

Lena House

*Location: Northeastern Slope of Turtle Mountain
1801 – 1802*

LENA HOUSE IS ONE OF TWO FUR TRADING POSTS which were located on Turtle Mountain, though its exact location has never been determined.

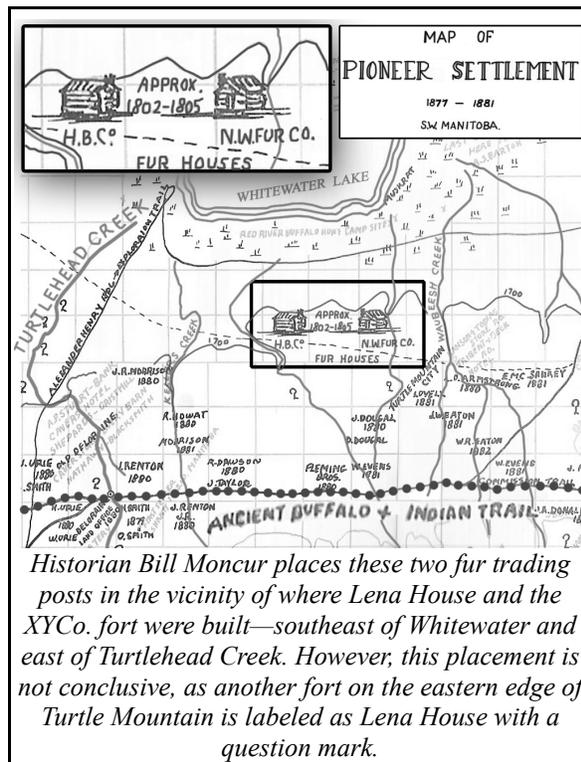
In the early years of the 1800s, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was becoming increasingly annoyed with independent traders who were setting up shop in places that diverted business away from the HBC. In the fall of 1801, John McKay of Brandon House sent Henry Lena with seven men and supplies to Turtle Mountain along with instructions to "cut off every independent" fur trader in that area.

It is believed that Lena House was established on the northeastern slopes of Turtle Mountain, though the exact location of the fort is unknown. The journals and letters of traders discussing the fort mention its distance from Brandon House on the Assiniboine River as 60 miles (100 kms). They also mention that it was not far from the southeastern shore of Whitewater Lake and some distance east of Turtlehead Creek.

Lena House operated from about 1801 until 1802 but was not very successful in its aim of closing down rival trade in the area. The XY Company set up a trading post not even a full mile away, placing themselves directly on the path that the Assiniboine First Nations would take were they to cross Turtle Mountain to trade. Even had the XY Company not provided such competition, Lena House may still have met an early demise because it was not well fortified and very vulnerable to Dakota attack from the south.

It is possible that well after its abandonment Lena House was given a second life under the name Turtle Mountain House. On the 18th of June, 1846, Governor Simpson of the HBC informed the Company head office in London that a new post was being established on Turtle Mountain which seems to have operated from 1846 to 1855. A map made of the

area by Aaron Arrowsmith in 1857 shows Turtle Mountain House in the northeast part of Turtle Mountain, the same general location as Lena House. Operating Turtle Mountain House from 1848 to 1855 was Antoine Desjarlais, and it is interesting to speculate whether or not he was a relative of the successful independent trader Joseph Desjarlais, who at the same time was trading in obvious opposition to the HBC on the Souris River.



In the 1880s, settlement began in the Turtle Mountain area. Settlers hauling wood from the forested mountain mentioned passing an old house or building that was in the same locality as Turtle Mountain House and Lena before it. This building was known as Wassewa House, and a CNR station by that name later appeared nearby. Was this building a remnant of either or both of the HBC posts? Considerable

research by various historians leave this and other questions like it lamentably unanswered.

Lena House had a brief and comparatively unremarkable existence. It did survive long and prominently enough, though, to provide the name for one of southwestern Manitoba's small hamlets. Although there is little left of Lena the village, it is the name of an international port of entry south of Killarney.

References:

- Duncan, Hal G. *The South-West Corner*. Altona: Friesen Printers, 1984.
- McMorran, G. A. *Souris River Posts*. Souris: Souris Plaindealer Ltd., 1948.
- "Turtle Mtn sites and people." *Historic Resources Branch Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport. Misc. Materials Relating to the Heritage Inventories and Bus Tours*. CD-ROM. Winnipeg: 2008.
- Map: Adapted from: Moncur, Bill. *Map of Pioneer Settlement 1877-1881 in SW Manitoba*. 1956.