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Fort George and the Union Fur Company on the Upper Missouri River

In 1842, the Upper Missouri Outfit division of the fur-trading firm of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., & Company had a stranglehold on the furs and bison robes being traded in Sioux country at the mouth of the Teton, or Bad, River opposite the present city of Pierre, South Dakota. The nerve center of this trade was Fort Pierre Chouteau, built in 1832 and situated on the Missouri River 2.7 miles above the mouth of the Teton. The director of the fort, Honoré Picotte, supervised its fifty to one hundred employees. Steamboats arrived at the fort each spring, bringing tons of goods for the trade and supplies for the fort, and departed a few days later with thousands of furs and robes for the company's warehouses in Saint Louis, Missouri. These products next traveled to New York by way of the Ohio River and then by canals, or via the Mississippi River to New Orleans and then by sea. Ultimately they reached fur markets in European cities such as London and Leipzig.[1]

The fur trade on the Upper Missouri generated great wealth, and competitors were eager to tap into its source. In 1842, the Union Fur Company challenged the Chouteau monopoly in the region. Curtis Bolton, Samuel M. Fox, and Mortimer Livingstone of New York City backed the new firm, properly known as Bolton, Fox, Livingstone, & Company. Former exchange broker John August N. Ebbetts and importer Fulton Cutting became its two principal field agents, and Charles Kelsey (also an exchange broker) was to help them manage

This essay draws extensively from G. Hubert Smith's report of his investigation of Fort George in 1962. R. Bruce McMillan's Internet expertise proved invaluable in rounding out the later history of the post and its locale. Michael Fosha generously assisted in providing aerial imagery, and William J. Hunt was a thoughtful proofreader.

1. David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807–1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 106–9.

the business on the Missouri from a post—Fort George—to be built near Fort Pierre. The Union Fur Company (also known as Ebbetts & Cutting) would have a brief but tumultuous history, and historian Hiram M. Chittenden alleged it to be the "most powerful opposition" that the Upper Missouri Outfit had to contend with in the area except for the firm of William L. Sublette and Robert Campbell a decade earlier.[2]

Built in 1842, Fort George fell into ruins shortly after its abandonment in 1845, and its remains attracted little attention until 1962, when historian Harry H. Anderson of the South Dakota State Historical Society foresaw its inundation by the rising waters of the Lake Sharpe reservoir behind Big Bend Dam. Using a metal detector, he recovered a number of artifacts from the site and urged that it be formally investigated. As part of its program to document archaeological sites threatened by dam construction, the Smithsonian Institution's Missouri River Basin Surveys sent a team under the direction of historical archaeologist G. Hubert Smith to excavate the fort's ruins from June through August 1962. The survey group exposed the entire footprint of the fort, revealing its dimensions as well as the remains of the buildings within it. Smith published a history of the post together with the results of his investigations in 1968. Unfortunately, none of the firm's own records appear to have survived, and any history of the Union Fur Company and Fort George must be pieced together from scattered references in documents of the time.[3]

At the time of its excavation, a barbed-wire fence marking the northern boundary of the Lower Brule Indian Reservation crossed the ruins of the post near its south side, for the fort's abandoned site had been the starting point of the reservation boundary survey in 1890. Traces of what Smith believed to be plowed fields south of the post were visible

2. Hiram M. Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 1:369.

3. *Pierre State News*, 25 Apr. 1962; Harry H. Anderson, "Fort George," *Wi-Iyohi* 16 (Oct. 1962):1–3; G. Hubert Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, Publications in Archeology, no. 9 (Lincoln, Nebr.: River Basin Surveys, Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, 1968), pp. 3–30.

on aerial photographs. Perhaps Indian families grew crops near the old fort.[4] Today the terrace immediately south of the now-obliterated location of the old post is mantled by a center-pivot irrigation system.

The history of Fort George began in June 1840, when prominent Saint Louis businessmen Wayman Crow and Robert W. Taylor guaranteed a bond for John Ebbetts, enabling the latter to obtain a license to do business with Indians on the Upper Missouri. Ebbetts engaged twenty-nine men to trade at posts on the west bank of the Missouri River between the White and Heart rivers, or, in present-day terms, roughly between Chamberlain, South Dakota, and Mandan, North Dakota. Ebbetts even sent a small outfit to the Black Hills. His initial investment in these ventures amounted to $5,776.60. Ebbetts was trading in the heartland of the Sioux Indians, and although this region was the main sphere of operations for the Upper Missouri Outfit, he successfully carved out a small independent business in 1841. The Chouteau interests paid little attention to him, a matter that encouraged Ebbetts to go east the following winter. In New York, he was able to convince Bolton, Fox, Livingstone & Company to back him with the resources necessary to compete with Chouteau and his partners on the Upper Missouri. Ebbetts had had a successful season in 1841, but he spiced his proposal to the company with the story that the Upper Missouri Outfit was losing its hold on the region.[5]

The newly formed Union Fur Company was to be short-lived, but during its four-year existence it established a number of posts on the Upper Missouri in direct competition with Chouteau's company. The principal Union Fur Company establishments were Fort George, located nineteen miles downriver from Chouteau's field headquarters at Fort Pierre, and Fort Mortimer, a post built at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Named after Mortimer Livingstone, Fort Mortimer

4. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, pp. 10, 16–19, fig. 2; Charles J. Kappler, comp. and ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904–1941), 1:329.

5. John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840–1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 37; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1:370; Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833–1872* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 151.

was about three miles east of its rivals at Fort Union. The Union Fur Company post was adjacent to the ruins of Fort William, which the Sublette & Campbell firm had abandoned nearly a decade earlier.[6] The derivation of the name Fort George is unknown, as none of the partners in the Union Fur Company bore the name George.

The new company leased a steamboat in Saint Louis to service its posts, and its employees went upriver in the spring of 1842 to establish Forts George and Mortimer. Charles Larpenteur, an Upper Missouri Outfit trader, recorded that his new competitors "had come up in a steamer, with a large outfit, and they were building a Mackinaw boat for the Crows' trade [on] the Yellowstone."[7] Fulton Cutting assumed command at Fort Mortimer, and Charles Kelsey returned downriver to Fort George and settled in as its director. On 22 August 1842, Ebbetts, Cutting, and Kelsey signed "articles of agreement" at Fort George.[8]

Construction of Fort George surely began as soon as the steamer arrived at the site with supplies sometime in June or July 1842. The post stood on the south side of the Missouri some five hundred feet upstream from the mouth of a then-nameless stream, directly opposite Simoneau's Island. In later years, the stream and the island would become known as Fort George Creek and Fort George Island, respectively.[9] The fort stood on a broad, level terrace surrounded by an expanse of prairie grasses that would have afforded the post's horses ample grazing.

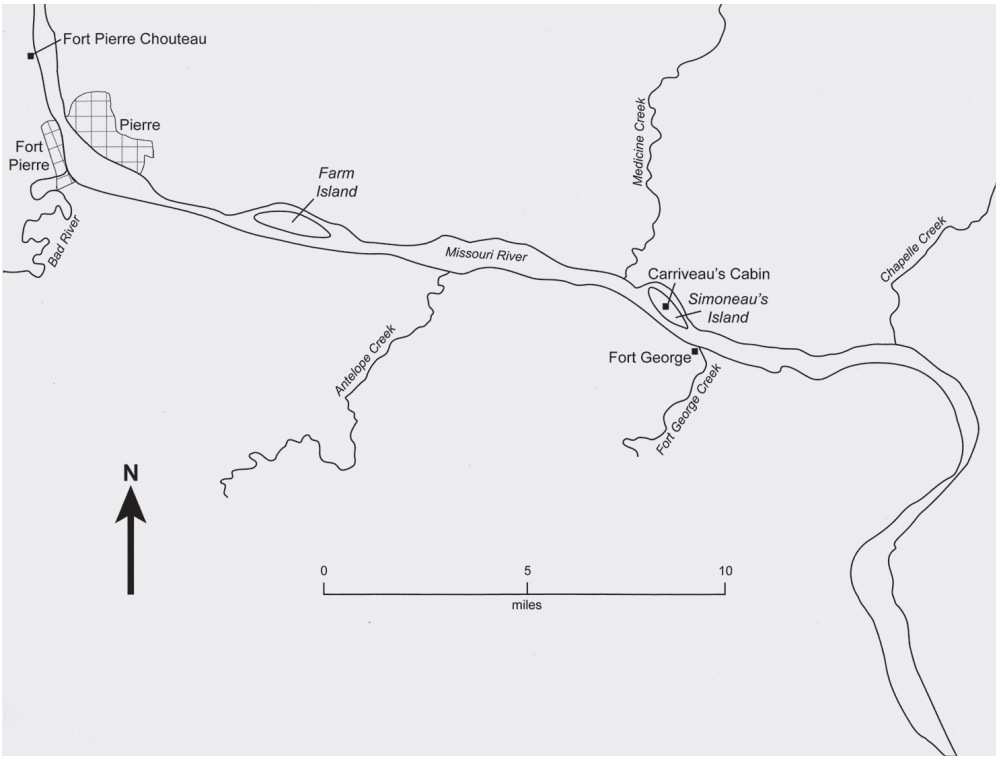
The men probably first erected a store for the company's trading stock and dwellings for themselves and then built a rectangular stockaded enclosure measuring approximately 165 by 155 feet around the initial structures. The palisade consisted of cottonwood logs set in trenches two to three feet deep with a level plate pinned along the top.

6. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, p. 54.

7. Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, p. 148.

8. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, 40n25.

9. Simoneau's Island appears to have been about one mile in length on a map prepared under the direction of Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren in 1855–1856. Warren's map shows the island as fully wooded. Graham A. Calloway and W. Raymond Wood, comps., *Lt. G. K. Warren's 1855 and 1856 Manuscript Maps of the Missouri River* (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2012), plate 19.



Fort George was located on the Missouri River not far downstream from the present-day cities of Fort Pierre and Pierre. (Map by Amy C. Bleier)

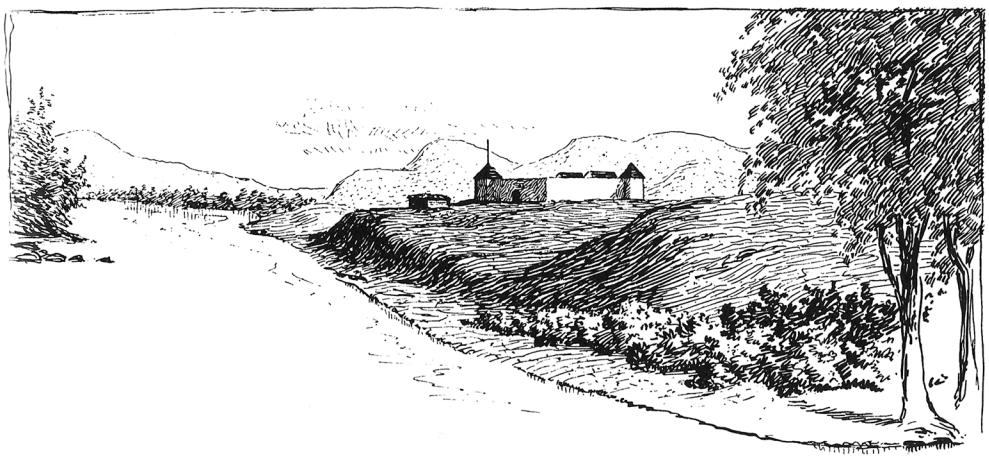
Projecting blockhouses guarded opposing corners. Only one image of the fort is known to exist. An engraving made from an 1844 pencil sketch by trader Alexander H. Murray shows that the blockhouses had pyramidal roofs, one of which bore a flagstaff. The image also includes an outbuilding that appears to lie between the river and the entry to the fort.[10] The post's log buildings, chinked with clay, were separated from the palisade by an alley, and some of the buildings had substantial

10. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, between pp. 146 and 147. The image was engraved from Murray's pencil sketch for publication in "Ancient Landmarks," *Forest and Stream* 70 (8 Feb. 1908): 210. Murray's original sketches of Missouri River forts have been lost.

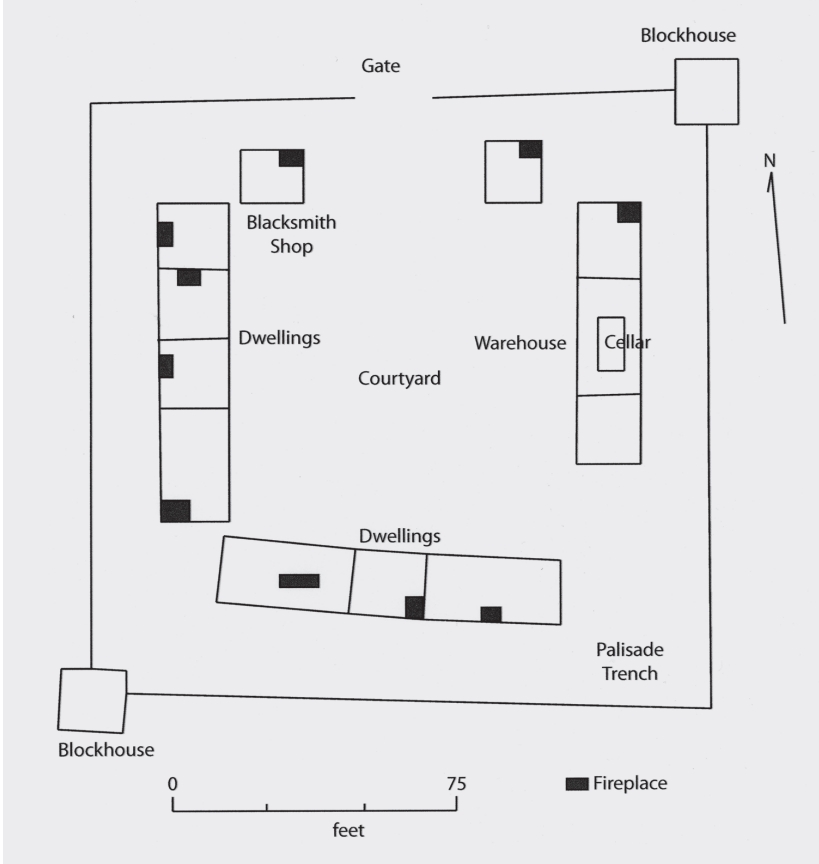
adobe-clay brick fireplaces. In 1968, G. Hubert Smith speculated that the Union Fur Company was responsible for introducing adobe-brick masonry to the Upper Missouri. Smith based his supposition on Upper Missouri Outfit trader Rudolf Friedrich Kurz's 1852 comment that the Union opposition posts had been called "dobies" because of their construction.[11]

The irregular alignment of the large structure on the south side of the courtyard likely was the result of its having been built before the palisade was erected. Metal fragments on the floor of one building led Smith to conclude that it was the blacksmith shop, and the fireplaces in other structures, some of which appear to have had glass windows, probably meant they were dwellings. The lack of a hearth in the building on the east side that contained a shallow cellar indicated that it may have been the warehouse. Smith found no evidence of latrines, a common feature in Upper Missouri trading posts, inside the stockade.

11. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, p. 21; J. N. B. Hewitt, ed., *Journal of Rudolph Friedrich Kurz*, trans. Myrtis Jarrell, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin no. 115 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), pp. 138n5, 304.



The only known image of Fort George during its time as an active trading post is this 1856 engraving based on an 1844 pencil sketch. The original drawing by fur trader Alexander H. Murray has been lost.



This diagram shows the layout of Fort George based on evidence from G. Hubert Smith's 1962 excavation of the site. (Diagram by Amy C. Bleier)

The fort appears to have been built in a single construction episode. Because of the post's short life, it does not seem to have been remodeled in any way before it was abandoned, nor was there any evidence of later construction on its ruins.[12]

In November 1842, the Upper Missouri Outfit sent Frank Beeman, one of its clerks at Fort Pierre, to set up a lodge outside Fort George to oppose the interlopers. Ebbetts warned Beeman to desist from trading

12. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, pp. 16, 26.

and destroyed his lodge when the latter refused to comply. However, the Union Fur Company leader offered to buy part of his rival's outfit. Fearing mortal harm, Beeman fled to Fort Pierre, but his superiors ordered him to return. When Ebbetts again threatened Beeman, the hapless employee asked the manager of Fort Pierre for help. No further record of these events is known, but the incidents set the stage for further violence.[13]

Government-issued fur-trade licenses for 1843 reveal that the Union Fur Company had 104 men at Fort George and elsewhere (there had been 65 the year before), with a capital investment of $29,815. The Chouteau firm, on the other hand, had 119 men on its rolls, and its trade goods were valued at $58,698, more than double that of its opponents.[14] The Union men, however, hoped that by employing sharp trading practices they could give Chouteau serious competition, especially by trading liquor for robes and furs.

The number of men at a typical fur-trading fort varied during the year, but would normally include a blacksmith, a cook, hunters, and general laborers. Clerks and managers often used the French term *engagés* (roughly, "hired men") when referring to lower-level employees because many of these common laborers were French speakers of Canadian descent. Such posts normally depended on trade with Indians for their supplies of furs and bison hides, with few animals being killed or trapped by the traders themselves. Bison hides were pressed into packs weighing some one hundred pounds and containing about ten robes each. A pack of beaver contained eighty to one hundred pelts, while a pack of otter or opossum had about sixty skins. Popular items the Indians received in exchange were guns and ammunition, knives, tobacco, glass beads, and wool blankets. The traders also imported items for their own use, including clothing, fresh and preserved foods, and luxury items such as coffee, tea, sugar, and molasses. Post employees stayed frantically busy in the fall and winter when the Indians arrived to trade, but life was more relaxed after the trading season ended.

13. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, p. 56; Honoré Picotte to Andrew Drips, 20 Jan. 1843, and Frank Beeman to Drips, 1 Feb. 1843, Drips Papers, Missouri History Museum (MHM), Saint Louis.

14. *Pierre State News*, 25 Apr. 1962; Anderson, "Fort George," p. 2.

Duties for the *engagés* then included gathering firewood for the coming winter and cutting hay for their horses.[15]

In addition to Forts George and Mortimer, the Union Fur Company had other establishments, such as Fort Cotton, located above the later Fort Benton in present-day Montana; another trading station near the mouth of the Cheyenne River in South Dakota; and yet other poorly documented posts. There are no extant records of the firm's success in obtaining furs and robes. According to Charles Larpenteur, however, Fort George director Charles Kelsey soon found that the prospects for successful trade in the region were considerably less than he had been led to believe when he invested in the Union Fur Company.[16]

In the spring of 1844, the company sent a second steamer upstream. The *Frolic* attempted to reach Fort Mortimer, but low water forced it to stop at Fort George, where it spent the winter. The steamer began its return to Saint Louis on 9 May 1845, but low water halted its payload of seven hundred packs of robes and furs. The crew transferred much of the cargo to smaller mackinaw boats, permitting the *Frolic* to return home by 27 May. The steamer, however, was "pretty well used up" by its enforced sojourn on the river.[17] A profitless price war with the Upper Missouri Outfit, initial overconfidence, lack of experience in the fur trade, and the high cost of leasing the *Frolic* had sapped the resources of the Union Fur Company and threatened to undermine its success. Nonetheless, its principals were determined to continue trading despite the prospect of impending failure. By this time, however, the fur trade was in decline, and Pierre Chouteau, Jr., was becoming concerned about the ultimate future of his own company. Chouteau adjusted to the increasing rarity of smaller pelts such as beaver by shifting to bison robes as the primary commodity obtained from his Indian suppliers.[18]

15. Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, pp. 58–59, 81–106.

16. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, pp. 55, 71; Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites,* p. 4; Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, pp. 151–52.

17. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, p. 81.

18. U.S., Congress, House of Representatives, *Report Intended to Illustrate a Map of the Hydrographical Basin of the Upper Mississippi River Made by I. N.* (sic)*Nicollet While in Employ under the Bureau of the Corps of Topographic Engineers*, 28th Cong., 2d sess., 1845, H. Doc. 52, p. 65.

Growing competition for ever-scarcer resources led the Union men to desperate measures. In 1843, some of Ebbetts's employees fired on a passing boat owned by independent trader William P. May, forcing him to land a short distance below the mouth of the Cheyenne River and confiscating his cargo. He was left to return down the Missouri with nothing to show for his labor. Ebbetts did nothing to prevent this piracy by his men.[19]

Unruly behavior seems to have been the norm for Union Fur Company employees. For example, Upper Missouri Outfit employee Antoine R. Bouis wrote to Indian agent Andrew Drips in April 1843 to complain about his competitors at the mouth of the Cheyenne River. Bouis had been in the area for six months, with a Union Fur Company post nearby. According to Bouis, not a "single week passed by without some drinking going on at Ebbetts' establishment. In one of their frolics Michael De cuto [des Coteaux] was very severely wounded by a man named Ray. They often when drunk made threats to come and pull my houses down. . . . I was in daily expectation that they would put their threats into execution."[20] Such activities were commonplace. Indeed, most surviving accounts of Union Fur Company activities on the Upper Missouri relate to equally unsavory actions.

Later that month, Honoré Picotte wrote Drips that "a quantity of liquor has been stored at Ft. George, and the daily report by both whites and Indians is, that it is to be sent out to the different encampments of Indians for the purpose of trade."[21] Congress had outlawed the importation of liquor into Indian country in 1832. Although Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and his partners broke the laws against trading alcohol to Indians on occasion, they favored the enforcement of these laws against their competitors, especially when opposition firms offered enormous quantities of liquor in exchange for furs.[22] Picotte's 1843 complaint to Drips accomplished little, however. According to Hiram Chittenden, Union

19. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, p. 58.

20. Bouis to Drips, 18 Apr. 1843, in Charles E. DeLand, ed., "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books," with notes by Doane E. Robinson, *South Dakota Historical Collections* 9 (1918): 193–94.

21. Picotte to Drips, 30 Apr. 1843, ibid., p. 181.

22. Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, pp. 70–71, 73–74.

Fur Company men "exhibited from the start a facility for evading the law and resorting to desperate measures, which was never surpassed even by the American Fur Company itself; and in spite of all that Major Drips could do they succeeded in smuggling quantities of liquor to nearly all of their posts."[23]

Charles Kelsey soon found that his employees at Fort George were little more than outlaws, some of whom he could not control. Several men broke ties with the Union Fur Company and began to trade on their own in a log cabin on Simoneau's Island, to which the company had laid claim. This defiance, probably within view of Fort George itself, angered Kelsey. He ordered his erstwhile employees to abandon the island, and, when they ignored him, he led a party that attacked the cabin and shot two men dead. Two others were badly wounded. According to John J. Audubon, who visited the fort in the spring of 1843, all the victims of Kelsey's raid "were remarkable miscreants."[24] The leader of the mutineers, Jean Carriveau, was among the fatalities. Also known as "John Bull," he was a former company employee whom Kelsey had dismissed. The other fatality was Michoux Marley. Two other men, one of them named Jack Boyle, fled the scene. Fearing the consequences of his action, Kelsey decamped to New York City. He was indicted for murder in the federal circuit court for the state of Missouri in 1844, but the charges were dropped three years later. In 1915, Doane Robinson of the South Dakota State Historical Society visited the island and found what he believed to be a dugout that Carriveau and his gang had used. The structure was in an alfalfa field, but Robinson's party easily located its walls, foundation, fireplace, and chimney.[25]

The personal conduct of John Ebbetts was less violent, but clearly at odds with the law. In April 1843, Andrew Drips reported that Ebbetts had interfered with his attempts to regulate the use of liquor. Ebbetts allegedly told the Indians that Drips was not an agent of the Indian Office and claimed the right to sell them whatever liquor he wanted. Drips also asserted that drinking and brawling took place at Union Fur

23. Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1:370.

24. Maria R. Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), 1:519–20.

25. Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, p. 67; *Aberdeen Weekly News*, 4 Nov. 1915.

Company trading establishments. The Indian agent strongly recommended to Superintendent of Indian Affairs David D. Mitchell that Ebbetts be removed from Indian country immediately in view of his conduct over the preceding two years.[26]

In November 1843, Honoré Picotte wrote to Drips alleging that Indians had burned down the trading house of William Kansella and a man called Leclair on Simoneau's Island, not far from the scene of Kelsey's attack on his deserters. He informed Drips that the two traders had not been molested until it became known that Picotte had "bargained" for their house. Believing that the Indians in question "were influenced by some person or persons residing at Fort George," he asked Drips to investigate the affair.[27] In December, Picotte also wrote to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., that he hoped to buy out these interlopers—a transaction that was not finalized for another two years.[28]

On 28 May 1843, naturalists John James Audubon and Edward Harris arrived at Fort George on the steamer *Omega*, commanded by Captain Joseph Sire. "The gentlemen from Fort George came to make us a visit and dine with us," Sire wrote in his log.[29] Joseph V. Hamilton, acting Indian agent in the absence of Drips, was among the visitors. Audubon commented that Fort George was the "Station of the 'Opposition line.'"[30] Although Audubon and Harris spent three days at the fort, neither of them wrote anything specific about its appearance in their respective journals. A young Englishman, James O. Illingsworth, was the manager of the post at the time; he may have been a clerk at Fort Mortimer earlier.[31] The naturalists met Union Fur Company agent Fulton Cutting in one end of "a strongly built log cabin" and also visited the Indian lodge of an unnamed German, one of about fifteen such

26. Drips to Mitchell, 4 Apr. 1843, in DeLand, "Fort Tecumseh," pp. 191–92.

27. Picotte to Drips, 16 Nov. 1843, ibid., p. 187.

28. Picotte to Chouteau, 7 Dec. 1843, and Picotte to James Kipp, 18 Dec. 1843, Chouteau Collection, MHM.

29. Joseph Aime Sire, *For Wood and Water: Steamboating on the Missouri River, 1841–1846*, ed. Mark H. Bettis (Hermann, Mo.: Wein Press, 2000), p. 72.

30. Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals*, 1:519.

31. Ibid., 1:520; John Francis McDermott, ed., *Up the Missouri with Audubon: The Journals of Edward Harris* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 75–76; Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, p. 7.

lodges that stood nearby.[32] On its return voyage, the *Omega* overtook three Union Fur Company mackinaws at Great Cedar Island below Fort George; the mackinaws reached Saint Louis safely on 15 June 1843.[33]

By 1844, shrinking profits and merciless competition from the Upper Missouri Outfit led Cutting to write the superintendent of Indian affairs in Saint Louis claiming that Agent Drips served Pierre Chouteau's interests and should be dismissed. Drips responded that the charge resulted from the fact that he had stopped the Union Fur Company from trading liquor on the Yellowstone in the winter of 1843–1844. Cutting's effort to remove Drips failed, and by May 1845 the Union Fur Company partners saw that the end was near. Cutting and Ebbetts sold their "entire stock" on the Upper Missouri to Chouteau and left for Saint Louis. "Their better class of employees," having seen "they were on a sinking ship, withdrew from their employ, leaving them only the most abandoned and reckless characters in the country."[34] Drips complained to Superintendent of Indian Affairs Thomas H. Harvey that many former Union Fur Company employees "were a mongrel set of half breeds and white men, the greater part notorious for their misconduct here as well as in the civilized world."[35]

After the Union Fur Company abandoned Fort George, Upper Missouri Outfit traders apparently determined to prevent any of their business rivals from using the post. Writing from Fort Pierre on 31 August 1845, Antoine Bouis informed Honoré Picotte that he had "found it impossible to set fire to Fort George, [because] there are now and have been since your departure 15 families of the Two Kettle band [of Lakota Indians] living in the fort." However, Bouis assured Picotte that "so soon as I hear that the opposition is coming (if such should be the case) I will send down a trader with a few goods to take possession of the place."[36]

Louis DeWitt, "a prominent mixed-blood living about three-quarters of a mile up Fort George Creek," told historian Charles E. DeLand

32. Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals*, 1:520–21.
33. *Saint Louis New Era*, 15 June 1843.
34. Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1:372.
35. Drips to Harvey, 18 May 1845, quoted in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1:372n7.
36. Bouis to Picotte, 31 Aug. 1845, Letter Book C, Chouteau Collection, MHM.

in November 1901 that Four Bears, chief of the Two Kettles, and another man named Swift Hawk "lived there in the stockade after the post was abandoned; [and] that when abandoned the post was given to Four Bears." From information DeWitt and other informants provided, DeLand concluded that Upper Missouri Outfit laborers salvaged what they could from Fort George, including some logs they used to maintain Fort Pierre. Eventually, there was "nothing left" of the old structures "except a chimney made of hay and clay."[37]

Any Indian occupation of the stockade must have been temporary, but it was sufficient to stymie Bouis's plan to destroy Fort George in August 1845. G. Hubert Smith found only random Indian artifacts during his team's excavation of its buildings—too few to imply any extended

37. Charles E. DeLand, "Editorial Notes on Old Fort Pierre and Its Neighbors," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 1 (1902): 328.

Louis DeWitt and his family lived less than a mile from the site of Fort George. This photograph was probably taken around 1900.

In this scene recorded by Nels P. Christensen in 1903, Louis DeWitt's wagon and team stand in the center of the area that had once been enclosed by the Fort George stockade.

Nels Christensen took this image showing the DeWitt farm from a bluff south of the Missouri River in 1903. An inscription on the back of the photograph notes that "Old Fort George" was located on the riverbank "over [the] chimney of [the] house."

Indian occupation. Perhaps what Smith found was no more than scatter from the numerous (and probably prehistoric) Indian earthlodges just west of the post. There is no evidence of other traders using the post before it was ultimately deserted.[38]

The Union Fur Company appears to have abandoned Fort George by mid-1845, for Captain Sire recorded on 19 June that he found only Indians at the site on his way upriver in the *General Brooke*. Whether they were the Two Kettles or not is a matter for speculation. When Sire and his steamer returned to the area on 8 July, he stopped at the old fort and took on "several very bad pieces of wood."[39] Steamboat crews routinely dismantled abandoned trading posts and Indian villages for fuel. Emile de Girardin, a French traveler aboard the Upper Missouri Outfit steamer *Iowa* in 1849, believed that the captain and crew had few scruples about where they got their firewood. He later wrote: "One day when we were passing in front of a blockhouse or winter post belonging to the Company of the Opposition, our captain took pleasure in sending his whole crew ashore to demolish houses, fortifications, and palisades. The whole was brought on board and provided fuel for a day's journey."[40] The location where the *Iowa* crew gathered wood may have been Fort George itself; if not, it was at least nearby.[41]

The record for the immediate vicinity of Fort George was essentially quiet between 1845 and 1855. In the latter year, Brevet Brigadier General William S. Harney led several hundred troops into the Bad River area. On 31 July 1855, Major William R. Montgomery recorded that a company of the Second United States Infantry commanded by Captain Henry W. Wessells had been sent to Fort George on 15 July. Wessells was instructed to receive any stores the steamers supplying Harney's expedition had unloaded at its site, "and if the buildings there should not be required for that purpose to take them down preparatory to their material being transported to this post; for the construc-

38. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, pp. 12–13. The doughnut-shaped features visible on the 1938 aerial photograph are likely depressions marking the earthlodge sites.

39. Sire, *Wood and Water*, pp. 108, 113.

40. Girardin, "A Trip to the Bad Lands in 1849," trans. Elizabeth Conrad and Mrs. S. M. Stockdale, *South Dakota Historical Review* 1 (1936): 56.

41. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites*, p. 8.

tion of public storehouses &c., here."[42] Also on 31 July, Captain Wessells recorded that Fort George was allegedly sold to the army: "This post having been purchased by the Quartermaster's Department was temporarily occupied on the 15th July . . . for the purpose of removing the buildings when no longer required for the public service and to store such public property as might be discharged from overloaded boats on their way to Fort Pierre."[43]

It is not likely that Captain Wessells found much in the way of buildings at Fort George. G. Hubert Smith did not find any record of its purchase by the army. Furthermore, the Wessells account contradicts other statements that Upper Missouri Outfit personnel from Fort Pierre had already dismantled the abandoned post. Perhaps some buildings did remain. Otherwise, Major Montgomery, who surely knew the physical condition of Fort George, would not have dispatched Wessells from Fort Pierre. However, most of the post burned at an unknown date, as verified by the charred remains that G. Hubert Smith excavated in 1962. Smith found that one building on the east side of the courtyard appeared to have been demolished, for it had not burned.[44] In any event, the arsonists were almost surely Chouteau employees determined to prevent any other parties from using Fort George.

In 1856, assistants under the direction of Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren prepared detailed maps of the Upper Missouri as they ascended the stream on the steamer *Genoa*. They did not stop at Fort George as they passed it on 23 May, nor did they describe the old post, but its site was carefully recorded on their map. The 1860 United States census records nine people living at what was listed as Old Fort George. The count included two unmarried hunters, one from Washington Territory and the other from the Selkirk settlement in Canada. Trapper Antoine Glaudon and his wife had come from Hudson Bay and had three children. The remaining residents were two Indians, listed in the census as hunters.[45] No clue is given as to their housing or

42. William R. Montgomery to Adjutant General, 31 July 1855, quoted in "Official Correspondence Relating to Fort Pierre," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 1 (1902): 390.

43. Quoted in DeLand, "Editorial Notes on Old Fort Pierre," pp. 328–29.

44. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites,* p. 14.

45. Calloway and Wood, *Lt. G. K. Warren's 1855 and 1856 Manuscript Maps*, plate 19;

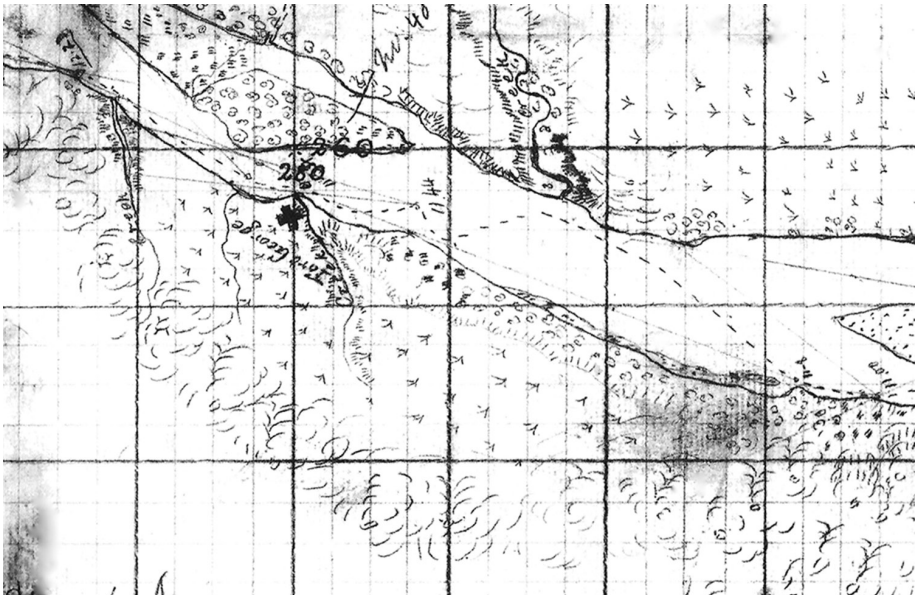
their location with respect to the fort. Lieutenant August V. Kautz noticed only a "solitary chimney" when he passed by the old fort on 1 June 1860.[46] After John Allen Hosmer passed the site on 30 October 1865, he reported that "nothing remains of this fort but two chimneys."[47] The fort's remains were sometimes mentioned as a landmark in the logs of other steamers, including those of the *W. J. Lewis* in 1866 and the *Scarred Wolf* in 1868.[48]

Michael M. Casler, *Steamboats of the Fort Union Fur Trade* (Williston, N.Dak.: Fort Union Association, 1999), p. 24; U.S., Department of the Interior, Office of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States* (1860), National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, roll 94, frame 143.

46. "From Missouri to Oregon in 1860: The Diary of August V. Kautz," ed. Martin F. Schmitt, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 37 (July 1946): 203.

47. Hosmer, *A Trip to the States in 1865*, ed. Edith M. Duncan, Sources of Northwest History no. 17 (Missoula: State University of Montana, 1932), p. 20.

48. C. J. Atkins, "Logs of Missouri River Steamboats, 1863–1868," *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota* 2 (1906): 320, 348.

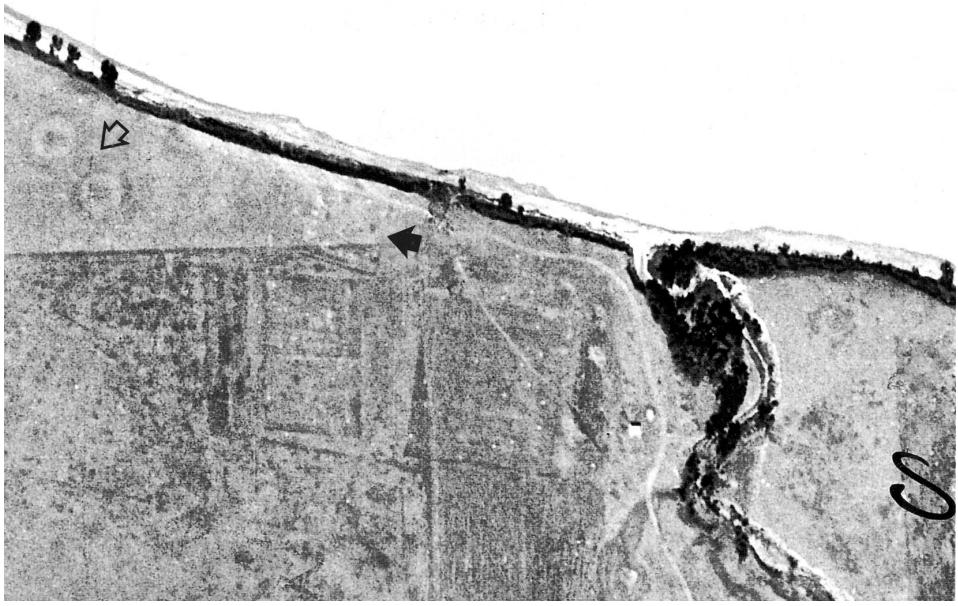


Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren and his party passed by the site of Fort George on 23 May 1856 and marked the location on their maps. The words "Fort George" are written upside down near the bold "X" at upper left.

By 1875, the Sioux City freighting firm of Hornick & Evans was sending cargo up the Missouri River by steamer to a warehouse in the town of Fort Pierre. Wagon trains then carried the goods to the Black Hills. According to a 1907 article in the *Aberdeen American*, the War Department sent Colonel Fred Grant, with Colonel M. W. Sheafe acting as a representative of Dakota Territory, to the town of Fort Pierre in 1876. The two men were to lay out a trail from the Missouri to the Black Hills, but the summer was rainy. Deterred by the sticky gumbo soil at Fort Pierre, Grant instead chose to begin the Black Hills trail at old Fort George and "laid out a town there" to be its starting point. However, the Sioux City freighters refused to move their warehouse from Fort Pierre to the Fort George site. Because Hornick & Evans used the Black Hills trail more than any other firm, the trailhead remained at Fort Pierre. According to the newspaper article, the War Department could not locate any record of the trail from Fort George in 1907.[49] There are no records of a town existing at the locale, but a 1938 aerial photograph reveals rectangular features south and east of the fort's site, suggesting that a community may have been platted. Though not aligned with the compass, these features measure about six hundred feet east to west and three hundred feet north to south, surely a modest size for a townsite. Only two rectangular units south of the fort might represent blocks, although they are far smaller than is usual for most towns. These features are what G. Hubert Smith believed to be old fields.[50]

In 1880, an Omaha newspaper reported that the extension of the Chicago & North Western Railroad westward across Dakota Territory would cross the Missouri at Fort George Island just below Medicine Creek in present-day Hughes County. The terminus of the railroad was then at Volga, 130 miles to the east. The roadbed soon reached the locality of Blunt, then turned south along the valley of Medicine Creek to the proposed crossing at Fort George Island. Rather than bridging the Missouri there, the route followed the north bank of the river to Pierre. However, the railroad did not complete a permanent bridge

49. *Aberdeen American*, 13 Nov. 1907.
50. Smith, *Big Bend Historic Sites,* p. 12.



This aerial photograph of the Fort George vicinity was taken for the United States Department of Agriculture in 1938. The solid arrow points to the location of the fort, while the open arrow indicates two nearby Indian earthlodge sites.

across the Missouri between the towns of Pierre and Fort Pierre until 1907.[51]

The fort's locality never supported a town, but over the years area residents nonetheless became a recognized community. Newspapers recorded social happenings in the area for years. One such event, which the *Aberdeen Daily News* described as the "crowning" of the "queen of the gypsies," took place between Saturday and Monday, 17–19 December 1887, in a "spacious log house" at "the site of old Fort George." The newspaper's mention of a "log house" is one of the rare references to buildings at old Fort George at that late date.[52]

51. *Omaha* (Nebr.) *Herald*, 30 Apr. 1880; Rick W. Mills, *125 Years of Black Hills Railroading* (Hermosa, S.Dak.: Battle Creek Publishing, 2004), pp. 78–80. In 2014, the Rapid City, Pierre, & Eastern Railroad acquired the rail route from Pierre to the Black Hills from the Canadian Pacific Railway. *See Rapid City Journal*, 8 May 2014.

52. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 21 Dec. 1887.

The so-called gypsy queen was actually Marcella Dupuis Carlin, who was the daughter of prominent landowner Fred Dupuis (or Dupree) and Good Elk Woman, herself the daughter of a Minneconjou Lakota chief. Marcella had recently married Douglas F. ("Dug") Carlin, who became a wealthy rancher on the Cheyenne River and ran successfully for the South Dakota Senate in 1902.[53] The young bride's seventeenth birthday was reportedly the reason for the celebration. Newspaper accounts of the festivities describe an elaborate three-day ceremony with more than three hundred fifty Indian visitors in attendance. Marcella Carlin received many presents, and the event ended with a magnificent supper of turkey, antelope, bear, and bison. The *Daily News* article concluded, "This is the first crowning of a queen that has occurred among the Indians for fifty years . . . To the Indians this event is of as much importance as the queen's jubilee was to the English,"[54] an allusion to Victoria, who had marked the fiftieth anniversary of her accession to the throne that year. Just why the Aberdeen newspaper described the birthday celebration as the "crowning" of a "gypsy queen" remains unclear.

Although few traces of Fort George's original buildings remained by the time of the 1887 celebration, the name remained attached to the site for years to come. An 1893 publication of the Hampton Institute in Virginia records that two of its students from the Lower Brule reservation had returned to homes near the old trading post. One of them, Emma (or Amy) Fallis, married Morris Langdon in 1887, and the couple reportedly had a large farm near the old fort. The other, named Looking Eagle, was said to have "started a place of his own at old Fort

53. George W. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, and George Martin Smith, *South Dakota: Its History and Its People*, 5 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915), 5:1038; Wayne C. Lee, *Scotty Philip, The Man Who Saved the Buffalo* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1975), p. 156. Although the *Aberdeen Daily News* gave the bride's first name as "Mineola," Marcella was her proper name. Marcella Carlin owned a spectacular beaded buckskin dress, which her female descendants wore on special occasions for years to come. In 2002, her family loaned the dress to the Indian Museum of North America, located at the Crazy Horse Memorial in the Black Hills. *See Rapid City Journal*, 22 May 2002.

54. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 21 Dec. 1887. *See also Grand Forks* (D.T.) *Herald*, 20 Dec. 1887.

George" in 1888.[55] In August 1895, "an Indian from Fort George" named Spotted Crow faced trial on a charge of stealing government cattle.[56] Seventeen years later, the *Aberdeen Daily News* reported that a homesteader had picked up a nine-pound cannonball near the old fort—an unusual find since no reports of cannon fire were ever recorded at the site.[57] In 1913, Carrie DeWitte and John La Roche, both Indians, were married "at the home of the bride's parents, Evergreen ranch at old Fort George."[58] When the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe ratified its original tribal constitution in 1935, one of the five voting districts on the reservation was named for Fort George.[59]

Although the remains of the fort now lie beneath the waters of Lake Sharpe or have eroded away, its memory is preserved in the informal community of Fort George. Indeed, Fort George Cemetery, still in use today, adjoins the now-abandoned Holy Name Episcopal Church that lies off South Dakota Highway 1806 about a mile southeast of the old fort's location. More visible reminders are Fort George Recreational Area, on the lakeshore directly across from the site of the post, and Fort George Butte, five and a half miles southeast of the site. These names and places are but thin remembrances of this once vibrant, violent, and short-lived outpost of the western fur trade.

55. [Helen W. Ludlow, comp.], *Twenty-two Years' Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia* (Hampton, Va.: Hampton Normal School Press, 1893), pp. 393, 400.

56. *Aberdeen Daily News*, 14 Aug. 1895.

57. Ibid., 29 Jan. 1912.

58. *Aberdeen Weekly News*, 4 Dec. 1913.

59. Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, *Constitution and Bylaws for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe* (1935), art. 3, sec. 2.

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On the covers: Nels P. Christensen recorded the Missouri River scene in 1903, as Louis DeWitt parked his wagon (back) at the former site of Fort George in central South Dakota. In this issue, W. Raymond Wood delves into the history of the fur-trading post, which the Union Fur Company abandoned in 1845. John R. Henris details the introduction of trout (inset) to the Black Hills at the turn of the last century in his article on the development of the region's fishery.