

# Missouri Traders/Economic Problems

1. MISSOURI TRADERS Spanish Governor, Delassus, in 1798-99 granted tracts of thousands of acres
  - a. Blank forms, fill in name and amount of land
  - b. 1805, U.S. est. board of commissioners to decide land titles in Mo.
  - c. Became contentious question in the state
  - d. Claims sold and resold, aggravated in 1819 because of influx of new settlers & new crop of speculators, gov't. failed to open enough land for everyone to have a choice lot
  - e. Congress passed law after law broadening terms of confirmation
  - f. Final settlement not until 1870
  - g. Terrific influx of immigrants, climax in 1818 and 1819
  - h. Spanish land claimants and those with New Madrid certificates and pre-emptioners all claimed same land
    - i. Squatters hoped to acquire by pre-emption what others claimed under the old grants
2. Missourians wanted more land opened for settlement
3. Surveyor estimated this would be about 8,730,000 acres, Gov't. reluctant because much public land unsold
  - a. Benton wanted even more liberal policy
  - b. Expressed firm conviction of the Jackson men of the State
  - c. Benton able to interpret the common man to himself
4. Large immigration of 1818-1819, land boom
  - a. People at mercy of those who had purchased land grant claims & New Madrid certificates
5. Most land in Missouri sold at a moderate and reasonable price
  - a. Howard county – average of \$4.00 per acre
6. Missouri also experienced a town-making speculation
  - a. But inevitable drain of money to the East: payment for government land; payment of merchants of the East for necessities of the frontier; nation-wide panic
  - b. Debtor, purchased on credit was hard pressed on all sides
    - i. Payment due on land, merchant must remit money to creditor in the East; taxes must be paid to the State
  - c. Was plague of grasshoppers; destructive hailstorms
  - d. Gov't began periodic forced movement of Indians, settling on land desired by Missourians
7. Land act of 1820 provided for purchase of 80 acre lots for cash at \$1.25/acre.
8. Scarcity of circulating currency, much barter
  - a. Counterfeit bank notes
9. Prices on goods from East rose

- a. Most merchants & officers refused to accept
- 10. Missouri's attempt to create own circulating medium out of fiat money failed
- 11. Benton proponent of hard money urged citizens to transfer trade to New Orleans, where goods could be bartered for necessities
- 12. By 1806 fur trapping and trading business well established, to expand significantly through the century: Quote from Meriwether Lewis to Thomas Jefferson upon return from expedition, "We view this passage across the continent as affording immense advantages to the fur trade... The Missouri and all its branches from the Cheyenne upwards abound more in beaver and common otter, than any other streams on earth, particularly the proportion of them lying within the Rocky Mountains... If the government will only aid, even in a very limited manner, the enterprise of her citizens I am fully convinced that we shall shortly derive the benefits of a most lucrative trade from this source."
- 13. 1820's American companies able to challenge British dominance of the trans-Mississippi fur trade
- 14. First trade post was Fort Manuel, built by trader Manuel Lisa in September 1809 above the mouth of the Knife River, occupied until 1813.
- 15. By 1840's population of beaver in western streams nearly gone, many fur trade posts became military posts
  - a. Trails established by fur traders and mountain men brought permanent settlers to the region
- 16. Missouri Fur Company (also known as the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company or the Manuel Lisa Trading Company)
  - a. Dissolved and reorganized several times
  - b. Created by Manuel Lisa and members of the Chouteau family
  - c. Lisa partnered with Pierre Menard and hired several veterans of the Corps of Discovery, including John Colter and George Drouillard
    - i. 1807 Est. Fort Raymond
  - d. Feb. 24, 1809, Lisa and Benjamin Wilkinson (nephew of Louisiana Territorial Governor James Wilkinson), Jean Pierre Chouteau (son of St. Louis co-founder René Auguste Chouteau), Auguste Pierre Chouteau (son of Jean Pierre Chouteau), Reuben Lewis (brother of Meriwether Lewis), William Clark, Pierre Menard, Andrew Henry, Sylvester Labadie, William Morrison, and Andrew Fitzhugh
  - e. Acquired equipment and posts of its members' private fur operations, capital resources of at least \$40,000; equipment & supplies to be traded with Native Americans for furs were guns, ammunition, and whiskey
  - f. Defined field of operations as entire Missouri River upriver from the Platte River
- 17. Chouteau Expedition of 1810 – pretty much a failure
- 18. Reorganized the company in January 1812, operated a joint-stock company, ownership restricted to St. Louis owners
  - a. Wealthy fur merchant John Jacob Astor offer was rejected
- 19. 1812 expedition led by Lisa left St. Louis, returned with few furs and little profit
- 20. Association again dissolved and reorganized

21. Manuel Lisa primary owner of new company, War of 1812 interrupted trade with upper Missouri River tribes until 1816, constructed a new Fort Lisa at what now is Omaha, Ne.
22. 1819 company dissolved and reorganized, Lisa has one more expedition in 1819, returns spring 1820, dies unexpectedly in August, 1820
23. New president Joshua Pilcher, built Fort Recovery and Fort Benton, site of former Fort Lisa
24. Sent expedition from St. Charles to new Fort Benton, brought \$25,000 worth of furs back
  - a. Negotiated for a new post with Blackfeet near the Great Falls of the Missouri
  - b. Blackfeet attacked the expedition
  - c. After Jones expedition, Pilcher dissolved Missouri Fur Company in 1824
25. New company's trade power limited by rival companies: American Fur Company (John Jacob Astor) and Rocky Mountain Fur Company
26. Pilcher Expedition of 1827-1829, returned to St. Louis in June 1830
  - a. Familiar with Hudson's Bay company's extensive trade network
  - b. American Fur Company nearly monopolized American trade
  - c. Pilcher dissolved the company
  - d. Most former traders went to work for American fur Company
  - e. Western headquarters in St. Louis
  - f. Peak of fur trade had passed
27. St. Louis greatest center of the fur trade in 19<sup>th</sup> century
28. In the early period much of the taking of the furs, particularly of the beaver, was done by the white trappers. There were two classes of these, the hired trappers and the free trappers. Hired trappers were employed by the company, normally for a term of three years, for a stipulated sum. They were usually engaged for from one to two hundred dollars a year paid off in goods at company prices which were very high. [13] They performed the tasks assigned them by the company such as hunting, trapping, loading and unloading horses, mounting guard, and the distasteful duties of camp life. The company furnished their weapons, horses and equipment. [14] In 1830 the American Fur Company kept a record of the trappers and engagees
29. The free trappers, on the other hand, were more of an independent class. They supplied their own horses and equipment, could hunt and trap where they pleased, and could dispose of their furs to the highest bidder. Occasionally, when in dangerous country, it was necessary for the trapper to attach himself to some other trader for protection. In such circumstances he was compelled to conform to the ordinary rules for trapping and to the rules of the camp. He was also required to dispose of his beaver to the trader who commanded the camp. [16]
30. In the Rocky Mountain region, much of the beaver trapping had been done by bands of white trappers traveling fousugh the country. On the Upper Missouri, on the other hand, a large part of the trapping, particularly of the small fur-bearing animals such as muskrat, racoon, otter, and ermine was done by the Indians. The buffalo robe and a substantial tongue business, important items in

the Upper Missouri trade, continued to be largely in Indian hands. With the fall in the price of beaver in the 1840's, the practice of sending large parties of white trappers fousugh the country was discontinued. Rudolph F. Kurz, who spent 1851-1852 on the Upper Missouri, wrote that in the entire North Plains Indian country "the trappers are no longer found at all." [\[18\]](#)

31. Goods were shipped to the principal posts where stock valued at from fifteen to twenty thousand dollars was kept. Those shipped by the larger posts to the temporary posts varied in value from five hundred to two or three thousand dollars. The principal posts apparently stocked the staple items in large amounts. In 1831 Laidlaw reported to Pierre Chouteau Jr. that Fort Tecumseh (later replaced by Fort Pierre) had on hand 6,000 lbs. of powder, 13,000 lbs. of lead and 6,000 lbs. of tobacco "and liquor a pretty good quantity" valued at \$19,700.<sup>19</sup> The most popular trade items as indicated in the inventory at Fort Union in 1831, were awls, half axes, beads, hawk bells, blankets, combs, flannel shirts, pantaloons, kettles, lead, powder, gun worms, bar iron, rifle balls, gun flints, vermilion, and coat buttons. [\[20\]](#) The Indians early showed a decided preference for woolen goods and guns of English manufacture. Sugar and coffee also later became popular. Whiskey, although never authorized by law and later forbidden entirely became, in spite of every effort of the government to prevent it, the principal and one of the most lucrative articles of trade. [\[21\]](#)
32. By the 1850's the Indians' desires for white man's goods had expanded. Henry A. Boller listed the miscellaneous merchandise at Fort Atkinson, an opposition post near Fort Berthold, in 1858, as follows: blankets, all sizes, all colors, calicos, prints, cotton, ticking, blue and scarlet cloth, lindsay, blue ducking, guns, fuses, revolvers and rifles, prepared bullets (1/2 ounce) shot and an abundance of powder, together with flints, percussion caps, powder horns, gun worms, awls, beads, all sizes and kinds, hawk bells, gilt buttons, gold and silver lace, sewings, ribbons, fancy caps, combs, "enough to clear out all the heads in the country," butcher knives, files, shears, vermilion, chrome yellow conchonical (used to dye quills for garnishing), brass tacks, Jew harps, brass kettles, camp kettles, tin cups, dippers, copper pots of all sizes, small trunks covered with red morocco and plentifully studded with brass tacks, coffee mills, tin pans, crockery, bowls, mugs and many other articles. "Sugar, coffee and tea are the most profitable articles of trade," he wrote. [\[22\]](#)
33. The market for products of the fur trade varied considerably fousughout the century. During the first four decades beaver was in great demand. Maximilian estimated in 1833 that the company shipped down the river approximately 25,000 skins. These were shipped in packs of 100 pounds each comprising about 60 large skins in a pack. The usual price was \$4.00 per pound. [\[27\]](#)

A record of the varied commercial interests of St. Louis of 18<sup>0</sup> was written on the name plates of the commercial establishments. Walking north along Main Street toward the Tontine Coffeehouse at No. 89 north, a visitor would pass the "factory" of Andrews and Beakey who listed themselves as tin, copper, and sheet iron manufacturers. Along a few doors he would see the drygoods shop of J. J. Anderson, the warehouse of Augustus Adams, importer of fancy French and German goods and English cutlery; and next door the wholesale drygoods warehouse of Peter Blow. Among the variety of shops and small manufactories and warehouses that still lay between our traveler and his destination he would notice doctors offices, retail and wholesale druggists, merchant tailors, wholesale and retail drygoods merchants, a wholesale grocer, a manufacturer of copper, tin and sheet iron who also sold stoves, and the establishment of S. P. Carpenter who dealt in boots and shoes. At 75 North Main our traveler would pass the banking offices of Benoist and Co. and just before reaching the Tontine Coffeehouse, the factory of Beltzhooover and Bobb, manufacturers of hats and caps

The inbound traffic to the city consisted of two quite different groups of products. One coming from eastern markets consisted of a variety of manufactured articles moving to St. Louis for consumption in the city and nearby areas or for resale in the southwest, west and northwest. The other came from the immediate hinterland of the city which supplied agricultural, mineral, forest and animal products. Surplus crops moved from farms to supply the local city market and for reshipment to the south and east and to foreign countries.

The major raw materials and foodstuffs coming into the warehouses of the city were lead, wheat, tobacco, hog products (bacon, lard, and pork) and hemp. The approximate value of these and other important products brought into the port by river in 1845 were as follows:"^

out above the others with hemp and lead (bacon, lard and pork), however, reached

Flour Hemp Hides

Wheat and tobacco stand following. Combined hog products

a total second only to wheat.

In addition to the foregoing commodities there were sizable receipts of molasses, oats, barley, potatoes, salt, sugar, cheese and lesser receipts of other staple products. In 1845 the fur trade was still large and buffalo robes, furs and pelts brought to the city for trans-