



# CASTOR CANADENSIS

Newsletter of the Jedediah Smith Society • University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

WINTER 2019-2020

## Trading Posts of the Central Plains

By, Gail DeBuse Potter

*Credit: Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly; Volume 43, Number 3/4, Fall/Winter 2007*

The Central Plains are defined, for the purposes of this paper, as approximately the region from the mouth of the Platte River on the Missouri River, upstream to the mouth of the Grand River, and west to the Continental Divide, then south to the Fortieth parallel (the southern border of Nebraska) and east to the Missouri River. I intend to present, in a mix of chronological and geographical order, the locations, ownership, and periods of occupation of posts in this vast region.

### I. EARLY POSTS (defined as those constructed before 1806)

1. Ponca Post. Located at the mouth of the Niobrara on the Missouri River. Built by Jean Munier about 1791. Taken over by James Mackay in 1796, and the trade continued there under Spanish license until 1803.
2. Ponca Post II. Solomon Petit built a trading post at the same location, and operated in 1794-1795.
3. Ponca House. Located on the Missouri just below Fort Randall Dam. Built in 1794 by Jean Baptiste Truteau under Spanish license. Abandoned the next spring.
4. Arikara Post. Located on the Missouri River near the mouth of the Grand. Built 1795 by Jean Baptiste Truteau for a St. Louis Spanish monopoly directed by Jacques Clamorgan. Abandoned 1796 under Sioux attack.
5. Fort Charles. Located on the Missouri River near present-day Homer, Nebraska, at the site of the Omaha Indian village, Tonwatonga. Built by James Mackay for the same monopoly, in 1795, it was a substantial, stockaded post with bastions and artillery. Abandoned in 1797.
6. One Post. Located at the mouth of the Platte River on the Missouri. Built by the same Spanish monopoly in 1795, it was abandoned in 1797.
7. Cruzat's Otoe Post. Built north of the Council Bluff, it operated 1801-2, and its ruins were observed by Lewis and Clark in 1804.



### Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Featured Article .....	1-6
Source Material: Early Fur Trade of St. Louis.....	7
President/Editor's Comments .....	8
Newsletter Guidelines.....	8
Upcoming Events .....	9
Website - Interactive Maps Information .....	9
An 1828 J.J. Henry American Northwest Gun .....	10-12
Jed's Estate Papers/Will .....	13-14
Members' Section: New Members, Donor List, JSS Officers & Board Members.....	15
Invite a Friend to Join .....	16

Continued on page 2

## Trading Posts of the Central Plains (Continued)

8. Moreau's Post. A St. Louis trader named Moreau is believed to have operated a post at the mouth of the Moreau River around 1800 or a little later. According to oral history, he was stabbed to death while sleeping by a captive Indian girl he had purchased, who escaped.
9. Tabeau's Post. Located on the Missouri near the mouth of the Grand. Built about 1804, Tabeau abandoned his post and returned with Lewis and Clark's keelboat the next year, 1805.
10. Cedar Island Post, also called Fort aux Cédres. Located thirty-five miles southeast of present-day Pierre, South Dakota. Built about 1801 by Régis Loisel and Hugh Heney for the Sioux. Abandoned in 1804.
11. Heney's Sioux Post. Located on the Missouri at the mouth of the Cheyenne River. In 1801, Heney established another post for the Sioux. This was also abandoned in 1804.

### II. MISSOURI RIVER POSTS

12. Lisa's Cedar Island Post. In 1809, the Missouri Fur Company occupied Loisel's empty buildings on Cedar Island 35 miles southeast of Pierre, South Dakota.. It was destroyed by fire the next year and rebuilt, operating until 1813.
13. Brazeau's Cedar Island post. Joseph Brazeau may have occupied Lisa's abandoned buildings, 1819-1821, for Berthold and Chouteau.
14. Fort Recovery. In 1821, the Missouri Fur Company reoccupied the Cedar Island fort ten miles above the mouth of the White, and made a last effort to trap up the Missouri. The effort failed, and Fort Recovery closed in 1824 as the company went bankrupt.
15. Lisa's Arikara Post. Located at the mouth of the Grand on the Missouri, it operated from 1809 to 1811, when it was relocated upriver twelve miles and named Fort Manuel.
16. Crooks' and McClellan's Post. Located on the Missouri River above Papillion Creek. Built in 1809 by the future president of the American Fur Company for the Omaha trade, it closed the next year. Both partners joined the Astoria expedition.
17. Fort Lisa, also known as Fort Hunt. Located nine miles north on Omaha, Nebraska, at the Council Bluff. Built by the Missouri Fur Company in 1812. It closed about 1824.



18. Fort Manuel. Located on the Missouri River, ten miles south of the North and South Dakota border. Built 1812 for the Arikara trade by the Missouri Fur Company. Abandoned in 1813 due to the War of 1812.
19. Fort LaFramboise. Located on the Missouri River at its confluence with the Bad River, which was then known as the Teton River. Built by Joseph LaFramboise in 1817, it was abandoned in 1822.
20. Fort LaFramboise II. Located on the Missouri, three miles above Fort Pierre II and two miles north of present-day Pierre, South Dakota. Built by Joseph LaFramboise about 1863 for LaBarge, Harkness, and Co.

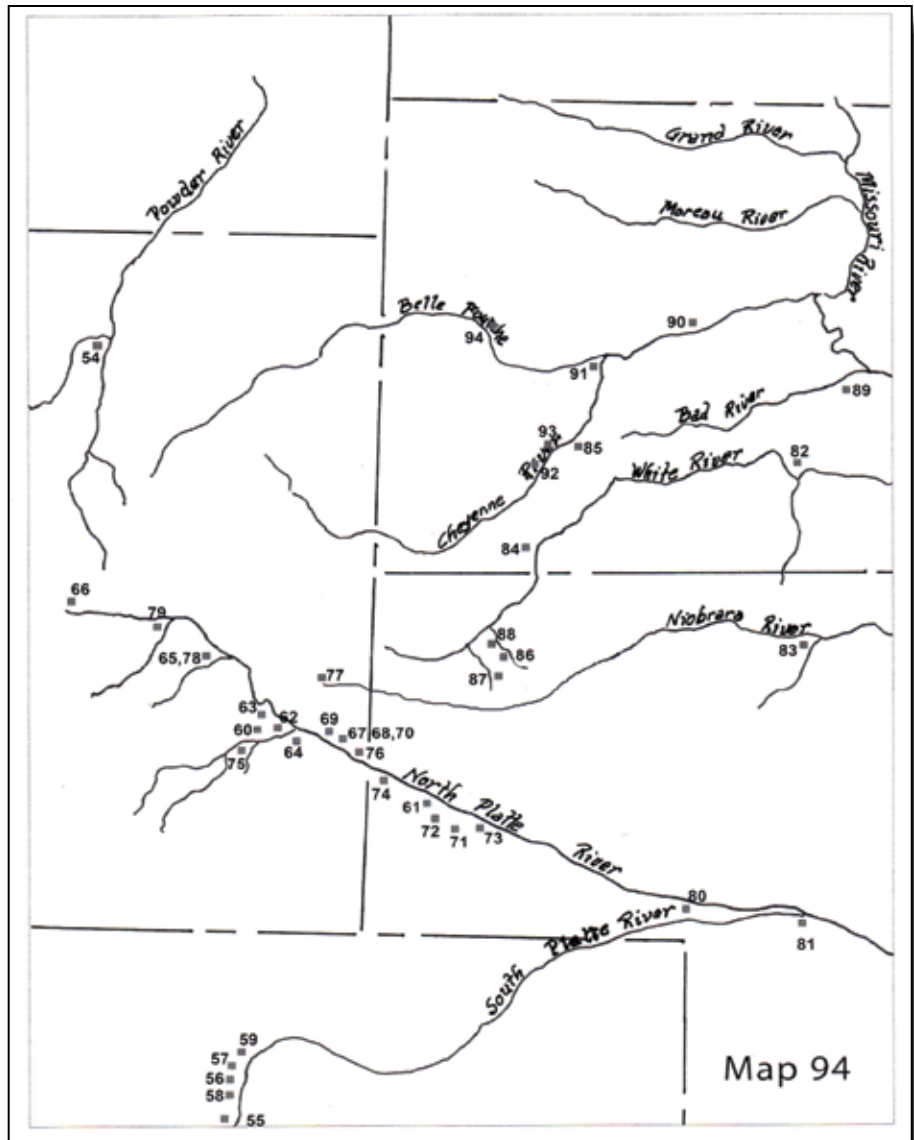
### Trading Posts of the Central Plains (Continued)

21. Citoleux's Post. Located at the mouth of the Grand was a post established by Berthold and Chouteau about 1820. No other reference known. Not mentioned in 1823 Arikara attack on Ashley's brigade.
22. Hunkpapa Post. Located on the lower Moreau River near its confluence with the Missouri. A satellite of Fort Tecumseh, it was built in the late 1820s. No other information found so far.
23. Omaha Post. Located just north of Decatur, Nebraska, on the Missouri river. Built about 1819 by Pratte and Vasquez for Berthold and Chouteau. The closing date is not known.
24. Cerre's Ponca Post. Located on the Missouri below the mouth of the Niobrara. It was built about 1821 by Pratte and Chouteau.
25. Columbia Fur Co. Ponca Post. This post, located at the same place, competed until 1827, when both were absorbed by the American Fur Co. It continued to operate a Ponca Post until about 1833.
26. Papin's Ponca Post. P. D. Papin and Company operated a post at the same site from 1829 to 1830, when it sold out to the AFC.
27. Schlegel's Ponca Post. A trader by that name had a post in 1851 somewhere around the mouth of the Niobrara.
28. Sarpy's Ponca Post. It is known that Peter Sarpy had a post in the same area in 1852-53.
29. Bellevue. Located nine miles above the mouth of the Platte on the Missouri River, Bellevue was original established in 1823 by the declining Missouri Fur Company. After it folded, ownership passed to Fontenelle and Drips and then to Pierre Chouteau Jr. & Co. Operating into the 1850s, it served increasingly as a supply point for western emigrants. By the 1860s it had become a town.
30. Cabanné's Post. Located eight miles downstream from the Council Bluff, now North Omaha, Nebraska. Built about 1822 by John P. Cabanné for Berthold, Chouteau, & Pratte. Eventually it became an American Fur Company post. It was abandoned in the 1830s in favor of Bellevue a few miles to the south.
31. Dickson's Post. Located on the left bank of the Missouri at the mouth of the James River. Built for the Yankton Sioux in the early 1820s by the Columbia Fur Company, which was made up of Canadian traders under an American, William Tilton.
32. Pratte's James River Post. A competition post was built by Pratte and Company next to Dickson's post in 1824. Both of these posts were acquired by the American Fur Company and the operation was moved to the nearby Vermilion River in 1834.
33. Big Sioux Post. Located at the mouth of the Sioux River on the left bank of the Missouri. Built about 1825 by the Columbia Fur Company for the Yankton Indians. Absorbed by the American Fur Company as part of the Upper Missouri Outfit. Abandoned about 1855 when Fort Pierre closed.
34. Fort Mitchell. Located at the mouth of the Niobrara. Built by the American Fur Company in 1833 for the Ponca trade. Abandoned 1837.
35. Frost & Todd's James River Post. The opposition company operated a trading post at the mouth of the James, 1857-59.
36. Vermilion River Post. Located downstream 35 miles from the James, the Vermilion Post was established by the American Fur Company in 1834, and it closed about 1851.
37. Leclerc's Post. Located near Greenwood South Dakota, about fifteen miles below Fort Randall dam. Built in the 1830s by Narcisse Leclerc. Abandoned in the late 1830s.
38. Crow Creek Post. Located on the Missouri River at the mouth of Crow Creek thirty miles below Fort Pierre. Established about 1845 by Colin Campbell, a Sioux Indian, for the Lower Brulés, this post specialized in small furs instead of buffalo robes. It may have closed by the mid-1850s.
39. Fort Kiowa, also known as Fort Lookout. Located on the Missouri River, twenty-five miles above the mouth of the White River. Built in 1822 for the French Company of Berthold, Chouteau, and Pratte, by Joseph Brazeau, and named for his French nickname, "Kiowa." Through mergers, Fort Kiowa became the American Fur Company post, Fort Lookout. It was abandoned, then occupied again about 1840 by Joseph LaBarge who abandoned it a few years later.
40. Fort Tecumseh. Located on the Missouri 1 ½ miles above the mouth of the Bad River. Built by the Columbia Fur Company in 1822, it became part of the American Fur Company's Upper Missouri Outfit, and was replaced in 1833 by Fort Pierre.
41. Fort Teton. Located on the south bank of the Bad River, two miles below Fort Tecumseh. Built in 1828 by P. D. Papin & Co., (the French Company), and acquired and torn down by the American Fur Company in 1830.
42. P. D. Papin's White River Post. Located at the mouth of the White as a satellite of Fort Teton. Built 1828, absorbed by American Fur Company in 1830 and abandoned.
43. Fort Pierre. Located on the Missouri River three miles above the mouth of the Bad River. Built in 1832-3 to replace Fort Tecumseh, and named in honor of Pierre Chouteau Jr. It was the largest trading post ever built in the United States, and upon completion, was made headquarters of the new Sioux Outfit. In 1837 it became HQ of the Upper Missouri Outfit. In 1855, the US army purchased the fort.



### Trading Posts of the Central Plains (Continued)

44. Sublette & Campbell's Bad River Post. Adjacent to Fort Tecumseh. Built in 1833 to compete with Fort Pierre, it closed the next year when Sublette & Campbell sold out to the AFC in favor of the upper Platte.
45. Sublette & Campbell's White River Post. Located at the mouth of White River. Built in 1833, and sold to AFC in 1834, and abandoned.
46. Fort Galpin. Located two miles above Fort Pierre. Following the 1855 sale of Fort Pierre, this post took its place from 1856 to 1859.
47. Fort Pierre II. Located ½ mile south of Fort Galpin. Fort Pierre II then operated as the PCJ's main fort on the middle Missouri until 1863, and the company liquidated the next year.
48. Leclerc's Bad River Post. Located on Bad River at its confluence with the Missouri. Built in the early 1830s by Narcisse Leclerc to oppose Fort Pierre. Abandoned shortly thereafter.
49. Cheyenne River Post. Located at the mouth of the Cheyenne River. Built by the American Fur company about 1830-31. In 1843, there were opposing traders from Pratte and Cabanné and the Union Fur Company as well.
50. Fort George. Located on the Missouri River thirty miles downstream from Fort Pierre. Built in 1842 by John Ebbetts of Fox, Livingston and Company, popularly called the Union Fur Company. PCJ bought the company out in 1845 and burned the post down.
51. Fort Defiance. Located on the Missouri at the mouth of Medicine Creek about thirty miles below Fort Pierre. Built in 1846 by Harvey, Primeau and Company, with backing by Robert Campbell. Through several reorganizations, the firm was the principal opposition to Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Company. Never able to be more than a nuisance to PCJ, the opposition company sold out to PCJ in 1860.
52. Handy's Post. Located in South Dakota four miles below Fort Randall Dam. Little is known of the post or its dates of operation. The army built Fort Randall on the site in 1856.
53. Northwestern Fur Co. Post. Located on the Missouri at the mouth of the Niobrara River. Built about 1865 for the company that bought out PCJ, the post was burned about 1867 by Hunkpapa or other Sioux. 53A. Bijou



Hills Post. Located on the east bank of the Missouri at the foot of the Bijou Hills in South Dakota below Fort Pierre. Probably built by Joseph Bissonet dit Bijou in the 1820s. He worked for the American Fur Co. at Fort Pierre.

### III. INLAND POSTS

54. Portuguese Houses. Located near Sussex, Wyoming near the junction of the Forks of the Powder River. Built about 1834 by Antonio Montero for Captain Bonneville, it was to be used as a supply base for trappers working the Bighorn Mountains. Sioux Indians laid siege to the post, and it was apparently abandoned the next year.

#### A. South Platte River Posts

55. Fort Convenience. Located on the South Platte at the mouth of Clear Creek in present-day north Denver. Built by Lewis Vasquez about 1832, it may have been relocated six miles downstream in 1836, and then abandoned in favor of Fort Vasquez further downstream.

### Trading Posts of the Central Plains (Continued)

56. Fort Jackson. Located twelve miles north of Brighton, Colorado. In 1837 Peter Sarpy built this post named for President Jackson, for Pratte, Chouteau & Co. It was sold to Bent & St. Vrain in 1838, who burned it down. PCJ then divided the trade with Bent & St. Vrain, leaving them the Southern Plains trade.
57. Fort Vasquez. Located twenty miles north of Brighton, Colorado. Built with the financial support of William Sublette in 1835. Abandoned in 1842.
58. Fort Lupton. Located on the South Platte River six miles north of Brighton, Colorado. Built by fired army officer Lancaster Lupton in 1837, it succumbed to the competition of Bent and St. Vrain about 1840.
59. Fort St. Vrain. Located fourteen miles southwest of Greeley, Colorado. In 1837, the Bent Brothers on the Arkansas River in southeast Colorado sent their brother George to drive away the growing competition on the lower South Platte. By 1842 the competition was gone. The bents used the post intermittently for the Cheyenne and Arapaho trade into the 1850s.
60. Fort Laramie, also known as Fort Lucien, Fort William, and Fort John. Located on the Laramie River, two miles above its confluence with the North Platte. Built 1834 by William Sublette and Robert Campbell, and called Fort William, it was sold to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Co. in 1835, and renamed Fort Lucien. In 1837 the Chouteau firm bought it and renamed it Fort John, in honor of John Sarpy. Through all this it was popularly called Fort Laramie, for a mountain man killed in 1821. It was rebuilt of adobe in 1841. The post was sold to the US army in 1849.
61. Fort John II. Located in 1850 on the North Platte River four miles west of Scottsbluff, Nebraska, then relocated in 1851 to Helvas Canyon eight miles south. This was done after Fort Laramie was sold to the army. It closed about 1860.
62. Fort Adams. Located on the North Platte River at the mouth of the Laramie. Built 1841 by the firm of Sybille and Adams. Abandoned 1842 when it acquired Lancaster Lupton's Fort Platte.
63. Lock and Randolph. Located two miles up the North Platte from Fort Adams. Built in 1841 and abandoned the next year.
64. Fort Platte. Located at the confluence of the Laramie River with the North Platte. Built in 1841 by Lancaster Lupton, who sold out in 1842 to Sibille and Adams, who sold out in 1844 to Pratte and Cabanné, who abandoned it in 1845.
65. LaBonte Creek Trading Post. Located sixty miles above Fort Laramie on the North Platte River. Built in the early 1840s by an independent trader named LaBonte who was killed shortly thereafter. The post was occupied by Joseph Bissonette as late as the 1850s.
66. Fort Richard (Rees haw). Just west of Casper/Evanston on the North Platte at Red Buttes. Operated by John Richard (Ree Shaw) from 1853-65. Destroyed by the Cheyenne Indians.
67. Fort Sarpy. Eight miles below the mouth of the Laramie River, on the North Platte, a group of trading houses were established, beginning with Peter Sarpy in 1837. This is the junction of the trail to Fort Pierre with the North Platte River. Sarpy abandoned his post in 1838.
68. Fort Bernard. John Richard built this post for Pratte and Cabanné at the site of Fort Sarpy in 1845. It burned down the next year.
69. Bissonette's North Platte trading post. Located on the North Platte five miles downstream from the mouth of the Laramie River. Built about 1843 or 1844 by Joseph Bissonette Abandoned by him and then reoccupied in 1851, probably abandoned about 1864.
70. Bordeaux-Bissonette Post. Located at the site of Fort Sarpy, in 1849 these two traders built a post. Bissonette left the partnership in about 1850, and Bordeaux operated it until about 1864. This post was very near the Grattan Massacre and it was ransacked after the fight.
71. Robidoux Pass Post. Located on the east side of Robidoux pass, southwest of Scottsbluff National Monument. Built by Joseph Robidoux III in 1849 for the emigrant and Indian trade. Moved to Carter Canyon 1851.
72. Carter Canyon Post. Robidoux moved his post to Carter Canyon southwest of Gering in 1851 to take advantage of relocated emigrant trails. This post was abandoned in 1853.
73. Robidoux's Platte River Post. In 1851, Robidoux also built a post and smithy four miles east of Gering Nebraska on the south side of the North Platte on the Oregon Trail. It closed about 1858.
74. The Horse Creek Post. In 1851, Robidoux also set up a post at the mouth of Horse Creek on the North Platte three miles northeast of Lyman, Nebraska, and situated to supply both emigrants and Indians. It closed in 1858.
75. Moncrevier's Post. Located twelve miles above Fort Laramie on the Laramie River. J. B. Moncrevier built it in 1856 and abandoned it by 1858.
76. Drips' post. Located on the North Platte nineteen miles below the mouth of the Laramie. Built in 1857 by Andrew Drips for PCJ to trade with emigrants as well as Indians. Closed 1860 when Drips died.
77. Rawhide Butte Post. Located about thirty miles north of the Platte River on Rawhide Creek, on the southwest side of Rawhide Butte. Sometime in the early 1850s, James Bordeaux built a post there. It was apparently abandoned by 1857, when the buildings were occupied and expanded by Sioux Indian agent Thomas Twiss.

### **Trading Posts of the Central Plains (Continued)**

78. LaBonte's Post. Located sixty miles west of Fort Laramie on the North Platte River at the mouth of LaBonte Creek.
79. Deer Creek Post. Located on the North Platte River at the mouth of Deer Creek near present-day Glenrock, Wyoming. Built by Joseph Bissonette, and operated by him in the period 1859-60.
80. Beauvais' Post. Located at California Crossing of the Platte River near present-day Brule, Nebraska. Built by independent trader Geminien Beauvais about 1850, it served Indians during the winter and emigrants during the summer. Abandoned about 1853.
81. Morrow's Post. Located at the junction of the North and South Platte Rivers, this was an independent "road ranche" that catered to emigrants in the summer and Indians in the winter. Built in the 1850s, it was abandoned by 1864.

#### **C. Brule Sioux Posts**

82. Forks of the White River. Located on the north side of White River at the junction of the south Fork. Established by Frederick LaBoue as a satellite of Fort Tecumseh/Fort Pierre about 1830. Still operating in 1854.
83. Snake Creek Post. Located at junction of Snake Creek and Niobrara River. Head of navigation for boats on Niobrara. Built about 1830, abandoned before 1857. Satellite of Fort Tecumseh/Pierre. Mixed Brule Sioux and Ponca trade.
84. Butte Cachée or Hidden Butte. Located on the on the west bank of White River near Black Tail Creek. Established about 1829 at the head of navigation on White River. Satellite of Fort Tecumseh/Pierre.
85. Crow Creek Post. Located on the Cheyenne River northwest of Pino Springs on the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail just north of the Bad Lands. Nothing is known of it other than it was operating in 1854 and was seen by geologist Ferdinand V. Hayden.
86. James Bordeaux's Post. Located on Bordeaux Creek about six miles up stream from its confluence with the White River. The post may have been in use as early as 1833 by a De Grey a trader from Fort Pierre. In 1837 traders were sent there from Fort Laramie, and by 1838 the trader operating the post was James Bordeaux. Bordeaux operated the post independently until 1872, according to his descendants. Then it was occupied by Francis Boucher, a relative by marriage of Spotted tail, chief of the upper Brulés. Accused of selling arms and ammunition to the hostiles, the trading post was closed in August 1876, by the US army.
87. Chadron Creek Trading Post. Located six miles south of Chadron, Nebraska, on Chadron Creek. In 1841, Lancaster Lupton expanded his trading operation on the North Platte and established this post for the Brule Sioux winter trade. The next year he sold out to Sybille and Adams, and the post continued until about 1845. The post's substantial stone chimney was still standing in 1907.
88. Bissonette's Post. Located a half mile north west of Bordeaux's Post on Bordeaux Creek. Built 1871, abandoned 1877.

#### **D. Oglala Sioux Posts**

89. Hollow Wood. Located on the lower Bad River near Van Meter, SD. No information other than it was an early satellite of Fort Tecumseh.
90. Cherry Creek Post. Located on the Cheyenne River at the mouth of Cherry Creek. Built in 1831 by Frederick LaBoue for the American Fur Company to trade with the Oglalas. The post closed in the early 1850s after the murder of the trader there, Edwin LaChapelle, by Hunkpapas.
91. Forks of the Cheyenne. Located at the junction of the Cheyenne and Belle Fourche Rivers. Possibly built for trade with the Cheyennes in about 1828 or 1829, as a satellite post of Fort Tecumseh. It was apparently abandoned in the early 1830s.
92. Rapid Creek Trading Post. Located on Cheyenne River at the mouth of Rapid Creek as a satellite of Fort Tecumseh. Built by Thomas L'estang Sarpy, brother of Peter and John Sarpy in 1829. In 1832, the post was blown up accidentally, killing Sarpy.
93. Box Elder Creek Post. Located on Cheyenne River at the mouth of Box Elder Creek. Built by Edward LaChapelle about 1832 as a satellite of Fort Pierre. While the Cheyennes had been trading here for three years, this was apparently the new post to replace the Rapid Creek Post. Still operating in 1838. Ruins of the post observed in 1857.
94. Bear Butte Post. Located near Bear Butte on the Belle Fourche, or north branch of the Cheyenne. Originally a post for the Saone Sioux built by Fred Laboue as early as 1831, and supplied from Fort Tecumseh/ Fort Pierre, by 1838 it had grown into a major trading spot . Lupton had John Richards there in 1841, and Sibille and Adams stationed him there in 1842. The post was operating in 1854. The pickets were still standing in 1864.

## SOURCE MATERIAL: THE EARLY FUR TRADE OF ST. LOUIS

*Credit: Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly; Volume 53, Number 3, Fall 2017*

Tucked away in the addenda of Zadok Cramer's *The Navigator* (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear, and Eichbaum, 1808; eighth edition, 1814) is a letter (pp. 343-45), written by Anthony Soulard, Surveyor General of Upper Louisiana during the Spanish and French regime. His maps of the Missouri River were eagerly sought and used by the Lewis and Clark expedition. Soulard also compiled annual statistics on the fur trade of his city over a fifteen-year period, mostly before the American purchase of Louisiana.

His numbers for annual St. Louis fur production are impressive and revealing. For example, the acquisition of buffalo robes is surprisingly high for this early period, and the average prices are virtually identical to the wholesale prices received during the height of the robe trade. Otter skins were worth over three times that of beaver. Deer skins, however, more than a hundred thousand of them yearly, accounted for fully half the total annual fur trade revenue of the Missouri Basin, or the Illinois country as it was then known.

"The productions of the Missouri at this time are received from the Indians and the hunters, in exchange for goods and merchandise, and may be exhibited in the following table.

### MISSOURI PRODUCE

Beaver	12,281 lbs. at \$1.20	\$14,737.00
Fox skins	802 at 0.50	401.00
Bear skins, Black, grey, yellow, and brown	2,541 at 2.00	5,082.00
Cow skins	189 at 1.50	283.50
Deer skins in the hair	6,381 at 0.50	3,190.50
Bear's grease	2,310 gals. 1.20	2,572.00
Otter skins	1,267 lbs. 4.00	5,068.00
Rackoon skins	at .25	1,062.00
Bison hides or robes	1,714 at 3.00	5,162.00
Dressed deer skins	96,926 at 0.40	38,770.40
Tallow and fat	8,313 at 0.20	1,662.60
		<hr/> \$ 77,971.00

"This table which is made as correct as possible on an average of fifteen years, thus gives an amount of 77,971 dollars, without mentioning musquashes and martins. Calculating at the same rate, the value of goods carried up the Missouri, and exchanged for this peltry, would be 61,250 dollars, reckoning the charges to amount to a quarter part of the worth of these articles. From this it follows, that the trade affords an annual profit of 16,721 dollars, or about a profit of 27 per cent.

"If the Missouri trade, badly regulated, and without encouragement, gives annually such a profit, there can be no doubt of its increase, if encouraged by the government. It must be observed, that the price fixed in the preceding table is that current at the Illinois. If the London price was taken, deducting freight and charges, the profit would appear much greater. If the Missouri, left to the savages, and having but a single branch of trade, affords such great returns, in proportion to the capital employed in it, what might we not expect from individuals or companies with large funds, aided by a numerous population, and devoting themselves to other sorts of traffic....

Dated at St. Louis, of the Illinois, March, 1805."



## President/Editor's Comments - Kevin Kucera



**Kevin Kucera**  
**President/Editor**

In the spirit of celebrating the 200th Anniversary of Fort. Atkinson this year we feature two articles describing the early fur trade posts of the Missouri River, and, a significant 1806 inventory of fur trade production from the Missouri River Basin. We are looking forward to our Annual Meeting and Rendezvous this September at Ft. Atkinson. This military fort provided significant military support to the trappers who fought in the Arikara War on the Missouri. Captain Jedediah Smith was a natural leader showing great confidence and humility in his actions in this first Indian War of the West.

These articles herein also show us that the Missouri River Fur Trade was well established before Ashley went up the Missouri for the first time in 1823, and early fur trade adopters like James Mackay and Manuel Lisa blazed the way for Ashley and Smith. In turn they quickly learned that the traditional Missouri River water route for fur trade in the Rocky Mountains was not going to work, so they made a paradigm shift in business practice by taking their fur trade business travels going west by land instead of using the Missouri. This business concept evolved into the storied Rendezvous System of the Rocky Mountain fur trade.

In the Archives section we share an original page of the Smith Will. This rare document includes important information. On a fun side of the matter we also share a page from the typewritten Smith Estate document including a list of Jedediah's personal catalogue of books. His reading was in my estimation, focused on empire building and Christianity which is consistent with his history, behavior and what he shared in his letters and journals. Joe Molter provides insight into his books, including Smith's study of practical navigation techniques.

Milton von Damm's article on the Northwest Gun is fascinating in telling the story on how the Henry Family started their firearm business. The Henry Brand is still recognizable today for its high quality American made firearms. We are most grateful for all the work Milt does for our society. In his capacity as Treasurer he has reminded me that our annual dues are due, and, thanks you all for your support!

Happy Trails!  
Kevin

### CASTOR CANADENSIS NEWSLETTER GUIDELINES

The editor welcomes articles for publication. Please review the following guidelines:

1. Prospective authors should send their articles or questions to Kevin Kucera at [kckucera@msn.com](mailto:kckucera@msn.com)
2. Submit in MS Word.
3. End notes should be numbered consecutively.
4. Photographs, maps or illustrations should be sent as an attachment and not embedded into the article. They should also be numbered i.e. Fig 1. A separate list with Fig. No. should be attached with a short title of the photograph etc.
5. After receipt the article will be reviewed by a technical editor. Once this is completed the author will be notified and an approximate date for publication will be provided.
6. Please note the *Castor Canadensis* is not responsible for either the research or the opinions of the writer.



## Upcoming Events

**Fort Atkinson State Historical Park  
north of Omaha, Nebraska  
is hosting the  
*2020 National Fur Trade Symposium*  
September 9-13, 2020**



### **Call for Papers!**

**The primary focus of the 2020 National Fur Trade Symposium is that era of trade on the Missouri River spanning from the return of Lewis and Clark in 1806 to the abandonment of Fort Atkinson in 1827. Papers pertaining to notable individuals and/or companies and particular events occurring during that time-period are encouraged. Papers pertaining to the impact of the U.S. Army and the implementation of federal law on the fur trade and the Missouri River native tribes are encouraged, as well.**

**Email a copy of your paper to [jason.grof@nebraska.gov](mailto:jason.grof@nebraska.gov)  
or mail a hard copy to Fort Atkinson SHP, PO Box 240, Ft. Calhoun, NE 68023**



**This photo was taken at Fort Atkinson, Nebraska,  
at the Lewis and Clark First Indian Council site.**

**Left to right are:  
Corbin Kucera, (Meriwether Lewis), Luke Kucera.**

**Fort Atkinson will be the location of our next Annual  
Meeting and Rendezvous! Details to follow.**

**Please remember to go to our website:  
[www.JedediahSmithSociety.org](http://www.JedediahSmithSociety.org)**

**to check out the interactive maps that  
have been created by our map team.**

**They're unbelievable!**

**Also please consider purchasing a map  
for your wall.**

**They come in 2 sizes:**

**24" x 36"**

**and 16" x 20".**

**You may order the historic style or one with  
modern highways added. You will find the  
order sheet on-line with instructions.**

# **AN 1828 J.J. HENRY AMERICAN NORTHWEST GUN**

**By, Milton von Damm**

## **What is a Northwest Gun?**

During the mid-eighteenth century a light, smoothbore, long firearm evolved in North America in response to the Indian preference for an all-purpose gun for hunting and defense. It was light enough to be carried since horses were not in general use by Indians east of the Mississippi, had a bore that was similar to a 20 gauge shotgun, and featured a large loop trigger guard and a cast brass serpent design on the sideplate. The pattern endured for over 150 years, initially with a flintlock and later including percussion options. The large trigger enabled a person to use two fingers to pull the trigger, like shooting an arrow from a bow, or firing while wearing a glove. The favored serpent sideplate sprung from similar sideplates of early colonial fowlers. The Northwest guns became the standard Indian trade gun throughout North America for the remainder of the muzzle loading shoulder arm history.

Thousands of these guns were ordered from England and the Belgium areas by the Hudson's Bay Company and other fur trading competitors in what is now Canada.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, these guns were a staple of a fur trade inventory stocked by American importers who supplied American fur trading companies. The New York based American Fur Company (AFC), John Jacob Astor, owner, favored English models made by Barnett, plus cheaper options from makers in Liege, Belgium, during the 1820s when Jedediah Smith was in the Far West. In a major departure from its Northwest gun orders to Europe, the AFC supplemented its rifle orders with the reliable J.J. Henry to include 580 Northwest guns on April 21, 1828, for the 1829 season. If the quality and price could be competitive with the English and Liege guns, it was a sensible opportunity because the Boulton gunmaking family facility was close to New York. This was the first order from any fur trade firm for American-made Northwest guns.<sup>2</sup>

## **The 1828 J.J. Henry Northwest Indian Trade Gun**

The order was to be delivered by April 15, 1829.<sup>3</sup> Presumably, many of these guns were sent to trading posts to the Northern Department, and the rest were sent to St. Louis to the AFC's Western Department to their agent, Bernard Pratt and Co.

The partnership of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette agreed to let William Ashley market their furs and provide their supplies. Ashley had the capability of obtaining trade goods and supplies directly from wholesale firms in the East, and the AFC's surge into the far western fur trade was creating animosity among St. Louis competitors. Nevertheless, Ashley did purchase goods from the AFC in April 1829 for \$1,556.85.<sup>4</sup> Could some J.J. Henry guns have constituted part of the purchase? Sublette was then assembling supplies and trade goods for the 1829 Rendezvous which was held in Popo Agie Valley, with a second one after Jedediah Smith returned from being with the Hudson's Bay Company near Pierre's Hole near the Grand Tetons. Trapping in Blackfoot territory followed.

Interestingly, Captain Bonneville, who was attempting to establish a fur trade in the Far West during the early 1830s, reported in 1830 that he had witnessed the sale of American trade guns to Blackfoot Indians. If they were Northwest guns, rifles were not a focus of trade at that time; the guns had to be J.J. Henry Northwest guns.<sup>5</sup>



The Henry contract with the AFC specified that the guns would be flintlock smoothbores with walnut or maple stocks with square butts and barrels from two feet six inches to four feet. The locks were to be six inches long, and the barrels were to be bright blue with well varnished stocks.<sup>6</sup>

The J.J. Henry Northwest gun pictured here conforms to the contract specifications. It has a six-inch long flintlock marked J.J. Henry over Boulton on the lock face, but no date on the tail; the unmarked .60 caliber bright blue barrel is just under forty two inches long and has a single ring where the octagon breech section becomes round. The stock is varnished and has a square butt. One unusual mark is a round snowflake or wheel mark just behind the trigger guard. The survival rate for fur trade guns has been estimated to be about one percent. There may be only six 1828 J.J. Henry Northwest guns in existence, one in the Museum of the Fur Trade, and a second is this pictured example in my collection.



This 1828 J.J. Henry Northwest gun is a prime example of the company's first order for this type of Indian trade gun and the only order that the American Fur Company had with the Henry clan for Northwest guns. J. J. Henry was subsequently informed that English guns were cheaper, and James Henry was later told that the Indians only wanted English Northwest guns.<sup>7</sup> This example may have remained in the East. It was converted

to percussion, perhaps in the factory, and does not appear to have suffered the heavy wear expected from use by Indians, especially in the Far West. However, it has been restored nearly to its original condition. The lock has been carefully reconverted from percussion to flint, and 21 inches of the front of the stock has been replaced along with a new barrel thimble and ramrod. The lock has been cleaned and the stock re-varnished to give the gun a uniform appearance.

### **Other Northwest Indian Trade guns made in the Henry family's Boulton facility**

There are surviving examples of J.J. Henry Northwest guns, marked HENRY 1830 on their lock tails and a fox in a circle below the lock pan. Surviving examples have been located in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. The primary southwest market for the fur trade was supplied by an unidentified St. Louis trader, primarily to Bent's trading post, and after 1834, Bent's Fort operated by the Bent, St. Vrain and Co.



**Lock Mark for 1828 gun**

During the 1840s James Henry, J.J. Henry's son, furnished Northwest trade guns with two different markings. The markings on one example reveal who bought them. The PCJ and Co. (Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Co.) on the lock tail is the key. Pierre Chouteau Jr. became owner of the American Fur Company's Western Department in 1834. Under the pan is J. HENRY, and the barrels are marked HENRY. Surprisingly, although Chouteau was headquartered in St. Louis, the guns were for the upper Mississippi market. The marks on a second Northwest gun include HENRY and a tombstone fox on the lock and HENRY on the barrel. It is known that the Ewing Brothers, a northwestern trading firm, purchased J. Henry rifles and may have also purchased J. Henry Northwest guns. The Museum of the Fur Trade in Chadron, Nebraska, has an original percussion Northwest gun marked J. HENRY & SON.

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### **NOTES**

1. An excellent source of detailed information about Northwest guns and their manufacturers is James Hanson's *Encyclopedia of Trade Goods-Firearms*. The Museum of the Fur Trade.
2. Other American gunmakers made Northwest guns. Primarily for the federal government's Indian Department for gifts and treaty payments. The earliest government order was a war of 1812 order for 130 guns from Henry Deringer for Indian allies that could not be delivered until 1816.
3. Kauffman, *The Pennsylvania-Kentucky Rifle*, pp 259.
4. Dale L. Morgan, *The West of William Ashley*, pp 197.
5. Carl Russell, *Firearms, Traps & trade Goods of the Mountain Man*, pp 68.
6. John Parson, "Gunmakers for the American Fur Company," *The New York Historical Review*, April 1952. p183.
7. Antique arms collectors will place a higher value on examples that are in fine or unused condition. Collectors who seek arms as examples of the material culture of some aspect of history place a premium on who owned the gun, was it present at some historic event. Also of interest is whether there is a trail from where the gun was made to where it may have been used. "Attic condition" is a popular term to describe a gun that was stored after the end of its working life and not repaired or restored. "Used but not abused" is a perspective for collectors seeking guns of historic interest. Substantial restoration normally does not enhance the value of an antique gun beyond the cost of the restoration, but there are instances where a gun is so rare and the restoration is so well done, that it is much more desirable than an alternative that has been abused.



## Archives Corner

## Jed's Estate Papers/Will

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The Smith Estate document (type written on the next page) is located in the Jedediah Smith Collection at the University of Pacific. See: "UOP,HASC,S/B Fam, Box 1,2".

The following insight on Smith’s personal book collection as listed in the Smith Estate document herein is from Joe Molter, past JSS President, and past Editor of this publication.

On the books Jed had:

- Henrys Exposition is short for Henrys Exposition of the Old and New Testaments, six volumes.
- Seamans Daily Assistant is a navigational guide that is full of navigational aids that can be used on land! I found a copy on web and printed it, some 170 pages. I believe Jed made much use of this.
- Rollins Ancient History pertains to the Middle East.
- Josephus is the works of Flavius Josephus who was a witness of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

## Archives Corner

A true & full Inventory of the real & personal Estate, goods, chattels & effects of the late Jedediah S. Smith so far as the undersigned Executor has been able to ascertain & collect the same To Wit:

32 Mules

8 horses

4 Waggon with harness complete

1 Negro man (William) 35 years of age

1 Negro woman (Elizabeth) 21 years of age

1 lot of Grey Bear Skins

Sundry small skins of but little value

24 lb Beaver Fur

2 Rifle guns (out of repair)

5 shot guns do

1 Sea Otter skin

1 skin shirt

1 Bow & Arrows

10 Spanish saddles

1 Box tools

16 Spanish Blankets

1 pr Boots & 1 pr shoes

1 lot of tin kettles

1 Box & 1 trunk containing tin cups, plates &c

1 Keg with 15 lb powder

### Catalogue of Books

viz	Henrys Exposition	6 Vol	
	Morris Gazetteer	1 Vol	
	Seamans Daily Assist.-	1 "	
	Clappertons 2nd Expedition into Africa -	1 Vol	
	Rollins Ancient History --	1 "	
	History of Mexico --	1 "	
	Natural Theology --	1 "	
	Evidence of Christianity --	1 "	
	Websters Dictionary	2 "	
	Buck Theological Dictionary	1 "	
	Josephus - -	4 "	
	History of Ancient Greece - -	1 "	
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#### Special thanks to:

- Theresa Melbar donated \$1,000 to our Society to help fund a replacement of a Jedediah Smith monument near Bakersfield that was stolen. The Bakersfield Historical Society has the lead in this project.
- The James Irvine Foundation has awarded a grant of \$500 to the Jedediah Smith Society to help pay for the costs associated with having Professor Stephen Beckham speak at the 2019 Annual Meeting. This grant came from the Staff Discretionary Grants Program through Adam Cimino. His father is Rich Cimino, a member of our Board.
- Jim Smith donated \$150 to help pay for printing expenses associated with the Annual Meeting.
- Member Jon Warn made a general donation of \$100 over and above his dues which will be used to help fund the map project.
- New member, Kenneth Rendell made a general donation of \$100 when paying his initial dues making him a JSS Patron.

Thank you!

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**Please welcome our new members to the Society.** We welcome you to our events and participation on various committees. If you'd like to write an article please see the guidelines under the editor column.

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