Form 10-317
(Sept. 1957)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

1. STATE
North Dakota

2. THEME(S). IF ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE, WRITE "ARCH" BEFORE THEME NO. Theme XV "Westward Expansion" (The Fur Trade)

3. NAME(S) OF SITE
Fort Union

4. APPROX. ACREAGE
8

5. EXACT LOCATION (*County, township, roads, etc. If difficult to find, sketch on Supplementary Sheet*)
East of Buford, North Dakota near Montana - North Dakota State Line.

6. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PRESENT OWNER (*Also administrator if different from owner*)
State of North Dakota; administered by State Historical Society of North Dakota.

7. IMPORTANCE AND DESCRIPTION (*Describe briefly what makes site important and what remains are extant*)

Significance: For almost four decades, Fort Union was the principal fur trading post on the Upper Missouri River. It was the leading fur depot for a vast area on the Missouri River and its tributaries above Fort Clark. It had a virtual monopoly on the rich fur trade area which now encompasses most of Montana, a portion of eastern North Dakota and parts of Wyoming and into Canada. The post was visited by the artist George Catlin, in 1832 the famous German traveller, Maximilian, Prince of Wied in 1833, and the naturalist John Audubon in 1843.

Fort Union was the best built post on the Missouri River. With the possible exception of Bent's Old Fort on the Arkansas, it was the best in the entire West. According to Nathaniel J. Wyeth who visited Union in 1833, no British post compared to it. The trading establishment was built in 1828 as Fort Floyd near the mouth of the Yellowstone. The name was later changed to Fort Union by the American Fur Company, which operated it during most of its existence. Based on available source materials, Hiram M. Chittenden, recognized authority on the fur trade, described Fort Union as follows:

> ...It was 240 by 220 feet, the shorter side facing the river, and was surrounded by a palisade of square hewn pickets about a foot thick and twenty feet high. The bastions were at the southwest and northeast corners, and consisted of square houses 24 feet on a side and 30 feet high, built entirely of stone and surmounted with pyramidal roofs. There were two stories; the lower one was pierced for cannon and the upper had a balcony for better observation. The usual banquette extended around the inner wall of the fort. The entrance was large and

8. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (*Give best sources; give location of manuscripts and rare works*)

Hiram M. Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, (New York, 1902), 958-960; Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., Maximilian's Travels in North America, (Cleveland, 1906) Vol. I, 376-388; Maria R. Audubon, ed., Audubon and His Journals, (New York, 1900) (Two Volumes), Vol. II, 180-188.

9. REPORTS AND STUDIES (*Mention best reports and studies, as, NPS study, HABS, etc.*)

Edward A. Hummel, Special Report on Fort Union, North Dakota, March, 1938.

10. PHOTOGRAPHS* ATTACHED: YES ☒ NO ☐	11. CONDITION	12. PRESENT USE (*Museum, farm, etc.*)	13. DATE OF VISIT
	Fair	State Park	May, 1951 ~~August, 1951~~
14. NAME OF RECORDER (*Signature*)		15. TITLE	16. DATE
Roy N. Matteson		Historian	October 5, 1

*DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10½ SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

(IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER)

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Form 10-317a
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NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many Supplement Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont'd), as, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd) . . .

STATE	NAME(S) OF SITE
North Dakota	Fort Union

was secured with a powerful gate which in 1837 was changed to a double gate on account of the dangerous disposition of the Indians owing to the smallpox scourge. On the opposite side of the quare from the entrance was the house of the bourgeois, a well-built, commodious two-story structure, with glass windows, fire-place and other 'modern conveniences.' Around the square were the barracks for the employes, the store houses, work shops, stables, a cut stone powder magazine capable of holding 50,000 pounds, and a reception room for the Indians. In the center of the court was a tall flag staff around which were the leathern tents of half-breeds in the service of the company. Near the flag-staff stood one or two cannon trained upon the entrance to the fort. Somewhere in the enclosure was the famous distillery of 1833-4. All of the buildings were of cottonwood lumber and every thing was of an unusually elaborate character....

Fort Union was the place where the distillery incident occured in 1833 which almost resulted in the American Fur Company losing its license to trade. The fort was the center of the smallpox epidemic in 1837 which swept away thousands of the Northern Plains Indians. General Alf Sully visited Fort Union during his Northwestern Expedition of 1864 and garrisoned the fur trading establishment. The post, after passing into the hands of the Northwest Fur Company and Durfee and Peck in 1867, was dismantled and its materials used in the buildings nearby Fort Buford.

Remains: Other than a few cellar pits, there is little surface evidence of the fort. The site needs to be investigated archeologically. Edward A. Hummel, who prepared a special report on this site recommended, "with the possible exceptions of St. Louis and Mackinac Island, Fort Union best illustrates one of the early phases of the exploitation of our national resources." There is no indication of any action by the Advisory Board on this area.

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