Military and Commercial Storage Buildings

France expanded and sustained its sphere of influence in the North American interior by using forts as both military bases and sites of economic exchange. France’s military presence and trading operations helped secure native allies.

Military Storage Buildings

Soldiers used powder magazines to store gunpowder and munitions. The ability to dispense powder to French regulars and their native allies was key to French military strategy. Heavily fortified sites often had a more substantial powder magazine to store large amounts of powder and provided maximum security to prevent an explosion during an attack. Such forts boasted magazines built of expensive stone, while smaller forts made do with ones of cheaper wood and sod.

Thick walls supported the heavy roof. Ventilation in these buildings prevented a build up of black powder gases. Wooden magazines lacked daub insulation (clay and straw mixture), allowing the building to breathe, while stone ones had a window. Even with these precautions, soldiers and traders still feared living in close proximity to powder magazines.

Commercial Storage Buildings

Large forts like de Chartres (Illinois), Pontchartrain (Detroit), and Michilimackinac (Michigan) had massive storehouses as large as 90 x 30 feet and two stories high.

These large storehouses contained a wide variety and large number of artifacts, which suggests that larger posts needed more space to store goods.

Smaller forts also had storehouses. For example, Fort Ouiatenon (Indiana) had a small semi-subterranean *poteaux en terre* (posts in the ground) styled storehouse.

Fort St. Joseph’s storehouse might have looked similar to Ouiatenon’s because of the posts’ similar size and location.

Although size and construction method varied by location, most storehouses lacked a fireplace, had shelves on the walls, and had basements. Traders also stored goods in their houses, basements, attics, or storage pits.