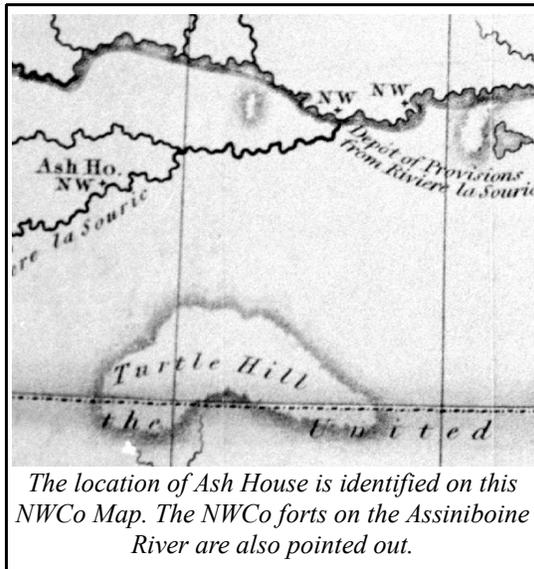


Ash House

Location: Souris River, West of Hartney
RM of Cameron
1795 – 1797

ASH HOUSE (FORT DE LA FRÈNIÈRE, FORT OF THE Ash, Ash Fort or Fort Ash) was perhaps the first fur trading post built along the Souris River. At the time of its construction there was fierce competition among five fur trading posts, all operating in close proximity to one another near the confluence of the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers. Ash House, built in 1795, appeared just two years after the first of the Assiniboine River posts started trading.



It was an attempt by the North West Company (NWCo) to gain further profit by drawing on the growing Souris basin trade, and more specifically to meet the competition of the company's major rival, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC).

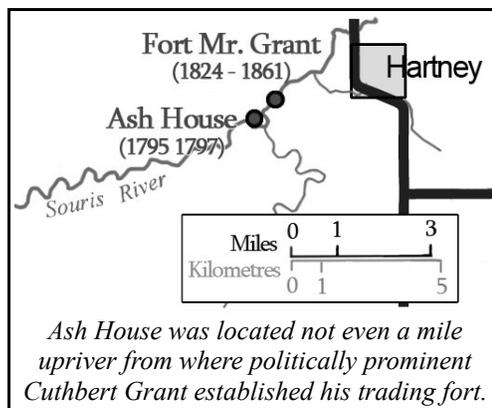
Scholars have lamented that mention of Ash House by the HBC and in the journals of early explorers and fur traders (such as David Thompson, Alexander Henry Jr., Peter Fidler and Peter Garrioch) occur only in passing. There is very little mention of the fort elsewhere, even among NWCo records. Distances and locations recorded by these early travellers of the Souris basin place the site of Ash House only generally in the vicinity of Hartney.

What is known about the fort is that Ash House was built on the north shore of the Souris and was accessible mostly by canoe. The Souris River surrounded it on three sides, and in wet years a depression to the north of the fort also filled with water, making it approachable only by canoe. The Yellow Quill trail – still faintly

discernible today – originates at Fort Garry (Winnipeg) and runs parallel to the Souris. For a fort dealing with trade, gaining proximity to this avenue of land travel and transport would have been a shrewd strategy. Also, in the vicinity of Ash House was a sandhill that may have been used as a lookout.

Ash House only operated for a year or at most a year and a half. This is possibly due to the fort's vulnerability to attack. Explorer David Thompson suggested this as the reason for its abandonment in his journal: "... it had to be given up, from it's being too open to the incursions of the Sioux Indians." From about 1748 onward the Sioux (preferring the name Dakota) were known to wage war on anyone trading on the Souris River to discourage foreigners from establishing control over trade in the area. More probably, Ash House was abandoned because of poor management or strong competition. It just wasn't profitable. In any case, when David Thompson passed through the area in December of 1797, he camped a few miles away and reported that the fort was by that time abandoned.

Trading posts were not designed to last the test of time and today the site of Ash House is no more than four cellar holes and two piles of stones.



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Graphic: "Map 018-b NWCo forts in Red River Basin 1816. *Historic Resources Branch Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport*
Map: Fort Location from McMorran, G. A.