchewan, they share one reserve with the Sioux and another with the Cree and Ojibwa. A third band resides on two other reserves in Saskatchewan.

Although not a well-known tribe today in the non-native culture, the Assiniboine were instrumental in the success of Fort Union and its fur trade.

Comprehension questions:

1. What language dialect do the Assiniboine speak?
2. When did the Assiniboine migrate to the northern plains?
3. What are nomadic tribes?
4. Where are the Assiniboine located today?

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska

Assiniboine Man – Karl Bodmer

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska

Assiniboine Camp – Karl Bodmer

Chapter Four
Fort Union Society-
Population, Class and Employment

As a commercial enterprise, the trading post had a society in which each man's background, education and income determined his place. The upper class was comprised of the bourgeois and his chief clerk and traders.

- Bourgeois – $1,000, plus a share in the profits made that year.
- Traders and Clerks - $800 to $1,000 for trading with tribes and keeping account records.
- Interpreters – for $500 they signed on for 8 ½ months during trade season.
- Craftsmen –$250 for building construction and repairs as well as providing the material needs of the fort.
- Engages –$125 for manual labor. Engages made up 70% of the work force.

The following annual salaries, representative of 1851, indicate, in 19th century dollars, that the men of the upper class were well paid.

Job Decriptions

The Bourgeois managed the fort and was a partner in the company.

Traders and clerks knew tribal languages, could read and write, and kept inventories and accounts. A top hat and suit of clothes were included in their yearly salary.

Interpreters were well versed in tribal languages and customs; most were French-Canadian or Métis

Craftsman were skilled workers: tinsmiths, blacksmiths, tailors, coopers, carpenters, rock masons and boat builders.

Engages (laborers) were the unskilled workers; they did all the heavy lifting and hauling.

Facts...

The workers, no matter what their pay, all received a room and clothing, two meals a day and a raw buffalo hide for bedding.

Though this breakdown shows company salaries, it was possible to learn a trade or skill in order to move up the ladder. An engage could, with hard work, learn carpentry, a Native American language and the knowledge to conduct trade sessions. He could learn to keep records of the trade goods and furs, to watch the fort while the bourgeois was in St. Louis, and finally, to become the manager himself.

National Anthropological Archives Smithsonian Institution

Trader by Kurz

National Anthropological Archives Smithsonian Institution

Engage by Kurz

Discussion:
Do you think it was possible to rise from an engage to interpreter or clerk? What kind of skills had to be acquired for this to happen?

Family Life

Many of the workers were married to Native American women from the various tribes who came to trade at Fort Union. These marriages, mostly based on tribal traditions, were also in some cases conducted according to Christian beliefs. Children born of these unions were capable of speaking multiple languages and understanding other cultures.

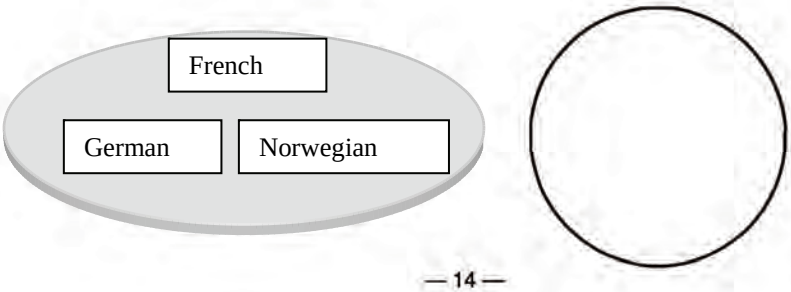
Did you know?

Partnerships between the fur traders and tribes were at times established through arranged marriages. A chief's daughter could marry a top clerk or even the bourgeois. This usually made the trade relationship stronger.

These women saw their marriage as important to their tribe. Native American women could also serve as interpreters and ties to the fur traders.

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska
"Trapper's Bride" – Alfred Jacob Miller

Activity:
Marriages between the Native Americans and fur traders led to mixed bloodlines for their children. Most of the traders came to Fort Union from one of 10 European groups, the majority being French-Canadian. Looking at your own background, make a circle into a pie chart with the kind of bloodlines that make up who you are.



Good Times & Bad

Law and Order

Since Fort Union was a company rather than a government, any law enforcement came from the company employees themselves. The clerks acted as law enforcers to the men who worked for them. Problems included:

- Stealing
- Cheating
- Robbing
- Fighting

If someone was caught doing any of the above criminal activities, punishment could include:

- Lashes on the back
- Shooting
- No pay or food
- Hard labor

Entertainment

To keep from getting bored, which might lead to trouble, the traders entertained themselves through various events like dances and playing music or games.

Popular parlor games included cards, various Native American dice games, and a Native American game similar to "Who's got the button?" Learning to play musical instruments was another activity. Racing with horses or testing one's marksmanship with a rifle provided entertainment and increased valuable skills.

Games that included a skill or competition kept workers sharp and prepared for any challenges they might encounter. Reading was another way to pass the time. In the 1830s, the fort's reading matter included texts on mixing dyes for porcupine quills, medicine, chemistry, natural philosophy and Spanish.

Food

An employee's status at the fort determined what kind and quantity of food he ate. At the lower end of the scale, engages (laborers and craftsmen) ate buffalo meat and biscuit, and drank coffee.

At the upper end, for the bourgeois, clerks and traders, meals could be exceptional. They included a good selection of meat and bread, often butter, cream or milk. There was pie on Sunday and sometimes canned oysters, dried fruit, preserved herrings, capers (buds or young berries used as a relish) and almonds, plus several varieties of wine.

Discussions:

Music and games were important to pass the time. Traders recorded games played by the various tribes who came to Fort Union. One popular Native American game was foot racing. One term used by the runners was, "never lose their breath." What does this mean?

Maintaining law was an important part of life among the traders. What steps can be taken to help keep the peace?

Comprehension Questions:

1. Name some of the positions and the salaries men earned.
2. Name some of the foods eaten at the head table in the Bourgeois House.
3. What did people do to entertain themselves at Fort Union?

Extended thinking:

1. Why were craftsmen at the fort so important?
2. What do you suppose a typical day in the life of a Fort Union child was like? Write, in first person, what your day would be like if you were a child at the fort?

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian I

North Gate – Fort Union, Rudolph Kurz

Chapter Five
Trading at Fort Union

Although there is no documented evidence, the Trade House was probably the first structure built by the men of the American Fur Company when they arrived at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers in 1828.

Reception Room (right) – this is where tribal leaders and traders met for a formal meeting to discuss terms.

The meeting was social, with an exchange of gifts, feasts, speeches and a ceremonial smoking of a Native American pipe.

Trade Shop (lower right) – this was the store used to display the fur company's trade goods, more than 200 items ranging from metal knives to blankets.

Clerk's Office (below) – the third room of the trade house was used for keeping track of the entire inventory taken in and out of the fort.

The three parts to the trade house were all necessary to the operation of the fort. This was where the trading was done. Knowing a number of different skills was vital to doing business.

Questions:

In the first picture on the right on the previous page, what kind of skill would you need in order to carry out your duties as an employee?

In the trade, Native American tribes brought in buffalo hides, beaver, otter, deer, elk or any other pelts that were of value for the different trade goods. If you came to Fort Union with one of the tribes during winter, what kind of goods, looking at the picture, do you think you might want?

What's in the trade?

At a sign or word from the chief, one of his followers spread out a buffalo robe and some other furs for the trader to examine. These were represented as typical of the type and quality of furs brought to Fort Union. The trader examined the furs - especially the buffalo robe - with great care, paying careful attention to the quality of fur and tanning. While the trader examined the skins, the chief and his men talked about the furs. They told the trader how the men had scouted many long days for the herds of buffalo, how they lost good ponies in the hunt, or how the women worked tirelessly to skin the animals and tan the hides.

After the trader examined the skins, he ordered an engage to retrieve a few items from the trade shop. These would be some of the newest items to arrive on the summer steamboats. As the chief and his men examined the goods, the trader praised them. The trader might brag that the new wool blankets were much better than those of the previous year, or assure his trading partners that the bottom of the tin cup would not fall off after steaming hot coffee was poured into it.

The length of stay of each tribal band at Fort Union depended on the size of the band, and the amount of furs to trade. Once traders and tribal leaders placed a value on the furs and robes, the band would trade until it was done. This could take a week or longer.

Once the band was finished and everyone was satisfied, they would leave to follow the buffalo. Although they hunted all year to provide food for their families, winter buffalo hunts furnished the best hides for tanning because they were fuller and thicker

Gikrease Museum. Tulsa, Oklahoma

Cree Chief Le Tout Pique addressing Edwin Denig by Rudolph Kurz

Discussion:

Reading the information above, what was the reason for inspecting the furs? Also, why would the trader explain the effects of pouring coffee into a cup?

Facts...

Tribes arriving for trade with the traders were brought into the trade room and were greeted in either their own language or through sign.

Native American sign language was practiced by tribes from the East coast to the West coast. During the Lewis and Clark expedition the explorers brought a hunter/interpreter who was half French and Shawnee. He knew the sign language used by the tribes they would encounter.

Activity:

Practice the signs to the right to get the feel of how this language is done.

Friend Raise right hand with pointer and middle finger together. Thumb on ring finger and pinky. 	**Trade** Cross index fingers in front of one another
Blanket Hold the closed hands at shoulder height, then cross them. 	**Buffalo** Closed hands bring them to top part of head. Pointer fingers are not closed, but pointing.
Beaver Let hand flat out across the body. Then the right hand slaps the left from the bottom back. 	**Good** Bring right hand flat across your body, going from left to right.

Trade Goods

Items traded at Fort Union were often utensils, such as knives, spoons, cups and bowls, as well as cloth, beads, blankets, rifles. By 1851, Fort Union had as many as 250 trade items

Questions:

Knives came from Sheffield, England. The process of making items from steel is done by what method?

a. freezing b. grinding c. melting d. twisting

What words best fit the blanks in the sentence below?
Brass kettles are another item of trade that tribes acquired from Fort Union. To cook, tribes previously used _____ or produced their own pottery out of_____.

Word possibilities: animal stomach, rock, wood, leather, river clay, mud.

The Trade House Today

Just as the original Trade House was Fort Union's focal point, today's Trade House is the center of the modern historical site. The Trade House is the only building at Fort Union completely refurnished to its original appearance, thanks largely to the sketches and journal of Rudolph Kurz, Swiss artist employee of the American Fur Company from 1851-52.

The Trade House is fully restocked during the summer months, based on the inventories of 1851. It functions today much as it did in the mid-nineteenth century. Visitors are welcome to examine the trade goods and purchase them. However, there is no lengthy negotiation now. That belongs to an earlier era, when skins were money.

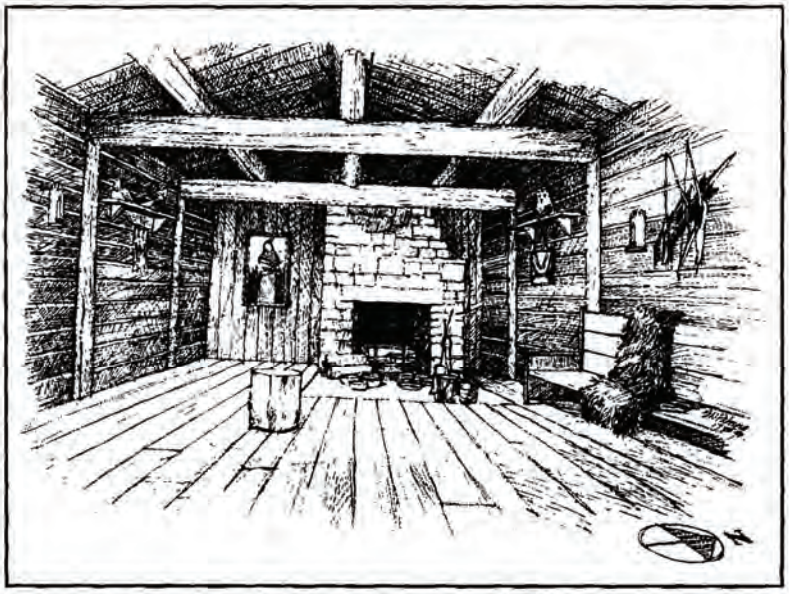
Comprehension questions:

1. Write a summary of a trade negotiation between an Assiniboine and trader.
2. What gifts might a chief receive from a trader?
3. What gifts might a chief give to a trader?
4. How long would a tribe stay at the fort during the trade negotiations?

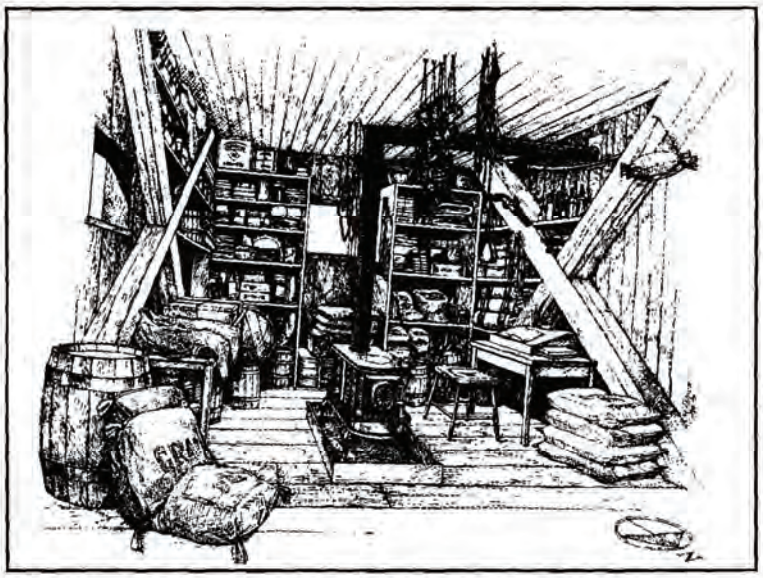
Extended thinking:

1. Why do you think items like coffee and sugar were desired by the tribes trading at the fort?

2. Role play that you are an Assiniboine chief. Write a speech to begin the trade negotiations. Then write an introductory speech role playing as a Fort Union trader.



Trade House Reception Room



Trade House Trade Shop

Chapter Six
"Across the wide Missouri"

The Missouri was the water highway connecting St. Louis and Fort Union, a distance of 1,800 miles.

Bullboat

Bullboats were a common form of river transportation familiar to tribes on the Upper Missouri, who used them to transport both people and items such as food or belongings. Most bullboats could hold a maximum of two people and their supplies. Although traditionally used by women of these Upper Missouri tribes, fur traders adapted bullboats for their own needs.

A bullboat took an average of three hours to build and, depending on the weather, a couple more hours to dry. The bullboat was created by using willow, rawhide rope, and the green, or uncured, hide of a buffalo.

The willows, usually numbering 13, were shaped and tied into a frame that looked like a cup or a bowl. After the green hide was scraped and cleaned, it was stretched over the frame and tied at the edges. As the hide dried, it stretched tight to the frame.

The fur of the hide was placed on the outside of the boat so that the epidermis of the skin holding the hair would serve as a water proofing to keep the hide dry.

Any holes in hides were mended with sinew string. Once water began to dampen the hide, the water swelled the hide and closed any other holes too small to be seen with the naked eye.

Mandan Bull Boats. Painting by Karl Bodmer c.a. 1832

Keelboat Era

Keelboats were once the principal craft conveying trade goods up river and cargoes of fur down river. Costing around $2,500 each, keelboats averaged 60 feet long, 18 feet wide, with a five-foot cabin above the deck. The craft featured a sharp bow and stern, with a swivel gun mounted on the bow for protection. These boats each carried 20 tons of trade goods and were pulled, poled or rowed up the Missouri, against a strong current.

A keelboat crew consisted of a *patron* or captain, *bosseman* or assistant patron, and twenty *voyageurs* who literally pulled the boat up river. Additional passengers might include hunters and trappers en route to the mountains.

National Park Service, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Archives.

The voyageurs pulled the keelboat by means of a 300-yard *cordell* rope attached to the upper portion of the boat's mast. The patron kept the boat in the channel, while the bosseman shouted orders and the voyageurs pulled at the rate of 15 miles per day.

It took a keelboat crew six months to travel from St. Louis to Fort Union, and an additional 40 days to continue up river to Fort McKenzie, located on the Missouri in west-central Montana.

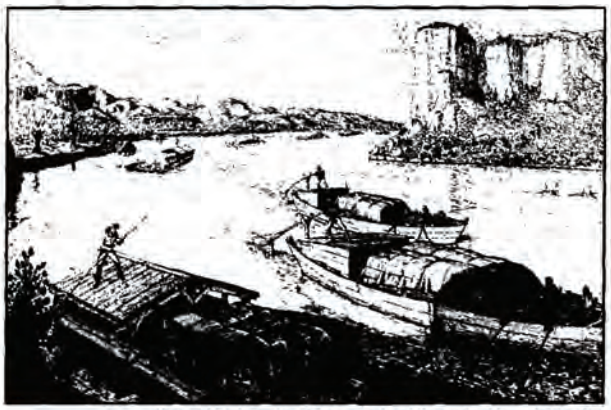
The trip consumed one boating season. Steamboat travel was initiated in 1832 by the American Fur Company to cut the high cost of transporting goods by labor-intensive keelboat and speed the journey. To businessmen, time is money.

Mackinaw Boats: A One-Way Trip

Large posts such as Fort Union have *chantiers*, or boat yards, for the construction of mackinaw boats. Constructed of two-inch cottonwood planks, typical mackinaws were 50 feet long and nine feet wide, with three-foot gunwales; they drew 30 inches.

Mackinaws were the cheapest downstream transportation available, since steamboats usually could not carry all the furs gathered at the forts. They were built for a one-way trip.

A Mackinaw could carry 300 packs of furs covered with buffalo skins to provide watertight protection. A mackinaw crew consisted of a steersman, plus five men. Mackinaws traveled in fleets of six to 12 boats for protection and assistance. They averaged 100 miles a day, running with the swift current to St. Louis.



National Park Service, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Archives

Steamboat Era

In a move to improve transportation to its upper river posts and to cut the costs of keelboats, the American Fur Company built a steamboat, the *Yellow Stone*, during the winter of 1830-1831.

Kenneth McKenzie, Fort Union's first bourgeois, gets credit for the idea of developing steamboat traffic on the upper river. Through long experience in the fur trade, he realized that Missouri River steamboat transportation could be used to the advantage of the American Fur Company, and at the expense of its competitors.

The *Yellow Stone* departed from St. Louis in April 1831 on its pioneering voyage. Because of the inexperience of its captain in navigating the treacherous, meandering Upper Missouri, the boat only got as far as Fort Tecumseh in present-day South Dakota.

In 1832, the *Yellow Stone* again departed from St. Louis, but this time in March to take advantage of the upper river's "June rise." To cheers and the firing of cannon, the *Yellow Stone* reached Fort Union on June 16, 1832.

For the next 27 years, Fort Union was the effective head of navigation on the Missouri River. The arrival of the annual steamboat was cause for great celebration among the Upper Missouri forts.

Each successive year after 1832, the American Fur Company sent one steamboat per year to Fort Union. In the 1850s, two steamboats made the trip each summer, owing to competitive pressure and lucrative government contracts required by Indian treaties.

In 1859, the American Fur Company's *Chippewa* became the first boat to reach Brulé Bottom just below Fort Benton in Montana Territory. From 1859, to the abandonment of Fort Union in 1867, Fort Benton became the head of steam navigation on the great Missouri River.

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Comprehension Questions:

1. What were the dimensions of a keelboat and how much cargo could a keelboat hold?
2. How many miles a day could a keelboat travel?
3. How many miles was it from St. Louis to Fort Union and how long did it take a keelboat to make the journey?
4. What were the dimensions of a Mackinaw and how much cargo could it hold?
5. With a swift current, downstream, how many miles could a Mackinaw travel in a day?
6. When and what steamboat first reached Fort Union?
7. When did the first steamboat reach Fort Benton?

Extended Thinking:

1. Imagine that you are on a steamboat to St. Louis, write about your experiences.

Research Activities:

1. At Fort Union, ask a ranger to tell you about the different boats used for transportation.

Chapter Seven
Personalities on the Upper Missouri

Explorers, scientists, artists, priests, surveyors, royalty, naturalists and adventurers were drawn to the remote Upper Missouri for various reasons: Some to save souls; others to paint; some to study; others to exploit.

All could expect a welcome at Fort Union and other trading posts on the Upper Missouri, mainly because of Pierre Chouteau, Jr. Charming and well-educated, Chouteau eventually led the American Fur Company after John J. Astor's retirement in 1834.

Chouteau took a great interest in the bright minds who came his way and wanted his assistance in traveling upriver. Chouteau and his Upper Missouri colleagues extended hospitality to travelers.

Some of the region's other notable personalities were here from the first, including Azhazhana (The Light), and Natawista Iksina, wife of Bourgeois Alexander Culbertson.

The bourgeois themselves, who provided the hospitality, also stand out. Kenneth McKenzie, first bourgeois, has already been mentioned. There were others - Alexander Culbertson and Edwin Denig – who played major roles in the fur trade.

Alexander Culbertson (1809-1879)

Alexander Culbertson was born in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in 1809. He went upriver in 1833 as an employee of the Upper Missouri Outfit of the Western Department of the American Fur Company.

Montana Historical Society
Alexander Culbertson

Early in his employment, the able Culbertson traveled beyond Fort Union to Fort McKenzie, deep in Blackfeet country. He later built Fort Benton. His wise marriage to Natawista Iksina (Medicine Snake Woman), of the Blackfeet nation helped cement ties and bring the Blackfeet into the fold of the American Fur Company.

Culbertson served as bourgeois at Fort Union and Fort McKenzie. He became an agent of the Upper Missouri Outfit - an overseer of several forts - with a handsome salary and shares in the company.

In 1851, Culbertson led a delegation of Upper Missouri tribes to Fort Laramie for the treaty conference. He was respected by Indians and whites alike.

Culbertson retired from the fur trade in 1857 and died in Nebraska in 1879.

Medicine Snake Woman – Natawista Iksina (ca. 1825-1893)

Natawista Iksina was the daughter of Two Suns - Blood chief of the Fish Eater Band - and Red Deer Woman, born in what is now Montana near the Belly (Oldman) River.

Natawista's marriage to Alexander Culbertson in 1840 did much to cement relationships between the Blackfeet and American traders, which previously had been precarious.

Montana Historical Society
Natawista

Her presence during trade negotiations helped ensure good relationships. She was also able to act as interpreter, and was known as a gracious hostess.

The Culbertsons were married for 30 years, during which time they had several children. Natawista eventually returned to her own people in Montana. Some of their children remained in the East in white society; others went West. The Culbertson name is still prominent in Montana, where there is a town of that name.

Natawista died on the Blood Reserve in Canada.

Edwin Denig (1812-1858)

National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution
Edwin Denig & Deer Little Women

Edwin Thompson Denig was born in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, the son of a physician. Like his friend and fellow Pennsylvanian Alexander Culbertson, Denig went upriver in 1833 in the employ of the American Fur Company.

The well-educated Denig rose through the ranks, becoming bourgeois of Fort Union in 1849. An advantageous marriage (two, in fact) to Assiniboine daughters of Chief Iron Arrow Point gave Denig status among the Assiniboine.

Denig was a careful student of the culture and wildlife of the Upper Missouri. In 1843, he helped John J. Audubon gather specimens, also furnishing him with the most detailed description of Fort Union known to exist. Denig also sent specimens of Upper Missouri mammals to the Smithsonian Institution in 1850.

In response to a detailed questionnaire about Indians from Henry Schoolcraft, Denig wrote what is now a classic of ethnology about Indians of the Upper Missouri. His work remains respected today.

Denig retired from the fur trade in 1856 and moved to Canada with his wife, Deer Little Woman. At the time of his death from appendicitis in 1858, he was working on another treatise on Indians.

George Catlin (1796-1872)

National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
George Catlin

Born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, George Catlin gave up a career as an attorney to paint. Catlin was the first artist of note to capture images of the Upper Missouri, including Fort Union.

In 1832, Catlin was on the steamboat *Yellow Stone* for its first successful trip to Fort Union. During Catlin's stay, Bourgeois Kenneth McKenzie let the artist turn the upper level of the southwest bastion into a studio. Indeed, Catlin made reference to "the cool breech of a brass twelve-pounder" as a comfortable seat while he painted there.

In his five months on the Upper Missouri, Catlin produced some 170 paintings. He often worked fast, ignoring details. This earned him the disdain of both Karl Bodmer and Rudolph F. Kurz, but Catlin's work has the spontaneity of a snapshot, before the era of photography.

Catlin spent five years in the west, painting and writing a series of letters later produced in two volumes. He toured his Indian collection in Europe, bringing the Upper Missouri to a wider world. His place as a painter of Indians is secure in American art.

The Light – Azhazhana (ca. 1832)

Son of Iron Arrow Point, traditional chief of the Assiniboine's Stone Band, The Light was the band's leading war chief. He is best known for his travels to the eastern United States during President Andrew Jackson's administration. He returned to tell his people in great detail about the many non-Native Americans who lived there.

Smithsonian American Art Museum
The Light

The Light was well-liked by Fort Union's fur traders, in part for keeping order among his people when they visited. His standing among the fur traders made an impression on the Assiniboine, as well.

During his trip back East, The Light was given the name, "General Jackson," by the president himself. He became known by this name. For the next three years, after he returned from the trip, The Light talked incessantly about the white peoples' large population and powerful tools. Not believing him, his people became distrustful. He was killed by a member of his own tribe.

Prince Maximilian Alexander Philipp Wied zu Neuwied (1782-1867)

Prince Maximilian was a German scholar-scientist, interested in literally everything. After achieving the rank of major general in the Prussian army during the Napoleonic Wars, Maximilian focused on scholarly pursuits.

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska
Prince Maximilian & Karl Bodmer meet the Hidatsa

He traveled extensively in Europe and South America (principally Brazil), where he sketched plants and animals and described the local cultures.

In 1832, accompanied by the equally remarkable Karl Bodmer, Maximilian went to America. He journeyed as far west as northern Montana and spent significant time at American Fur Company posts, among them Fort Clark and Fort Union. His observations on Fort Union are particularly valuable.

His book, *Travels in the Interior of North America during the Years 1832-1834*, contains both his observations and Bodmer's stunning paintings

Johan Karl Bodmer (1809-1893)

Coming to Fort Union in the year after Catlin was another remarkable artist, perhaps the finest 19th century painter of Indians: Karl Bodmer.

Bodmer was 23 years old when he came upriver in the company of Prince Maximilian Wied zu Neuwied. Born in Reisbach, Switzerland in 1809, Bodmer studied art in Paris and came to the attention of Price Maximilian, scientist and traveler.

Prince Maximilian needed a competent illustrator. He hired Bodmer as an all-around painter who could do justice to both landscapes and the human figure.

The scientist and the artist went up the Missouri in 1833 on the *Yellow Stone*. Maximilian took extensive notes, and Bodmer sketched and painted, in watercolor, the flora, fauna, and Indians along the way. In all, Bodmer executed more than 400 watercolors. Bodmer was the first artist to provide a detailed painting of Fort Union, painted north and east of the fort on what is now known as the Bodmer Overlook.

When the two returned to Europe in 1834, Bodmer re-cast many of his field sketches and watercolors into colored engravings (called aquatints), for Maximilian's two-volume work on the expedition.

Many of Bodmer's works are now housed in the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska.

Rudolph Friedrich Kurz (1818-1871)

A native of Bern, Switzerland, Kurz decided as a youth that he would someday go to America and paint Indians. After four years of classical training at an art school in Paris, Kurz went to the United States, arriving at the end of 1846.

After several years in Missouri, he went upriver on an American Fur Company steamboat. Because Kurz had no patron or personal wealth, he worked for the AFC, first at Fort Berthold and then at Fort Union.

Ethnographic Collection at the Historical Museum Berne
Rudolph Kurz

Kurz kept a journal during his North American visit. This journal, coupled with his sketches and watercolors, provide historians with one of the best views of the daily workings of a fur trade fort and its Indian trading partners.

Kurz spent the winter of 1851-1852 at Fort Union, then returned to Switzerland, determined to create paintings from his sketches and open a traveling exhibit, much as George Catlin had done earlier.

Critics savaged his paintings. Devastated, Kurz never showed them again. He worked as an art instructor in Bern.

The reconstruction of Fort Union is probably Kurz's greatest gift. His detailed architectural sketches and watercolors provided the foundation for an accurate recreation of the world of the fur trade in America

John James Audubon (1785-1851)

John James Audubon, wildlife painter and naturalist, was born in what is now Haiti. Educated in France, he came to the United States in 1803.

He is best known for his monumental work, *Birds of America.* Completed in 1838, the multi-volume work consists of 435 color plates of more than 1,000 life-sized figures of birds.

In 1843, Audubon went upriver to Fort Union Trading Post as a guest of the American Fur Company. The purpose of his visit was to collect and sketch specimens for what would become *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America.*

American Philosophical Society Philadelphia, PA
John James Audubon

A guest of bourgeois Alexander Culbertson, Audubon spent the summer at his task. Denig, head bookkeeper then, assisted him in collecting specimens.

Audubon was a respected figure in international scientific society. He was elected to London's prestigious Royal Society in 1830. Long after his death, the National Audubon Society was incorporated and named after him.

Pierre Jean DeSmet (1801-1873)

Pierre Jean DeSmet, well-traveled Jesuit missionary, was born in Belgium, but trained for the priesthood in the United States. Founder of the Pacific Northwest chain of missions in 1840, he is equally well-known as a great friend to Plains Indians.

DeSmet was held in special regard by the Teton Sioux, Yankton Sioux, and Blackfeet nations. His special place in Indian society allowed him to travel freely and safely throughout the plains and Rocky Mountains.

Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division
Pierre Jean DeSmet

DeSmet paid his first visit to Fort Union in 1840, coming back many times to baptize and christen Fort Union employees and their offspring, and regularly scold bourgeois Edwin Denig for having more than one wife.

DeSmet spend the remainder of his life visiting the missions he established, and servings as an advocate for the Indians he loved, and who came to love him.

He died in St. Louis, Mo., in 1873, and is buried in nearby Florissant.

Comprehension questions:

1. Write a summary of a personality and a timeline of his/her activities.

Extended thinking:

1. Why do you think these personalities wanted to come up the Missouri River to Fort Union and points further upriver?

Research activities:

1. Visit the bookstore at Fort Union for more information about these people.
2. Ask a ranger at Fort Union for information about these people and their activities while at Fort Union.

Chronology
Fort Union Trading Post

1673 Louis Joliet and Jacques Marquette discover the mouth of the Missouri River.
1738 Pierre La Verendrye visits the Mandan Indians on the Upper Missouri in what will become central North Dakota.
1805 Meriwether Lewis and William Clark explore the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, enroute to the Pacific coast.
1808 German-born John Jacob Astor organizes the American Fur Company.
1828 Kenneth McKenzie founds Fort Union near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers and becomes the first bourgeois (manager).
1830 Assiniboine Chief Tchatka or Le Gaucher, fails in attempt to attack Fort Union.
1831 McKenzie succeeds in establishing American trade with the Blackfeet Indians upriver in what is now Montana. Fort McKenzie is eventually built in their area as a trading post.
1832 Fort Union partially destroyed by fire; construction of a larger post begins.
1832 Steamboat *Yellow Stone* reaches Fort Union, establishing speedier steamboat trade on the Upper Missouri. Artist George Catlin is on board.
1832 Congress passes a bill prohibiting liquor in Indian Territory.
1833 Robert Campbell and William Sublette establish Fort William at the mouth of the Yellowstone River to compete with Fort Union. It is the first of several "opposition forts."
1833 Prince Maximilian of Wied NuWied and artist Karl Bodmer visit Fort Union. Many of Bodmer's world-famous paintings are sketched or painted at Fort Union.
1834 John Jacob Astor retires from the fur trade. Pratte, Chouteau and Co. buy out the Western Department of the American Fur Company.
1834 Charles Larpenteur is hired at Fort Union. During more than 30 years, he would record the events of life at the fort. His journal, *Forty Years a Fur Trader,* is one of the most complete records of fur trade life.
1837 McKenzie retires from active duty in the Upper Missouri fur trade and settles in St. Louis.
1837 Smallpox epidemic on the Upper Missouri kills thousands of Indian people.
1838 Pratte, Chouteau and Co. reorganizes as Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company. Despite name changes, the name American Fur Company remains in common usage.
1840 Father Pierre Jean DeSmet, Jesuit missionary, pays the first of many visits to Fort Union. James Kipp is bourgeois.
1843 Artist/naturalist John James Audubon and party visit Fort Union.
1844 Jim Bridger and a party of trappers spend the winter of 1844-45 at Fort Union.
1851 Swiss artist Rudolph F. Kurz arrives at Fort Union. He works as a clerk through 1851-52 winter and returns to Switzerland. His journal is also an excellent source of fur trade history and Indian lore.
1856 Another smallpox epidemic breaks out on the Upper Missouri.
1860 Gold discovered in Idaho.
1861 Dakota Territory is established.
1861 American Civil War begins.
1864 In June, Company I, 30th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, is garrisoned at Fort Union. In August, General Alfred Sully arrives with his command after campaigning against the Sioux. Co. I remains at Fort Union that winter, guarding supplies.
1864 Montana Territory is established.
1865 In June, word arrives that Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Co. has sold Fort Union to the Northwest Fur Company. Army leaves Fort Union in August.
1866 Advance party of the 13th Infantry, U.S. Army, arrives at the confluence and begins building Fort Buford on June 12.
1867 U.S. government purchases Fort Union, dismantles it, and uses the material to enlarge Fort Buford. Later, the site of Fort Union is included in Fort Buford Military Reservation.
1966 Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site is established by Congress as a unit of the National Park Service.

Glossary

Assiniboine Main tribe that lived nearby and traded at Fort Union.

American Fur Company Owner and operator of Fort Union.

Bastions Large stone structures built to house cannon and defend the fort.

Bourgeois The post manager. Because of both French-Canadian influence, and influence of the French-American families of St. Louis who pioneered the fur trade, many French terms were used.

Buffalo robes Brain-tanned hides with the hair intact, prepared by Indian women, were brought to the fort and used as a trade item. Buffalo robes were the most important trade item from the Upper Missouri.

Blackfeet Upper Missouri river tribe that came to trade at Fort Union.

Confluence The point where the Yellowstone River joins the Missouri River.

Engages Laborers of the post who were usually French-Canadians from Quebec.

Métis Mixed-blood people of the Upper Missouri, usually part Indian and part French, English, or Euro-American.

Palisades Vertical, sawed logs that made up the wall around the fort.

Pemmican Indian food adopted by the fur trade. Pemmican was made from berries (chokecherries, cranberries), and dried, shredded meat (deer, buffalo, elk) mixed with tallow or marrow fat. This was also an important trade item.

Trade goods Articles for the Indian trade, such as knives, axes, firearms, beads, ammunition, blankets, kettles, cloth, and many other items.

Smallpox Terrible disease which greatly reduced tribal numbers on several occasions in the upper Missouri River area.

Steamboat A steam-powered boat used to haul freight and passengers up and down rivers. The ones that operated best on the Missouri River were designed to float in approximately two feet of water.

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