

# FORT LARAMIE

## NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



Fort Laramie parade grounds

### Fort Laramie in Brief

Fort Laramie—the Crossroads of a Nation Moving West. This unique historic place preserves and interprets one of America's most important locations in the history of westward expansion and Indian resistance.

In 1834, where the Cheyenne and Arapaho travelled, traded and hunted, a fur trading post was created. Soon to be known as Fort Laramie, it rested at a location that would quickly prove to be the path of least resistance across a continent. By the 1840s, wagon trains rested and resupplied here, bound for Oregon, California and Utah.

In 1849 as the Gold Rush of California drew more westward, Fort Laramie became a military post, and for the next 41 years, would shape major events as the struggle between two cultures for domination of the northern plains increased into conflict. In 1876, Fort Laramie served as an anchor for military operations, communication, supply and logistics during the "Great Sioux War."

Fort Laramie closed, along with the frontier it helped shape and influence in 1890. Its legacy is one of peace and war, of cooperation and conflict; a place where the west we know today was forged.

**Email:** FOLA\_Superintendent@nps.gov

**Fax:** 307-837-2120

**Write to:** HC 72, Box 389, Fort Laramie, WY 82212

**Headquarters Phone:** 307-837-2221

### Operating Hours, Seasons

The Fort grounds are open from 8:00 am until dusk every day of the year. The Fort museum and Visitor Center is open daily at 8:00 am with extended hours during the Summer, May 26 through September 30.

### Accessibility

Park entrance, grounds and visitor center accessible. Many historic structures are partially accessible.

### Getting Around

Walking tours of grounds, features and historic buildings. Mobility assistance available. Contact visitor center.

### Fees/Permits

**Entrance Fee:** \$3.00 for 7 Days; \$15.00 for Annual; Visitors 16 and under are free.

**Fort Laramie Visitor Center:** Open All Year 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend 8 a.m.–7 p.m. 837-2221

**Closures:** Visitors Center closed annually on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years Days, but park grounds remain open.

**Special Programs:** 18 minute fort history video shown daily.

**Exhibits:** Uniforms, weapons, and artifacts relate the varied and influential history of Fort Laramie

in the 19th century western frontier.

**Available Facilities:** Includes visitor orientation, auditorium, museum and exhibits, as well as the Fort Laramie Historical Association Bookstore.

### Fort Laramie History

Fort Laramie, the military post, was founded in 1849 when the army purchased the old Fort John for \$4000, and began to build a military outpost along the Oregon Trail.

For many years, the Plains Indians and the travelers along the Oregon Trail had coexisted peacefully. As the numbers of emigrants increased, however, tensions between the two cultures began to develop. To help insure the safety of the travelers, Congress approved the establishment of forts along the Oregon Trail and a special regiment of Mounted Riflemen to man them. Fort Laramie was the second of these forts to be established.

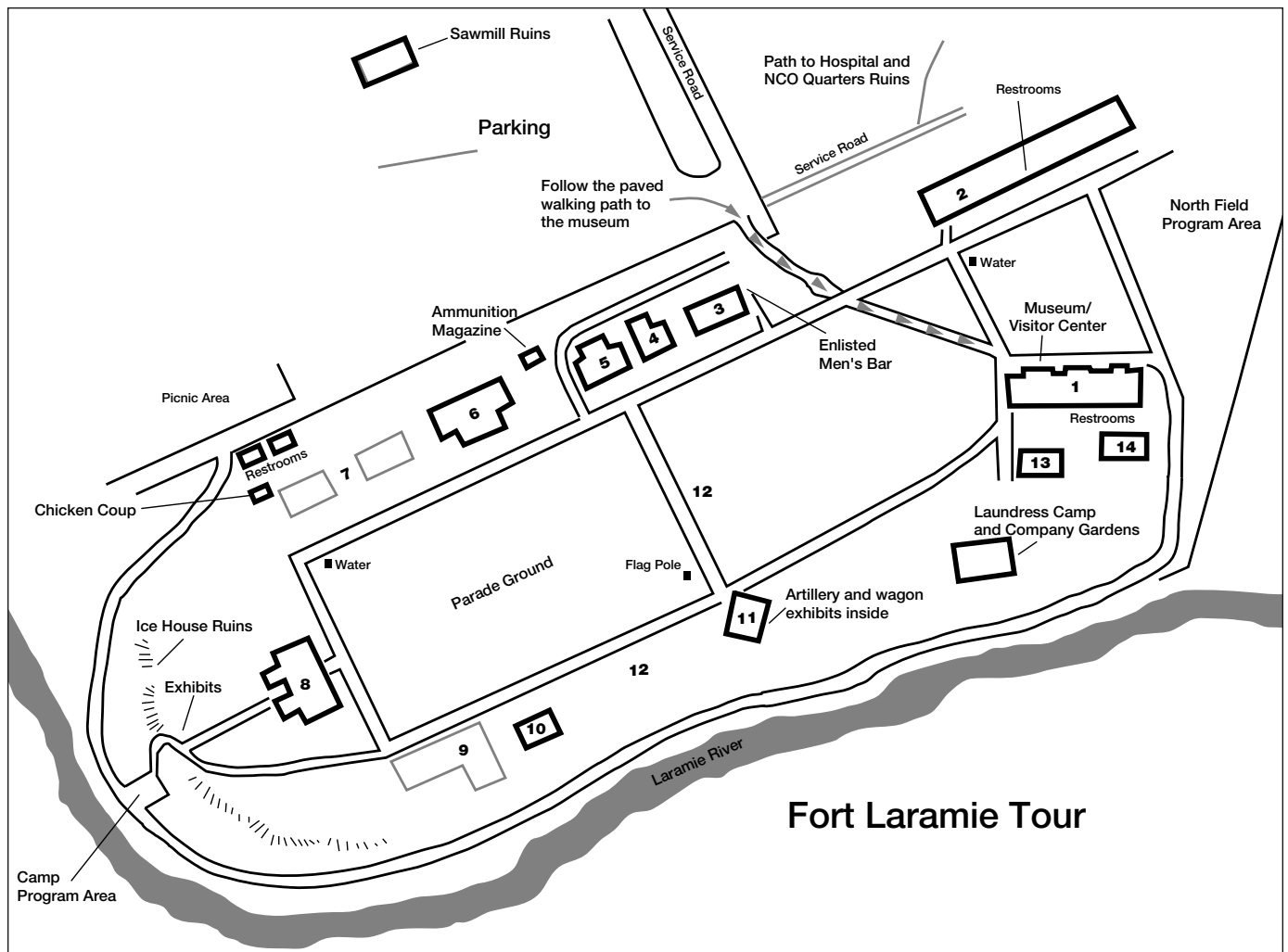
The popular view of a western fort, perhaps generated by Hollywood movies, is that of an enclosure surrounded by a wall or stockade. Fort Laramie, however, was never enclosed by a wall. Initial plans for the fort included a wooden fence or a thick structure of rubble, nine feet high, that enclosed an area 550 feet by 650 feet. Because of the high costs involved, however, the wall was never built. Fort Laramie was always an open fort that depended upon its location and its garrison of troops for security.

In the 1850s, one of the main functions of the troops stationed at the fort was patrolling and maintaining the security of a lengthy stretch of the Oregon Trail. This was a difficult task because of the small size of the garrison and the vast distances involved. In 1851, a treaty, the Treaty of 1851, was signed between the United States and the most important tribes of the Plains Indians. The peace that it inaugurated, however, lasted only three years. In 1854, an incident involving a passing wagon train precipitated the Grattan Fight in which an officer, an interpreter, and 29 soldiers from Fort Laramie were killed. This incident was one of several that ignited the flames of a conflict between the United States and the Plains Indians that would not be resolved until the end of the 1870s.

The 186's brought a different type of soldier to Fort Laramie. After the beginning of the Civil War, most regular army troops were withdrawn to the East to participate in that conflict, and the fort was garrisoned by state volunteer regiments, such as the Seventh Iowa and the Eleventh Ohio. The stream of emigrants along the Oregon trail began to diminish, but the completion of the transcontinental telegraph line in 1861 brought a new responsibility to the soldiers. Inspecting, defending, and repairing the "talking wire" was added to their duties. During the lat-

Fort Laramie

Fort Laramie	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
Average Max. Temperature (F)	40.4	46.4	47.8	61.1	67.9	78.6	88.7	88.2	79.5	67.5	53.6	42.7	63.5
Average Min. Temperature (F)	7.7	12.3	16.6	26.4	38.1	46.6	51.3	48.9	39.6	28.1	18.0	11.1	28.7
Average Total Precipitation (in.)	0.27	0.24	0.53	1.34	2.42	2.37	1.57	0.94	1.13	0.62	0.32	0.31	12.08
Average Total SnowFall (in.)	4.0	3.7	6.7	6.8	1.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.3	2.4	3.2	4.7	33.0
Average Snow Depth (in.)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0



## Fort Laramie Tour

ter part of the 1860s, troops from Fort Laramie were involved in supplying and reinforcing the forts along the Bozeman Trail, until the Treaty of 1868 was signed.

### Fort Laramie in 1876

Unfortunately, the Treaty of 1868 did not end the conflict between the United States and the Plains Indians and, by the 1870s, major campaigns were being mounted against the plains tribes. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills, in 1874, and the resultant rush to the gold fields had violated some of the terms of the treaty and antagonized the Sioux who regarded the Hills as sacred ground. Under leaders such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, they and their allies chose to fight to keep their land. In campaigns such as the ones in 1876, Fort Laramie served as a staging area for troops, a communications and logistical center, and a command post.

Conflicts with the Indians on the Northern Plains had abated by the 1880s. Relieved of some of its military function, Fort Laramie relaxed into a Victorian era of relative comfort. Boardwalks were built in front of officers' houses and trees were planted to soften the stark landscape.

By the end of the 1880s, the Army recognized that Fort Laramie had served its purpose. Many important events on the Northern Plains had involved the Fort, and many arteries of transport and communication had passed through it. Perhaps the most important artery, however, the Union Pacific Railroad, had bypassed it to the

South. In March of 1890, troops marched out of Fort Laramie for the last time. The land and buildings that comprised the Fort were sold at auction to civilians.

### Fort John

Fort John, constructed in 1841, replaced Fort William, the original wooden stockade fort. Part of the impetus for its construction was competition from Fort Platte, built by a rival fur company less than two miles away. Constructed of adobe brick, Fort John stood on a bluff overlooking the Laramie River. It was named for John Sarpy, a partner in the American Fur Company, but was more commonly called Fort Laramie by employees and travelers.

The business of the fort was the Buffalo Robe Trade with local Indian tribes. However, soon after the fort's completion, emigrants heading West began to use the fort as a stopping place for rest and resupply. By 1849, the press of increasing immigration resulted in the sale of the fort to the Army. With the arrival of Company E of the First Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, the army's 41 year history at Fort Laramie began.

### Virtual Tour

The map is a view of the grounds of Fort Laramie National Historic Site. The buildings whose outlines are in heavy black have been restored and refurbished to a particular period in the history of the Fort. These buildings are open to Fort visitors during the day.

Buildings number 1 and number 11 are restored, but not refurbished to a historical period. They are the Old Commissary that houses the Visitor Center and the 1876 Guardhouse that contains artillery pieces and military transport vehicles.

Buildings whose outlines are gray are ruins with standing walls but no restoration. Several officer's residences, the Post Hospital, and the 1885 Administration Building may be viewed as ruins. Foundations (number 12) mark the locations of barracks along the Parade Ground.



### 2. Cavalry Barracks

The building designated as the Cavalry Barracks is a two-company barracks built in 1874. The designation is somewhat misleading, however, because at various times it housed infantry as well as cavalry soldiers.

It is the only surviving enlisted men's barracks on the post. Two other barracks, along the North end and East side of the parade ground, housed three companies and two companies of

## CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF FORT LARAMIE HISTORY

1812 - Robert Stuart and the returning Astorians are the first recorded white men to pass by what will become Fort Laramie. While camped at the mouth of the Laramie River they leave the first recorded description of the area. Without knowing it they discover what will become the Oregon Trail.

1821 - Jacque LaRamee is killed on the Laramie River somewhere near the present site of Fort Laramie. Several geographical landmarks later take his name.

1830 - Smith, Jackson, and Sublette haul supplies to the annual rendezvous by wagon, thus becoming the first to pass the future site of Fort Laramie and the first on what will become the Oregon Trail.

1834 - William Sublette and Robert Campbell establish a log-stockaded fort at the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers to trade with the Indians, and name it Fort William (the first Fort Laramie).

1835 - Fort William is sold to Jim Bridger, William Fitzpatrick, and Milton Sublette.

1836 - Fort William is sold to the American Fur Company.

1836 - Elizabeth Spaulding and Narcissa Whitman visit Fort Laramie, and become the first white women to pass over the Oregon Trail, and the first known white women in the future state of Wyoming.

1841 - A rival fort, adobe-walled Fort Platte is built on the Platte River within a mile of Fort William. In response to the construction of Fort Platte, the American Fur Company replaces deteriorating log Fort William with a new fort, Fort John, also made of adobe (the second Fort Laramie).

1841 - The Bidwell-Bartelson party passes Fort Laramie enroute to California, the first true wagon train bound for California.

1842 - Lieutenant John C. Fremont passes on his first exploratory trip to the Rockies.

1843 - The Cow Column passes Fort Laramie. This train represented the first of the wagon trains to Oregon.

1845 - Colonel Stephen W. Kearny councils with the Indians at Fort Laramie to insure safe passage for the growing tide of emigrants traveling along the trail. This is the first peace council at Fort Laramie.

1845 - Fort Platte is abandoned

1846 - The Donner Party passes through Fort Laramie on their fateful trip to the west.

1847 - Brigham Young leads the first of the Mormon emigrants through Fort Laramie in search of their Zion, the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

1849 - Fort John (Fort Laramie) is purchased by the Army for \$4,000 on June 26th. The first garrison is comprised of two companies of Mounted Riflemen and one company of the 6th Infantry.

1850 - The high tide of emigration passes Fort Laramie, nearly 50,000 people.

1851 - Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (Horse Creek Treaty) is signed.

1853 - The Platte Ferry, just north of Fort Laramie, is seized by the Sioux. A skirmish results between Fort Laramie soldiers and the Sioux with the result of three Indians killed, three wounded, and two taken prisoner.

1854 - The Grattan Fight takes place on August 19th, after Brevet Second Lieutenant Grattan tries to arrest a Miniconjou brave for the killing of an emigrant's cow, eight miles east of Fort Laramie. All whites at the fight died. This is the first major battle of the Northern Plains Indian Wars.

1856 - Mormon emigrants pass Fort Laramie using "handcarts," the first of many handcart pioneers.

1857 - A large column of troops move through Fort Laramie enroute to Utah to suppress the rebellious Mormons.

1860 - April 6th, the Pony Express starts its express mail delivery through Fort Laramie.

1861 - The continental telegraph line is completed. The telegraph runs through Fort Laramie. The Pony Express ceases operations.

1864 - The only recorded attack on Fort Laramie. A scout detachment unsaddled their mounts on the Parade ground and approximately 30 warriors dashed through the fort, stealing the command's horses. No injuries or loss of life were reported.

1865 - Powder River Expedition is organized at Fort Laramie under General Patrick E. Connor to punish Indians in the region.

1866 - Peace Council is held at Fort Laramie to secure the right to use the Bozeman Trail. The peace council fails after Colonel Henry B. Carrington arrives with troops to establish Bozeman Trail forts. Start of Red Cloud's War.

1866 - Fetterman Fight takes place on December 21, and 81 soldiers die at the battle. John Phillips and Daniel Dixon start their ride to Deer Creek Station. Phillips continues on to Fort Laramie, arriving (so goes the legend) during a Christmas Night party at Old Bedlam.

1868 - Red Cloud wins his war with the government and a peace council is held at Fort Laramie, resulting in the signing of the Treaty of 1868, which sets aside the Great Sioux Reservation.

1874 - Gold is discovered in the Black Hills, causing a rush of miners to travel through Fort Laramie up the Cheyenne-Deadwood Trail.

1875 - A bridge is built over the North Platte River, the first iron bridge in Wyoming.

1876 - The campaign of 1876 begins, involving troops from Fort Laramie under the command of General George Crook. Fort Laramie troops fight in the Reynolds Fight of March 17th, and the Battle of the Rosebud on June 17th.

1883 - Last cavalry company leaves Fort Laramie, only infantry troops remain.

1889 - Order to abandon Fort Laramie is issued August 31.

1890 - Last garrison of the post marches away on March 2nd. A public auction is held on April 9th to sell the remaining property and buildings. On April 20th the fort is officially abandoned.

soldiers, respectively. Mess halls and mess kitchens would have been sited in separate buildings behind the barracks buildings. Only the foundations of these two barracks and their accompanying structures survive.

The Cavalry Barracks was a more modern structure than the other, older barracks buildings, built in 1866 and 1867. It was constructed as a two-story structure designed to house the soldiers living areas as well as their mess halls, mess kitchens, and other facilities.

The North end of the barracks building is currently being used, adaptively for Park support facilities and curative laboratories, but the South end has been restored and refurbished to the Summer of 1876 when it would have housed Company K of the Second Cavalry. The second floor contains the squad bay where the company would have lived and slept. Visitors can view the soldiers' beds, uniforms, weapons, and other military equipment. The company

kitchen, mess hall, wash room, armory, orderly room, and First Sergeant's room occupy the lower floor.



### 3. Post Trader's Store

The building identified as the Post Trader's Complex on the map of the grounds was the site of a commercial enterprise on the Post that was operated by the Sutler or Post Trader. (The title Sutler was used until shortly after the Civil War

when it was changed to Post Trader.) Between 1849 and 1890 several traders would operate the enterprise.

The Post Trader was a civilian who was given a license to operate a store on the Post. He was an important asset to the Fort because he supplied the soldiers with items that supplemented the bare necessities provided by the Army. In addition to military personnel, he also supplied emigrants traveling along the Oregon and Bozeman Trails and stocked items that appealed to officers' wives and other civilians in the area. In the 1850s and 1860s, Indians would also trade at his store. Although the prices of items in his store were regulated to some extent by the Army, the Post Trader still made a tidy profit.

### Interior of Post Trader's Store

There are three sections to the store: an adobe section built in 1850, a stone section added in 1852, and a segment added in 1883 that housed

## WHERE MYTH AND REALITY MERGE

As children, we are brought up on a steady diet of western folklore. Cowboys and Indians, soldiers, fur trappers and emigrants are all familiar characters to us. For the most part, they are nothing more than myth - fleeting characters on the big screen or the family television set. There was a place, however, where myth and reality merged; a place where the great events of the opening of the frontier were played out on a grand scale; a place where the list of characters who passed through read like a Who's Who of western history. This place was Fort Laramie, truly the crossroads of the American West.

an officer's club and an enlisted men's bar. The complex has been restored to its appearance in 1876 when the adobe portion housed the store and the stone section contained the trader's headquarters and the post office. The enlisted men's bar has been refurnished as a bar, and sells sarsaparilla and non-alcoholic beer to visitors. Lieutenant Colonel's Quarters



#### 4. Lt. Colonel's Quarters

The officer's house designated on the Fort map as the Lt. Colonel's Quarters is a two-story officers quarters that was constructed in 1884. It is somewhat unique in that, aside from the commanding officer's house, it is the only single-family dwelling on the post. Most officers and their families lived in duplexes.

Although occupied by several officers and their families at various times, it has been restored to 1887-1888 when it was the home of Lt. Colonel Andrew Sheridan Burt, his wife Elizabeth, and their children, Reynolds and Edith. Lt. Col. Burt was second in command at Fort Laramie during most of his tenure in this house.

When the building was restored and refurnished, the National Park Service had the good fortune to have the assistance of Reynolds Burt. Although only fourteen when he lived at Fort Laramie with his parents, Reynolds was able to remember the furnishings in the house and their arrangement. Some of the original items in the house have been donated by the Burt family and are placed in their original locations.

#### 5. Post Surgeon's Quarters

The Surgeon's Quarters is an officer's duplex that was constructed in 1875. During most of the period from its completion until the decommissioning of the Fort in 1990, the South half of this residence was the home of a succession of Post Surgeons.

The Post Surgeon assumed many roles at frontier posts such as Fort Laramie. He was the surgeon and physician to the enlisted men, officers, and laundresses at the Fort. He also administered to the medical needs of officer's wives and children and to the other civilians in the area. Only a small amount of his professional duties would involve battle wounds. Most of his practice would be devoted to caring for victims of accidents and treating diseases. The medical practices of the 19th century were primitive, however, and he often treated the symptoms rather than the causes of diseases.

In addition to his medical duties, the Surgeon also functioned as the local scientist. He logged the daily weather records, and recorded other scientific events of interest such as comets and meteor showers. He would also maintain a list of flora and fauna that he might encounter near the Post, and even collect and prepare scientific specimens to be sent back East to the Army Medical Museum and the Smithsonian Institution.

The Surgeon's Quarters have been refurnished to the years 1880-1882. They depict a Victorian residence of an officer of above-average means, his wife, and four children.



#### Old Hospital

The hospital in this photograph was built in 1873 on the site of an old cemetery used by the army until 1868. It contained a dispensary, a kitchen, a dining room, isolation rooms for quarantined or critical patients, and even a surgeon's office. There were only 12 beds, however, and no operating rooms or laboratories.

The hospital staff included a hospital steward, a matron, and one or more attendants (nurses). The steward was a regularly appointed non-commissioned officer who would most likely be permanently attached to the medical corps. He would be the wardmaster, record keeper and pharmacist. Only one steward was allotted to a hospital.

The matron (a woman) would assist the attendants and do laundry. One matron was allotted per hospital (two for posts with five or more companies in residence.)

The hospital attendants were ordinary soldiers, usually privates, who were detailed for hospital duty. One attendant was recommended for every two companies of soldiers stationed at the post. Attendants were exempt from most of the other normal duties of a soldier, but had to attend parades and weekly inspections. Hospital duty was not popular among the soldiers.

#### 6. Old Bedlam

The building identified as Old Bedlam on the map of the Fort grounds was built in 1849 and is the oldest military building at Fort Laramie. To many people it is and was the symbol of Fort Laramie. It was originally designed to be a bachelor officers quarters, but served many other purposes during the 41-year history of the Fort. For



several years it was Post Headquarters. Most of the people important in the drama of the westward expansion of the United States stood in its rooms or walked its halls.

The North side of Old Bedlam has been restored to the early 1854-1855 when it was a bachelor officer's quarters. The furnishings reflect the spartan atmosphere of the Fort at that time. The officers would have employed an enlisted man, called a striker, to cook their meals, order their quarters, and assist them with daily tasks. The striker's room has also been restored.

The South side of the building has been refurnished to the years 1863-1864 when it was Post Headquarters and the residence of the Post Commander, Colonel William O. Collins of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. At that time, the Civil War was raging back East and Regular Army troops had been withdrawn from the frontier forts to serve in that conflict. State volunteer regiments supplied troops for Fort Laramie. The lower floor of this side of Old Bedlam housed Post Headquarters and the officer's mess. The top floor was the residence of Colonel Collins and his wife.



#### 8. Captain's Quarters

The building designated Captain's Quarters was built in 1868-1870 and was originally designed to be the Post Commander's house. The Commander, however, preferred another house, and upon hearing this, the Fort Laramie Quartermaster converted the structure into a duplex.

The building was constructed at a time when the garrison at Fort Laramie was increasing and housing for officers was in short supply. If a new officer was assigned to the Fort, he could rank out of quarters any officer junior to him, appropriating the house for his own. Some very junior officers and their families were ranked into halls or even tents for short periods of time.

The building has been refurnished to its appearance in the year 1872. The East side of the duplex has been restored to reflect the residence of a Captain and his family. The West side has been furnished to show how a Lieutenant of more modest means might live.

#### 10. The 1866 Guardhouse

The 1866 guardhouse was the second of three such structures built at Fort Laramie. It served



two important functions, the headquarters of the guards or sentries at the Fort, and the incarceration center for soldiers who ran afoul of Army discipline and the rules of conduct outlined in the Articles of War. The building was constructed of stone.

Each day a group of soldiers would be selected to serve as guards or sentries at the Fort. They would serve in this capacity for 24 hours and would be attired in dress uniforms with white Berlin gloves. A formal ceremony, on the Parade Ground, would be held each morning to mark the changing of the guard. The new guards would be inspected by the Officer of the Day and given the password for the day.

The guards were usually split into two shifts, with one shift assuming sentry duties at strategic positions around the Post, and the other one remaining in a state of readiness in the upper level of the guardhouse. At two-hour intervals, the two shifts would switch roles.

The lower level of the guardhouse was the Fort's jail. The prisoners were usually forced to work at hard labor jobs during the day, under guard and often with ball and chain. At night they were confined to the jail. A general confinement room could hold up to 40 prisoners, and two solitary confinement cells were provided for incorrigibles. There was no stove or fireplace in the confinement area, so a soldier had only his two army-issue blankets to keep him warm, even on the coldest nights.



### 13. 1876 Post Bakery

The building designated as the 1876 Bakery on the map was one of four bakeries in use at various times at Fort Laramie. Bakeries were important because bread was a staple of a soldier's diet while he was in garrison. A loaf of bread was baked for every soldier at the Fort every day.

The baker was usually an ordinary soldier from the garrison detailed to bakery duty for ten days. At the end of his ten-day stint, he would be moved on to other duties and someone else would be rotated into the baker role. It was probable that most of the bakers had no previous baking experience and even possible that some would be illiterate and unable to read the bread recipe. The baker's job would have been relatively easy when the number of soldiers at the Fort was small, but challenging during the brief periods when the garrison was above 700.

This bakery was in use from 1876 to 1883 when its two ovens became faulty and it had to be replaced by another structure. The building has been restored to this time period and has been refurbished with a replica of one of the original ovens and with period utensils that the baker would have used.

## Significant Characters Who Passed Through Fort Laramie

### Robert Stuart

The first known white person to visit the site that would eventually become Fort Laramie. Stuart and his traveling companions camped at the mouth of the Laramie River on December 22, 1812 on their return trip to St. Louis from Fort Astoria, Oregon. Stuart inadvertently discovered the route that would later become the Oregon Trail.

### Jacques Laramée

A French fur trapper, rumored to have been killed by Indians on the stream that would take his name. Laramée is a shadowy character of whom we know very little. However, he now has a river, fort, town, city, county, mountain range, a peak, and plains all named after him.

### Jedediah S. Smith

Famous mountain man and one of the first to exploit the fur resources of the Fort Laramie region. He led William H. Ashley's expedition into the central Rocky Mountains in 1823.

### Thomas Fitzpatrick

Also known as Broken Hand, co-lead the Ashley expedition with Jed Smith. Fitzpatrick became one of the best known of the mountain men. He purchased Fort William with his associates in the spring of 1835. Later he served as a guide for the first true emigrant wagon train, the Bidwell-Bartleson party, in 1841. In 1847, he was appointed as Indian Agent to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Sioux, and in 1851, was instrumental in the success of the "Horse Creek" Treaty. James Bridger—Probably the most famous of the mountain men and a frequent visitor to Fort Laramie. Bridger gained most of his fame as a fur trapper but was also much sought after as a competent guide by emigrants and military alike. In his later years, Bridger spent many hours at Fort Laramie, "spinning yarns" for anybody who would listen. He is rumored to have had a room in the Post Trader's Store, where he wintered in 1867 while recovering his health.

### Kit Carson

Although Carson's fame was gained mostly on the Southern Plains, he nevertheless passed through Fort Laramie on many different occasions. Like most of the other famous guides of the period, Carson got his start in the fur trade. One of the little known phases of Carson's career was as a sheepman. He passed through Fort Laramie in 1853 with 6,500 head in route to California where he could turn a 100% profit.

### Robert Campbell & William Sublette

Formed a partnership in 1832 to compete in the fur trade. After being driven from the Upper Missouri, the partners became active in the central Rocky Mountain fur trade. Sensing a change in the fur trade industry, Campbell and Sublette decided to erect a fixed trading post to take advantage of the buffalo trade with the local natives. Campbell and Sublette selected the junc-

tion of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers for their new post—Fort William, the first Fort Laramie. Campbell later went on to become active in Indian affairs. He attended the Treaty Council of 1851 and was appointed to the Board of Indian Affairs in 1869. Sublette added to his fame as a guide when he led Sir William Drummond Stewart's party in 1843.

### Alfred Jacob Miller

Accompanied Sir William Drummond Stewart on his 1837 expedition. Miller was an accomplished artist. Among Miller's portraits of the western landscape through which he passed, are drawings and paintings of Fort William. Thus, he became the first artist to record the Fort Laramie landscape. His work now resides in some of the most renowned art galleries in the country.

### Donner Party

This famous company of emigrants passed through Fort Laramie in 1846. They were destined to be remembered because of the fateful decision to take the Hastings Cutoff south of the Great Salt Lake. This decision caused travel delays that allowed the train to get caught in the mountain snows of the High Sierra. Of the original 81 in the party, only 45 survived the tribulations of the winter. Thirty-six members of the company either froze or starved to death. Francis Parkman - At age 23, he made his famous journey on the Oregon Trail, "a tour of curiosity and amusement." As a product of this trip, he published *The Oregon Trail*, in 1849, an American classic. During this trip, he stopped at Fort Laramie and left a vivid description of life at the post. Parkman later went on to write an eight volume history of France and England in North America, as well as the *History of the Conspiracy of the Pontiac*.

### John C. Fremont

United States Army officer, passed through Fort John—the second Fort Laramie—in July of 1842 on his first expedition to the Rocky Mountains. Fremont recommended the site of Fort Laramie in his report of the expedition as a logical choice for a military post. Fremont visited Fort Laramie again in 1847, while being escorted east for his court martial by General Stephen Watts Kearny.

### Colonel Stephen W. Kearny

In the spring of 1845, Kearny was detailed to take five companies of dragoons as far as South Pass to impress the Indians and to study problems associated with overland travel. On June 16th he met 1200 Sioux at Fort Laramie and told them not to disturb the emigrants or molest their persons or property. He then "fired several shots with his howitzer, followed at darkness by a burst of rockets to tell the Great Spirit that they had listened to his words."

### Brigham Young

Leader of the Mormon pioneer movement. He led the first group of Mormons to their Zion, the valley of the Great Salt Lake, in 1847. Young and this first group of pioneers camped near Fort Laramie on June 1, 1847. Brigham Young conceived and implemented the handcart system in 1856.

### Whitmans and Spauldings

Dr. Marcus Whitman, his wife Narcissa, Reverend Henry Spaulding and his wife Elizabeth, were members of a missionary party that traveled West with a group of traders in 1836. On this trek they became the first party to take a wagon overland

to Oregon. Narcissa and Elizabeth were the first white women to visit Fort Laramie. It was Dr. Whitman who, on his first trip to the west in 1835, surgically removed a three-inch arrowhead from the back of Jim Bridger at the rendezvous that year. The Whitmans and Spauldings went on to establish a Presbyterian mission in Oregon. In November, 1847, the Whitman mission was attacked by Cayuse Indians. Marcus and Narcissa were killed in the raid.

#### **Bidwell-Bartelson Party**

Passed through Fort Laramie on June 22, 1841, en route to California. This group of emigrants would constitute the vanguard of the migration to the West Coast.

#### **Father Pierre Jean DeSmet S.J.**

Probably the most notable of all the missionaries who ventured into the Great American West. Father DeSmet first visited Fort Laramie (Fort William) on June 4, 1840—the last year that fort existed. On July 25, 1840, Father DeSmet celebrated the first Catholic mass in Wyoming. DeSmet returned to Fort Laramie in 1851, to attend the treaty council, and was instrumental in successfully completing the negotiations. While at the council, he baptized no less than 988 participants.

#### **Lieutenant Daniel P. Woodbury**

Officer of the Corps of Engineers, detailed to locate a fort somewhere in the vicinity of Laramie's Fork on the North Platte River. After surveying a number of sites in the vicinity, Woodbury chose the site occupied by Fort John—the second Fort Laramie. On June 26, 1849, Woodbury purchased the old fur trading post for \$4,000, and thus it officially passed into the hands of the U.S. Army and became Fort Laramie.

### FORT LARAMIE FIRSTS

First Permanent settlement in state of Wyoming - Fort William, 1834.

First Drunk Driving Fatality in Wyoming - 1841; the Sioux chief Susu-ceicha fell off his horse and broke his neck after riding back and forth between Fort John and Fort Platte, "receiving strongly drugged liquor."

First Military Post in State of Wyoming - 1849; with the purchase of fur-trade post Fort John by the Army, becoming Fort Laramie, a military installation.

First School in the State of Wyoming - as early as 1856; formal classes taught at Fort Laramie - the first recorded teacher was Post Chaplain Reverend Vaux.

First Post Office in the State of Wyoming - established on March 14, 1850; the oldest continuously operating post office in Wyoming.

First Major Indian Battle of the Northern Plains Indian Wars - Grattan fight, 1854.

First Iron Bridge in state of Wyoming - Army Iron Bridge constructed in 1875 on the North Platte River.

#### **Brevet 2nd Lieutenant John L. Grattan**

Impetuous young officer of the Sixth U.S. Infantry. On August 19, 1854, Grattan was put in command of a detachment of 29 enlisted men and an interpreter and was sent to arrest a Miniconjou Indian for supposedly stealing and killing an emigrant's cow in a Brule Indian camp eight miles east of Fort Laramie. It is unknown exactly what transpired at the Indian village, which may have contained as many as 4,000 people. Fighting broke out, claiming the life of Chief Conquering Bear, Grattan, the 29 enlisted men, and the interpreter. Most historians acknowledge this to be the first major battle of the Northern Plains Indian Wars.

#### **General William S. Harney**

On September 3, 1855, Harney led his troops to Ash Hollow, Nebraska, where Little Thunder and his band of Brules were encamped on Blue Water Creek. Harney attacked the village in retaliation for the Grattan fight a year earlier. Harney killed 86 Indians and took another 70 women and children captive. Harney then proceeded to Fort Laramie for a council with a delegation of Sioux chiefs. Harney threatened the Indians with continuing military action if any further depredations occurred along the trail. Harney again played a significant role in Plains Indian affairs in 1868 as part of the Indian Peace Commission held at Fort Laramie.

#### **Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder**

One of the least known but most significant figures in the history of Fort Laramie. Schnyder arrived at Fort Laramie with Company G, 6th U.S. Infantry, on August 12, 1849. He was appointed as assistant post librarian on September 17, 1851. Schnyder was promoted to the rank of Post Ordnance Sergeant on December 1, 1851. On September 17, 1859, he was appointed Garrison Postmaster, concurrent with his other duties. Despite requesting transfers on numerous occasions, Schnyder did not leave Fort Laramie until the fall of 1886. Schnyder retired in 1890. Ordnance Sergeant Schnyder holds the record for the longest term of service at Fort Laramie, 37 years, and is among the record holders for the longest term of service in the U.S. Army for an enlisted man—a total of 53 years. Spotted Tail (Sinte Galeska)—Chief of the Brule Sioux. Spotted Tail was born in 1823, and frequented the Fort Laramie region both as a child and as an adult. Spotted Tail was considered one of the greatest Sioux chiefs of his period. He was a brilliant orator, as well as a distinguished warrior. Lt. Eugene Ware states that Spotted Tail had counted 26 coups in personal combat. Spotted Tail was considered a peace chief. After witnessing the destruction of his village by General Harney in 1855, he recognized the futility of war with the whites. However, he was consistently an outspoken advocate for the rights of his people. Perhaps the most notable of Spotted Tail's many visits to Fort Laramie occurred in 1866, when he came to bury his daughter.

#### **Wheat Flour (Ah-ho-ap-pa)**

Ah-ho-ap-pa was the daughter of the Brule Chief Spotted Tail. Legend has it that she was enamored by the white way of life. She reputedly fell in love with an army officer at Fort Laramie, but was separated from him when he was transferred to another post. Apparently one of Ah-ho-ap-pa's favorite pastimes was watching the soldiers at formal dress parades. Although much of her life is a mystery, we do know that in keeping with his

daughter's wishes, Spotted Tail brought her to Fort Laramie for burial. Colonel Henry Maynadier provided a military escort for the burial party and arranged to have a scaffold erected on the high ground overlooking the fort to the north. Maynadier issued orders to provide full military honors to the girl. After the tumultuous events of 1876, Spotted Tail retrieved his daughter's bones and took them to the reservation for reburial.

#### **Red Cloud (Mahpialuta)**

Chief of the Oglala Sioux. Red Cloud was one of the most influential of the Sioux leaders. Red Cloud consolidated his leadership of the Oglala and was considered their principle leader by 1865. He was a frequent visitor to the Fort Laramie area. From 1866-1868 he led the Sioux in opposing white encroachment into the Powder River country. "Red Cloud's War," as it became known, proved to be very costly to the U.S. Army and white emigrants on the Bozeman Trail. Red Cloud won the war by forcing the government to abandon the Bozeman Trail forts and negotiate a treaty—the only such victory the Sioux could claim throughout the Indian Wars period. Thinking the whites would now keep their word, Red Cloud signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. He continued to be a champion of Indian rights and to oppose any further encroachment of Indian lands.

#### **Crazy Horse (Tashunka Witko)**

Probably the greatest of the Sioux leaders and still considered to be a sacred personage among the Sioux. Although legend states that Crazy Horse never visited the "white man's" fort on the Laramie, he certainly passed through the area very near Fort Laramie. As a boy, in 1851, Crazy Horse witnessed the Grattan Fight eight miles east of Fort Laramie. He became a powerful military leader among his people, playing a decisive role in the Indian victories at the Fetterman Fight in 1866, The Battle of the Rosebud in 1876, and the Custer Fight in 1876. Crazy Horse was killed during an altercation at Fort Robinson on September 5, 1877, while being arrested by soldiers.

#### **Colonel Henry Carrington**

Commanding officer of the 18th U.S. Infantry. Carrington passed through Fort Laramie on June 13, 1866, with his troops, en route to the Powder River country to establish forts along the Bozeman Trail. Unfortunately peace negotiations were in progress at Fort Laramie during this time for the purpose of securing the right of travel on the trail. After learning of the soldier's mission, the peace council failed, and Red Cloud began his war. Colonel Carrington was in command of Fort Phil Kearny at the time of the Fetterman Fight. The serious losses incurred during the fight cost Carrington his command and forever tarnished his reputation.

#### **Lieutenant Caspar Collins**

Son of the Post Commander, William O. Collins, and officer of the 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Collins left detailed accounts of life at Fort Laramie during the Civil War period. Unfortunately for young Collins, he became most well-known in death. On July 25, 1865, Collins led a group of 25 soldiers out of Platte River Bridge Station to relieve a detachment of ten soldiers guarding a supply train that was approaching the station. Indians closed in on the soldiers; Collins's horse bolted and ran into the group of Sioux. Collins and four other soldiers were killed. Platte River Bridge Station was

soon renamed Fort Caspar. The city of Casper, Wyoming now stands on the site.

#### **Colonel Thomas Moonlight**

Moonlight was probably the most incompetent of the long list of officers who commanded Fort Laramie. Of all the tragic blunders that Moonlight made, the hanging of Chiefs Two Face and Black Foot in 1865 was probably the most infamous. Two Face and Black Foot brought white captive Mrs. Eubank and her baby to Fort Laramie to turn them over to the Army. Mrs. Eubank had been taken captive during a raid by the Cheyenne on the Little Blue the proceeding year. Apparently the chiefs had bought Mrs. Eubank's freedom to gain the favor of the whites. Instead, they received death. Despite protests from several individuals, Colonel Moonlight had the chiefs hung with chains and left their bodies hanging for months as an example to other chiefs. Of course Moonlight's action brought further hostilities to the area. Moonlight went on to become Territorial Governor of Colorado in 1887.

#### **General William T. Sherman**

Civil war hero and commanding general of the Army after the election of U.S. Grant to the presidency. Sherman's Indian policy shaped the role that the Army would play during the height of the Indian Wars. Sherman was at Fort Laramie as part of the 1867-1868 peace commission.

#### **General Phillip Sheridan**

Lieutenant General of the army. Commander of the Division of the Missouri, and also a well-known Civil War hero. Sheridan spent time at Fort Laramie during the uneasy summer of 1876, at times making it his base of operations. Sheridan eventually went on to become commanding general of the Army.

#### **General George Crook**

Commanding general of the Department of the Platte and one of the most effective of the Indian Wars generals. General Crook was at Fort Laramie on many occasions, particularly in 1876. Crook was well known for his use of mules in the field and for his "horse meat" or "mud march" in 1876. Crook's character as a hard campaigner who also understood the Plains Indians made him effective as a general. It was Crook who ordered the arrest and confinement of Crazy Horse in 1877. He later went on to direct a successful campaign against the Apaches in the southwest.

#### **John "Portugee" Phillips (Manuel Filipe Cardoso)**

Phillips made the legendary ride from Fort Phil Kearney to Fort Laramie (December 21 to 25, 1866) to deliver messages to the commanding officer of the post following the Fetterman Fight. Much has been written of the ride to Fort Laramie, most of it myth. Phillips was hired to make the journey to Deer Creek Station along with Daniel Dixon for \$300.00 each. Phillips was given an additional message at Fort Reno to carry to Colonel Palmer at Fort Laramie. The ride took four days. Most accounts make no mention of Indians chasing Phillips and Dixon. There is also no contemporary documentation supporting the story that Phillips's horse died after he arrived at Fort Laramie.

#### **Martha Jane Canary (Calamity Jane)**

Frequented the Fort Laramie area and was an employee of the famous Three Mile or "Hog" Ranch (a house of ill repute just outside Fort

Laramie Military Reservation). Calamity Jane's exploits are legendary. On one occasion, Calamity Jane dressed as a male and joined the Jenny expedition of 1875, to the Black Hills. She disguised herself as one of the cavalry troopers escorting the expedition. When discovered, Colonel Dodge ordered her out of the column, but she hid amongst the cargo in one of the wagons and later turned up in the Black Hills. There she reportedly made herself so useful as a forager that she was permitted to stay with the column. In 1876, she was discovered masquerading as one of General Crook's mule skinnners, placed under arrest, and sent packing back to Fort Laramie. Calamity probably would not have been discovered had it not been for the fact that "her language when addressing the animals was not up to the usual standards of vituperative eloquence."

#### **Wild Bill Hickok (James Butler Hickok)**

Passed through Fort Laramie enroute to the Black Hills on the Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage line. Wild Bill was famous as a gunfighter, lawman and gambler. Hickok was later murdered in a saloon in Deadwood by Jack McCall.

#### **Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)**

Unfortunately for history, Mark Twain passed through Fort Laramie in the summer of 1861, during the night on the stagecoach. Undoubtedly, had he passed through in the daylight hours he would have left a vivid written picture of life at the Fort.

#### **Wyatt Earp**

Earp was a noted gunfighter and lawman (sometimes concurrently.) Earp took part in the famous "Gunfight at the OK Corral." He passed through Fort Laramie in 1877, as a special shotgun messenger for a gold shipment on the Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage.

#### **Buffalo Bill Cody (William F. Cody)**

Cody passed through Fort Laramie in 1876, while en route north with the Fifth Cavalry. Cody was a well known frontiersman, Pony Express rider, buffalo hunter, scout, and showman. Shortly after passing through Fort Laramie, Cody had his famous duel with Yellow Hair at the War Bonnet Creek Fight on July 17th, 1876. Cody took Yellow Hair's scalp—an event widely touted as "the first scalp for Custer."

### **Plains Indians**

During most of its early history, Fort Laramie was a social and economic center for several tribes of Plains Indians. The Native Americans came to trade, to visit, and later to sign treaties and receive annuities.

Early relations between the traders at the Fort and the Indians were amicable, but as the tide of emigrants swelled along the Oregon Trail, resentments and friction began to emerge. In an effort to end hostilities, a council attended by representatives of the United States and more than 10,000 Indians was called near Fort Laramie in 1851. The council gave birth to the Treaty of 1851 that was signed by the United States and tribal representatives. In return for \$50,000 per year of annuities, the Indians agreed to stop harassing the wagon trains.

The Treaty was not effective, however, and subsequent incidents resulted in deaths of Native Americans, emigrants, and soldiers alike. The Bozeman Trail, which headed North to the gold fields of Montana, was soon swarming with emigrants who passed through the prime bison hunt-

ing lands of the Sioux and the Cheyenne tribes. The Army constructed three Forts along the Trail to provide for the safety of the travelers. The Native Americans resented the intrusions, and the high plains were soon aflame with conflict. A new treaty, the Treaty of 1868 was signed in which the Army agreed to withdraw from the Bozeman Trail and evacuate the forts along it. In addition, the treaty provided a reservation for the Indians along with rights to their traditional hunting grounds.

The Treaty of 1868 did not bring a lasting peace to the high plains. In 1874, gold was discovered in the Black Hills and miners soon flocked to the area. Attempts by the U.S. Army to keep prospectors out of the area were unsuccessful. The influx angered the Sioux, because the Black Hills region was a sacred area and it was also part of the reservation lands guaranteed to the Indians by the Treaty of 1868. Under leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, they fought the Army in engagements such as the ones at the Rosebud and the Little Bighorn. Hostilities reached their peak in the Summer of 1876 and did not end until the Native Americans were forced onto their reservations.

### **The Tribes**

There were three tribes of Native Americans that called the high plains around Fort Laramie home: the Sioux, the Cheyenne, and the Arapaho.



*Red Cloud-Oglala Chief.  
National Park Service Photo.*

### **The Sioux**

The dominant tribe on the high plains near Ft. Laramie were the Sioux. The name Sioux refers to a large group of Native Americans speaking a common or similar language. They are often divided into three groups based on their geographic distribution. In the 1800's the Western group, called the Lakota or Teton Sioux, were the dominant tribe in the region around Fort Laramie. They were represented by several bands, the Oglala Sioux, the Brule Sioux, the Hunkpapa Sioux, and the Minneconjou Sioux. The Lakota Sioux were a nomadic people who hunted the buffalo that roamed the high plains in huge herds. The buffalo provided them with food, clothing, the covering for their dwellings, and the raw material for many of their tools. The Sioux could be peaceful or, when the occasion demanded, they could be formidable warriors. The spiritual power, Wakan, and the Summer Sun Dance ceremony played important parts in their lives.

### **The Cheyenne**

The Cheyenne were another well-known tribe that played a part in the pageant of Ft. Laramie. Originally from what is now northern Minnesota,

they had migrated to the high plains by the early 1800's and ranged from the Missouri River in the North to the Arkansas River in the South. They were divided into two branches, the Northern Cheyenne and the Southern Cheyenne. The Northern group spent much of their time on the high plains of Colorado and Wyoming, not far from Fort Laramie.

Like the Sioux, with whom they were often allied, the Cheyenne were horsemen and buffalo-hunters who obtained most of their physical needs from the shaggy bison. Also, like the Sioux, they celebrated the Summer Sun Dance, in which men would dance for several days in a ritual of spiritual cleansing and empowerment.

### The Arapaho

The Arapaho, although a distinct tribe, were very similar to their close allies, the Cheyenne. Like the Cheyenne, they spoke an Algonquin language and were originally from what is now northern Minnesota. They migrated westward and divided into Northern and Southern branches. The Northern branch lived on the high plains and were more relevant to the historical events played out at Fort Laramie. The Arapaho were mounted bison-hunters who depended on the buffalo for much of their livelihood. They also celebrated the Sun Dance.

*The following history of the fort is a reprint of "Fort Laramie" by David L. Heib, a National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 20, Washington, D.C., 1954.*

### Early Fur Trade on the Platte

On the level land near the junction of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers stands Fort Laramie, long a landmark and symbol of the Old West. Situated at a strategic point on a natural route of travel, the site early attracted the attention of trail-blazing fur trappers, who established the first fort. In later years it offered protection and refreshment to the throngs who made the great western migrations over the Oregon Trail. It was a station for the Pony Express and the Overland Stage. It served as an important base in the conquest of the Plains Indians, and it witnessed the development of the open range cattle industry, the coming of the homesteaders, and the final settlement which marked the closing of the frontier. Perhaps no other single site is so intimately connected with the history of the Old West in all its phases.

### Early Fur Trade on the Platte, 1812-30

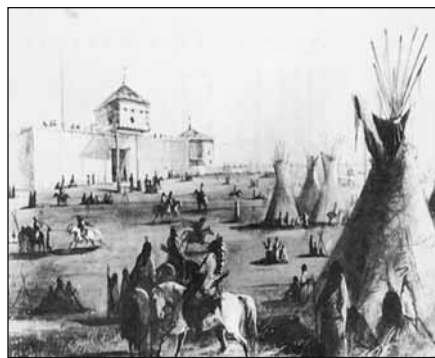
American and French Canadian fur traders and trappers, exploring the land, traveled the North Platte Route intermittently for over two decades before the original fort was established at the mouth of the Laramie River. First to mention the well-wooded stream flowing into the North Platte River from the southwest was Robert Stuart, leader of the seven "Returning Astorians" on their path-breaking journey from Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River to St. Louis, by way of South Pass in the Rockies and the valley of the Platte, during the winter of 1812-13. They journeyed eastward over what was to become the greatest roadway to the West, thus entitling them to recognition as the discoverers of the Oregon Trail.

Records of actual fur trade activity in this area for the next 10 years are extremely meager, but many geographical names bear witness to the gradual westward movement of the beaver hunters, some of them undoubtedly of Canadian origin. Among them was Jacques La

Ramee who, according to tradition, was killed by Indians in 1821 on the stream which now bears his name and which was destined to become the setting of Fort Laramie. Famous only in death, his name was to be given also to a plains region, a peak, a mountain range, a town, a city, and a county in Wyoming.

In 1823, Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, and other enterprising trappers of the Rocky Mountain Fur Co., going overland from the upper Missouri, rediscovered South Pass and the lush beaver country west of the Continental Divide. In 1824, while taking furs back to "the States," a band of "mountain men" under Thomas Fitzpatrick became the first Americans of record to pass the mouth of the Laramie after the Astorians. For 15 years thereafter the St. Louis traders sent supply trains up the North Platte route to the annual trappers' rendezvous, usually held in the valleys of the Green or Wind Rivers. In 1830, William Sublette, with supplies for the rendezvous on the Wind River, took the first wagons over the greater part of what was to become the Oregon Trail.

The Laramie and its tributaries were also the homes of the prized beaver, and much trading was done at the pleasant campsites near its mouth. Here, too, was the junction with the trappers' trail to Taos.



*Fort William, the first Fort Laramie, in 1837. From a painting by A. J. Miller. Courtesy Mrs. Clyde Porter.*

### Fort William, the First "Fort Laramie," 1834

The advantages of the site were readily apparent to William Sublette and Robert Campbell, when, in 1834, they paused en route to the annual trappers' rendezvous to launch construction of log-stockaded Fort William. This fort, named for Sublette, was the first fort on the Laramie. In 1835, Sublette and Campbell sold Fort William to Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and Milton Sublette, and a year later these men in turn sold their interests to the monopolistic American Fur Co. (after 1838, known officially as Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company).

Rev. Samuel Parker and Dr. Marcus Whitman, early missionaries to Oregon, traveling with a company of fur traders, paused at "the fort of the Black Hills" in July 1835. Reverend Parker has left a vivid description of activities at the fort, including near-fatal fights between drunken trappers, a council with the chiefs of 2,000 Oglala Sioux gathered at the fort to trade, and a buffalo dance, regarding which Parker commented, "I cannot say I was much amused to see how well they could imitate brute beasts, while ignorant of God and salvation . . ."

Marcus Whitman again traveled westward in 1836 with a fur traders' caravan, this time accompanied by his bride and Rev. and Mrs. Henry H. Spalding. The ladies, the first to travel the Oregon Trail, were extended all possible hospitality at Fort William. Especially remembered were chairs with buffalo skin bottoms, no doubt a most welcome change from the ordeal of saddle or wagon box.

To an artist, A. J. Miller, who traveled with Sir William Drummond Stewart, we are indebted for the only known pictures of Fort William. Made during his visit to the fort in 1837, these paintings depict a typical log stockade which Miller's notes describe further as being

"of a quadrangular form, with block houses at diagonal corners to sweep the fronts in case of attack. Over the front entrance is a large blockhouse in which is placed a cannon. The interior of the fort is about 150 feet square, surrounded by small cabins whose roofs reach within 3 feet of the top of the palisades against which they abut. The Indians encamp in great numbers here 3 or 4 times a year, bringing peltries to be exchanged for dry goods, tobacco, beads and alcohol. The Indians have a mortal horror of the "big gun" which rests in the blockhouse, as they have had experience of its prowess and witnessed the havoc produced by its loud "talk". They conceive it to be only asleep and have a wholesome dread of its being waked up."

The fur traders came to be more and more dependent upon the fort on the Laramie as a base of supplies and a refuge in time of trouble. Similarly, early travelers and missionaries found it a most welcome haven in the wilderness. In 1840, the famous Father de Smet paused at this "Fort La Ramee" where he was favorably impressed by a village of Cheyennes.

### Fort Platte and Fort John on the Laramie

Late in 1840 or early in 1841, a rival trading post appeared. This was Fort Platte, built of adobe on the nearby banks of the North Platte River by L. P. Lupton, a veteran of the fur trade in what is now Colorado, but later operated by at least two other independent trading companies.

Abandonment of the rendezvous system after 1840 increased the importance of fixed trading posts. The deterioration of Fort William prompted the American Fur Co. to replace it in 1841 with a more pretentious adobe-walled post which cost some \$10,000. Christened Fort John, presumably after John Sarpy, a stockholder, the new fort, like its predecessor, was popularly known as "Fort Laramie."

Competition in the declining fur trade led to open traffic in "fire water," and the debauchery of the Indians around Forts Platte and Laramie was noted by many travelers of the early 1840's. Rufus B. Sage vividly describes the carousals of one band of Indians which ended with the death and burial of a Brule chief. In a state of drunkenness, this unfortunate merrymaker fell from his horse and broke his neck while racing from Fort Laramie to Fort Platte.

Trade goods for the rival posts came out in wagons over the Platte Valley road from St. Joseph or over the trail from Fort Pierre on the upper Missouri. On the return trip, packs of buffalo robes and furs were sent down to St. Louis. In addition to wagon transportation, cargoes were sent by boat down the fickle Platte, which often dried up and left the boatmen stranded on sandbars in the middle of Nebraska.



## The First Emigrants

Up to 1840, traders, adventurers, and missionaries dominated the scene. The first party of true covered-wagon emigrants, whose experiences were recorded by John Bidwell and Joseph Williams, paused at Fort Laramie in 1841. The following year Lt. John C. Fremont visited the fort on his first exploring trip to the Rocky Mountains. Recognizing its strategic location and foreseeing the covered-wagon migrations, Fremont added his voice to those recommending the establishment of a military post at the site.

In 1843, the "cow column," first of the great migrations to Oregon, reached the fort under the guidance of Marcus Whitman. This group numbered nearly 1,000 persons. Thereafter, the emigrants with their covered wagons became a familiar sight each May and June. Impressions of the swift-flowing Laramie River, the white-walled fort, the populous Indian tepee villages, the "squawmen" at the fort, and the dances held on level ground beneath nearby cottonwoods were frequently recorded by diarists.

More than 3,000 Oregon-bound emigrants paused at the fort in 1845, intermingling peacefully with the numerous Sioux Indians encamped there. Later that summer, peace still prevailed when Col. Stephen Watts Kearny arrived with five companies of the First Dragoons, encamped on the grassy Laramie River bottoms, and held a formal council with the Indians between the two forts. Here the Indians were warned against drinking "Taos Lightning" or disturbing the emigrants and were assured of the love and solicitude of the Great White Father. They were also duly impressed with his power as symbolized in a display of howitzer fire and rockets.

While Fort Platte was abandoned by its owners in 1845, trade was brisk at Fort Laramie during the winter of 1845-46, and it is recorded that during the following spring a little fleet of Mackinaw boats, under the leadership of the veteran factor P. D. Papin, successfully navigated the Platte with 1,100 packs of buffalo robes, 110 packs of beaver, and 3 packs of bear and wolf skins. Thus, it was a moderately prosperous Fort Laramie in the waning days of the fur trade which the young historian Francis Parkman visited in the spring of 1846 and described so vividly in his book *The Oregon Trail*:

*"Fort Laramie is one of the posts established by the American Fur Company, which well-nigh monopolizes the Indian trade of this region. Prices are most extortionate: sugar, two dollars a cup; five-cent tobacco at a dollar and a half; bullets at seventy-five cents a pound. The company is exceedingly disliked in this country; it suppresses all opposition and, keeping up these enormous prices, pays its men in necessities on these terms. Here its officials rule with an absolute sway; the arm of the United States has little force, for when we were there the extreme outposts of her troops were about seven hundred miles to the eastward. The little fort is built of bricks dried in the sun, and externally is of an oblong form, with bastions of clay in the form of ordinary blockhouses at two of the corners. The walls are about fifteen feet high, and surmounted by a slender palisade. The roofs of the apartments within, which are built close against the walls, serve the purpose of banquette. Within, the fort is divided by a partition: on one side is the square area, surrounded by the storerooms, offices, and apartments of the inmates; on the other is the corral, a narrow place encompassed by the high clay walls, where at night or in the presence of dangerous Indians the horses and mules of the fort are crowded for safekeeping. The main entrance has two gates with an arched passage intervening. A little square*

*window, high above the ground, opens laterally from an adjoining chamber into this passage; so that, when the inner gate is closed and barred, a person without may still hold communication with those within through this narrow aperture. This obviates the necessity of admitting suspicious Indians for purposes of trading into the body of the fort, for when danger is apprehended the inner gate is shut fast, and all traffic is carried on by means of the window. This precaution, though necessary at some of the company's posts, is seldom resorted to at Fort Laramie, where, though men are frequently killed in the neighborhood, no apprehensions are felt of any general designs of hostility from the Indians."*

While here, Parkman also witnessed the arrival of the Donner party, who paused at the fort to celebrate the Fourth of July. Many of this party later met a tragic fate in the snow-locked passes of the Sierras.

## The Mormon Migrations, 1847-48

While many of the early visitors to Fort Laramie were missionaries, mass emigration motivated by religion was not in evidence until 1847. That spring the pioneer band of Mormons, led by Brigham Young, passed up the north bank of the Platte to its confluence with the Laramie, and crossed near the ruins of Fort Platte. They paused there for a few days to repair wagons and record for future emigrants the facilities available at Fort Laramie, of which James Bordeaux was then in charge. This party of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children seeking a new Zion in the Salt Lake Valley were but pathbreakers for more than 4,000 Mormons who almost monopolized the trail in 1848.

Like emigrants of all sects, the Mormons enjoyed a respite from travel on arrival at the great way station of Fort Laramie. A variety of activities engaged the emigrants during their brief stopover. Men engaged in blacksmithing and general repair, traded at the fort, or went fishing. The women busied themselves with washing and baking or gathered chokecherries or currants.

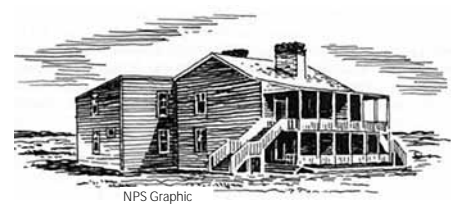
The Mormons at this time conceived a plan which was used for several years at Fort Laramie. Wagon supply trains from Utah, drawn by teams acclimated to mountain travel, met emigrating "Saints" from the East, and teams were exchanged. Thus, they avoided the serious losses of stock often resulting when tired low-country teams encountered the high altitudes of South Pass and the rough mountain trails into Utah.

Meanwhile, despite a moderately brisk business with the emigrants, trading at Fort Laramie continued to suffer from the general decline of the fur market and the competition of independent dealers in "Taos Lightning." Conditions were now ripe for the early retirement of the American Fur Co.

## Fort Laramie Becomes a Military Post

For some years the Government had considered establishing military posts along the Oregon Trail for the protection of emigrants, and this site at the mouth of the Laramie had often been recommended. In December 1845, such action was proposed by President Polk and in May 1846 the Congress approved "An Act to provide for raising a regiment of Mounted Riflemen, and for establishing military stations on the route to Oregon." Funds were provided to mount and equip the troops, to defray the expenses of each station, and to compensate the Indian tribes on whose lands these stations might be erected.

The Mexican War delayed the projected



building of forts on the Oregon Trail, but in 1847 a battalion of Missouri Mounted Volunteers was recruited. Early in 1848 this battalion established Fort Kearny, the first of the posts on the trail, on the south bank of the Platte near the head of Grand Island. In November, they were mustered out, being relieved by the Mounted Riflemen.

During the following winter the news of the discovery of gold in California was published throughout the land, and the resulting fevered preparations to trek westward the next spring increased the urgency of completing the chain of forts.

In March, United States Adj. Gen. Roger Jones directed Gen. D. E. Triggs at St. Louis to carry out establishment of the second post "at or near Fort Laramie, a trading station belonging to the American Fur Company." Lt. Daniel P. Woodbury, of the Corps of Engineers, was authorized to purchase the buildings of Fort Laramie "should he deem it necessary to do so." Companies A and E, Mounted Riflemen, and Company G, Sixth Infantry, were designated as the first garrison of the new post with Maj. W. F. Sanderson, Mounted Riflemen, in command.

Major Sanderson with 4 officers and 58 men of Company E, Mounted Riflemen, left Fort Leavenworth early in May and arrived at the Laramie on June 16 without incident. On June 27 he wrote to the adjutant general reporting that after making a thorough reconnaissance of the neighborhood he had found this to be the most eligible site and that at his request Lieutenant Woodbury had, on June 26, purchased Fort Laramie from Bruce Husband, agent of the American Fur Co., for \$4,000. He reported further that good pine timber, limestone, hay, and dry wood were readily available and that the Laramie River furnished abundant good water for the command.

Company C, Mounted Rifles, consisting of 2 officers and 60 men, arrived at the post on July 26, and on August 12 the 2 officers and 53 men of Company G, Sixth Infantry, completed the garrison and joined in the work of preparing additional quarters.

## The California Gold Rush

Meanwhile, these troops had been preceded, accompanied, and followed over the trail by some 30,000 goldseekers bound for California, a few thousand Mormons en route to Utah, and additional troops of Mounted Riflemen pushing west to establish a post at Fort Hall in Idaho.

Many of those who trekked westward from the Missouri did not even reach Fort Laramie. The dread Asiatic cholera took a terrible toll along the banks of the Platte. Fresh graves, averaging one and a half to the mile, marked the 700-mile trail from Westport Landing to the Laramie. Beyond Fort Laramie the ravages of disease abated, but already many trains were short of men and stock. These conditions and the rougher roads ahead frequently forced the abandonment of wagons, personal property, and stocks of provisions. However, not all of the westward surging

throng reached Fort Laramie with surplus supplies. Many were thankful to be able to replenish dwindling supplies at the commissary as well as to obtain fresh draft animals, repair failing wagons, and mail letters to "the States."

While purchase of the adobe trading post provided the Army with a measure of shelter for men and supplies, it was far from adequate. In late June 1849, Major Sanderson reported that the entire command was already employed in cutting and hauling timber and burning lime. Stone was also quarried and a horse-powered sawmill placed in operation. By winter, a two-storied block of officers' quarters (to become known as "Old Bedlam"), a block of soldiers' quarters, a bakery, and two stables had been pushed near enough completion to be occupied.

That winter was mild and uneventful at Fort Laramie, but by early May 1850 the high tide of westward migration began. Goldseekers and homeseekers bound for California, Oregon, or Utah thronged the trails on both sides of the Platte and converged on the fort, where, by August 14, a record had been made of 39,506 men, 2,421 women, 2,609 children, 9,927 wagons, and proportionate numbers of livestock. Also, 316 deaths en route were recorded, for cholera again raged along the trail in Nebraska. The graves along the trail east of Fort Laramie were only outnumbered by the bodies of dead draft animals and piles of abandoned property westward toward South Pass.

Meager blacksmithing and repair facilities were available to the emigrants at Fort Laramie. Supplies could be purchased at the commissary and at the sutler's store, whose adobe walls were first noted that year. The sutler, John S. Tutt, also had brisk competition from numerous old-time mountain men who set up shop along the trails nearby.

The post commander reported further progress in new construction during 1850. The stonewalled magazine was probably completed that year, "Old Bedlam" neared completion, and a two-storied barracks was begun. Lured by gold, however, troops as well as civilian artisans deserted the post to such an extent that Mexican labor was imported for building and experimental farming.

In 1851, the gold fever subsided somewhat, but Mormon emigrations increased and in all probability 20,000 emigrants trekked westward past the fort. Cholera was not epidemic and emigration was less eventful, but the fort was busy preparing to play host to other visitors.

### The Fort Laramie Treaty Council, 1851

Early in 1851, the Congress had authorized holding a great treaty council with the Plains Indians to assure peaceful relations along the trails to the West. D. D. Mitchell and Thomas Fitzpatrick, the commissioners, chose Fort Laramie as the meeting place and summoned the various Indian tribes to come in by September 1. For days before that date, Indians gathered at the fort. The Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes mingled freely, but tension mounted as their enemies, the Snakes and Crows, made their appearance. Peace prevailed, however, and the sole major difficulties were a grazing problem and the late arrival of a wagon train of gifts. The countless ponies accompanying 10,000 Indians required so much forage that the vast assemblage had to move to the meadows at the mouth of Horse Creek, 30 miles east of the fort. Chiefs representing many other tribes

arrived. Parades of Indian hordes in full array were held, speeches made, presents distributed, the pipe of peace smoked, and by September 17 it had been agreed that peace should reign among the red men and between them and the whites. The white men were to be free to travel the roads and hold their scattered forts, and the Indians were to receive an annuity of \$50,000 in goods each year. The council was considered a great success and gave promise of a lasting peace on the plains.



Fort Laramie in 1853. From a sketch by Frederick Piercy. Courtesy National Park Service.

### The Emigrant Tide and Indian Troubles, 1852-53

In 1852, the emigrant tide again swelled to nearly 40,000, over 10,000 of which were Mormons. The emigrants were encouraged to depend on supplies available at Fort Laramie and other posts along the trail. A toll bridge over the Laramie River, a mile below the fort, eliminated one obstacle on the trail, and disease took a much lighter toll of lives.

Beginning in 1850, many of the emigrants on the north bank, or Mormon Trail, stopped crossing to the south bank trail at Fort Laramie and followed a rough, but shorter, route westward along the north side of the river. Those who did not cross with their wagons, however, still found the old ferry across the North Platte a welcome means of visiting the fort for mail and supplies. In 1853, this ferry figured in the first serious Indian trouble near the fort.

The Sioux were becoming alarmed by the great numbers of whites using the Oregon Trail, with resulting destruction of game, and the ravages of new diseases among the tribes. On June 15, a group of Sioux seized the ferry boat, and one of them fired on Sergeant Raymond, who recaptured it. Lt. H. B. Fleming and 23 men were dispatched to the Indian village to arrest the offender. The Indians refused to give up the culprit and fired on the soldiers. In the resulting skirmish, 3 Indians were killed, 3 wounded, and 2 taken prisoner. The Miniconjou Sioux were incensed by this action, but after a full explanation by Capt. R. Garnett, commander of the fort, they accepted their annuities from the Indian agent and no further hostilities resulted that year.

In spite of this incident and considerable begging and thievery by Indians, the emigrants had been in little real danger of Indian attack. All this was changed by an unfortunate occurrence late in the summer of 1854.

### The Grattan and Harney Massacres, 1854-55

Until August 18, summer emigration in 1854 appears to have been unaffected by trouble with the Indians. On that day a Mormon caravan passed a village of Brule Sioux 8 miles east of Fort Laramie, and a cow ran into the village where it

was appropriated by a visiting Miniconjou brave. This matter was reported at the fort by both the Mormons and the chief of the Brules. Lt. John Grattan, Sixth Infantry, with 29 soldiers, 2 cannon, and an interpreter, was dispatched to the village to arrest the offending Indian. Unfortunately, the interpreter was drunk and the young officer was arrogant. The Indian offender refused to give himself up and a fight was precipitated in the Indian village, resulting in the annihilation of the military party.

The enraged Indians then pillaged Bordeaux's nearby trading post and helped themselves to both annuity goods and company property at the American Fur Co.'s post 3 miles up the river. Fortunately, no attack was made on the small remaining garrison of Fort Laramie to which neighboring traders and others rushed for protection. All Sioux immediately left the vicinity of the fort, and the Cheyennes and Arapahoes waited only for the distribution of treaty goods before moving away.

During the following year, Indians committed many small-scale depredations along the Oregon Trail. However, despite greatly exaggerated alarms, the emigrants of 1855 were for the most part unmolested. Meanwhile, the Army had become convinced that the Indians must be punished, and a force of 600 men under Gen. W. S. Harney marched westward from Fort Leavenworth. The Indian agent at Fort Laramie warned all friendly Indians to come to the south side of the Platte—a warning heeded by many bands. On September 2, General Harney arrived at Ash Hollow, 150 miles below Fort Laramie, and located Little Thunder's band of Brule Sioux some 6 miles north on the Blue Water. Early the next morning, after rejecting protestations of friendship by Little Thunder, his troops attacked the village from two sides, killing 86 Indians and capturing an almost equal number of women and children. At Fort Laramie, General Harney issued a stern warning to other Sioux bands, then proceeded overland through Sioux territory to establish a military post at Fort Pierre on the upper Missouri River.

### Handcart to Pony Express, 1856-61

In 1856, in an effort to reduce the cost of emigration to Utah, the Mormons introduced the handcart plan. Two-wheeled handcarts, similar to those once used by street sweepers, were constructed of Iowa hickory and oak. One cart was assigned to each four or five converts who walked and pushed or pulled their carts over the long trek from the railhead at Iowa City to the Salt Lake Valley. Livestock was driven with the parties and at times 1 ox-drawn wagon to each 100 emigrants was provided to carry additional baggage and supplies.

The first handcart parties were very successful, but the last two, in 1856, started too late in the summer and were snowed in near Devil's Gate. There, more than 200 of the 1,000 or more in the two parties perished from cold and hunger before the survivors could be rescued by wagon trains sent out from Utah. From 1856 to 1860 some 3,000 Mormons made the journey to Utah in 10 handcart companies, and to these footsore travelers Fort Laramie was indeed a haven in the wilderness.

Early in 1857, the War Department decided to abandon Fort Laramie, but events forced the cancellation of the order before it could be carried out, and the fort again demonstrated its

strategic importance. First, it served as a supply base for a punitive expedition led by Col. E. V. Sumner against the Cheyennes between the Platte and Arkansas Rivers. Then, as that campaign drew to an inconclusive end, the fort became a vital base for the Army which marched toward Utah that fall to subdue the reportedly rebellious Mormons.

By the next year, the Utah Campaign involved some 6,000 troops, half of whom were in or near Utah, with Fort Laramie their nearest sure source of supply.

In spite of this warlike activity, thousands of emigrants continued to roll westward by covered wagon, the great travel medium of the plains. To these the fort was a vital way station, as it was to the great firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, freighting contractors who carried supplies to the Army in Utah. In 1858, this enterprise alone involved 3,500 wagons, 40,000 oxen, 1,000 mules, and 4,000 men.

Beginning in 1850, mail service of varying frequency and reliability linked Fort Laramie with the States to the east and Salt Lake City to the west. Interrupted in the summer of 1857 by the Utah Campaign, a new and improved weekly mail service was organized in 1858 bringing news only 12 days old from the Missouri River to the fort.

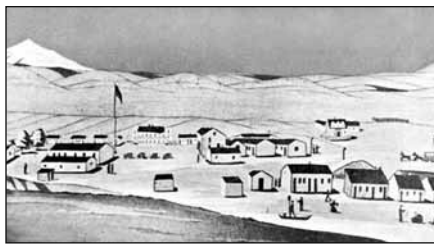
In 1858, the discovery of gold at Cherry Creek, 200 miles south of Fort Laramie, precipitated the Colorado gold rush. That winter Fort Laramie was the nearest link between the gold miners clustered about the site of Denver, Colo., and the outside world. An informal mail express to the fort was organized and carried by old trappers.

These developments were soon overshadowed by the spectacular Pony Express. The first west-bound rider galloped into Fort Laramie on April 6, 1860, just 3 days out from St. Joseph, Mo. This remarkable system of relays of riders and ponies carried up to 10 pounds of mail from St. Joseph to San Francisco in 13 days, at the rate of \$5 in gold for a half-ounce letter. Later, a Government subsidy, begun on July 1, 1861, reduced the rate to \$1 for one-half ounce. On that same date daily overland mail coaches began operating from St. Joseph to San Francisco, via Fort Laramie, on an 18-day schedule.

Meanwhile, the poles and wires of the first transcontinental telegraph were stretching out across the plains and mountains. Reaching Fort Laramie in September, the telegraph was completed to Salt Lake City and connected with the line from the west coast on October 24, 1861. That date also marked the end of the pony express which, although a financial failure that cost W. H. Russell his fortune, had proved the practicability of the central route to California for year-round travel.

## The Civil War and the Uprising of the Plains Indians

The outbreak of the Civil War led to the reduction of garrisons at all outposts. This, coupled with a bloody uprising of the Sioux in Minnesota in 1862, inspired the Plains Indians, nursing many grievances, to go on the warpath. In the spring of 1862, many stage stations along the Platte route were raided and burned. To meet this threat, volunteer cavalry from Utah rushed east to the South Pass area, and the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry under Col. Wm. O. Collins was ordered west to Fort Laramie. These raids also prompted the moving of the overland mail



*Fort Laramie in 1863. Note "Old Bedlam" to the right of the flagpole From a sketch in the University of Wyoming Archives by Bugler C. Moellman, 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Courtesy National Park Service.*

and stage route south to the Overland Trail and the establishment of Fort Halleck 120 miles to the southwest. During this period, troops at Fort Laramie continued to protect the vital telegraph line through South Pass and a still considerable volume of travelers, principally to Utah.

The next winter was fairly peaceful at Fort Laramie, and of social life at the post young Caspar Collins wrote to his mother: "They make the soldiers wear white gloves at this post, and they cut around very fashionably. A good many of the regulars are married and have their wives and families with them." He also indicated that they had a circulating library, a band, amateur theatricals, and an occasional ball. However, the dangers of the frontier were ever present, and, later that winter, troops en route from Fort Laramie to Fort Halleck encountered weather so severe that several were frozen to death.

Indians continued to steal horses from the overland mail stations, freighters, and ranchers; and incidents provoked by both whites and Indians piled up until the whole region was in a state of alarm. Efforts were made to call the Indians into the forts to treat for peace, but with little success.

At this time the difficulty of detecting the movements of Indian war parties was demonstrated at Fort Laramie. Returning from a 3-day scout, without finding a sign of hostile Indians, a large detachment of troops unsaddled their horses and let them roll on the parade grounds. Suddenly, at midday, a daring party of 30 warriors dashed through the fort, drove the horses off to the north and escaped, with all but the poorest animals, despite a 48-hour pursuit. The fort's commander, Major Wood, was described by his adjutant as "the maddest man I ever saw."

Later in 1864, after another attempt to make peace with the northern Indians had failed, Gen. R. B. Mitchell ordered the strengthening of the defenses along the road to South Pass. Several former stage and pony express stations were strengthened and garrisoned. Fort Sedgwick, near Julesburg, and Fort Mitchell, at Scottsbluff, were among those established. Fort Laramie became headquarters of a district extending from South Pass east to Mud Springs Station. Meanwhile, Indian raids along the South Platte River virtually cut off Denver from the east for 6 weeks.

Continuing efforts to seek peace with the Indians were made unsuccessful by the Sand Creek Massacre in November 1864, which united the southern bands of Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe on the warpath. Early in January 1865, they raided Julesburg, sacking the station, carrying off great quantities of foodstuffs, and almost succeeding in destroying the garrison of Fort Sedgwick. Efforts to burn out the Indians by setting a 300-mile-wide prairie fire brought them

swarming back to the attack, destroying the South Platte road stations and miles of telegraph line, sacking and burning Julesburg a second time, and driving off great herds of livestock. While troops from Fort Laramie arrived at Mud Springs Station in time to fight off the Indians there, all efforts by troops from Fort Laramie and the east failed to prevent the Indians from escaping with their booty across the North Platte, near Ash Hollow.

Termination of the Civil War in April 1865 released many troops for service against the Indians, and plans were laid for extensive punitive expeditions, especially in the country to the north of the North Platte River.

In May, the fort's commander, Col. Thomas Moonlight, led 500 cavalymen on a 450-mile foray into the Wind River Valley, but failed to find the Indians. Meanwhile, there were several raids on stations westward to South Pass. An effort to move a village of friendly Brules from Fort Laramie to Fort Kearny resulted in a fight at Horse Creek where Captain Fouts and four soldiers were killed as these Indians escaped to join the hostiles. In pursuing them, all of Colonel Moonlight's horses were stolen, and he returned to Fort Laramie in disgrace.

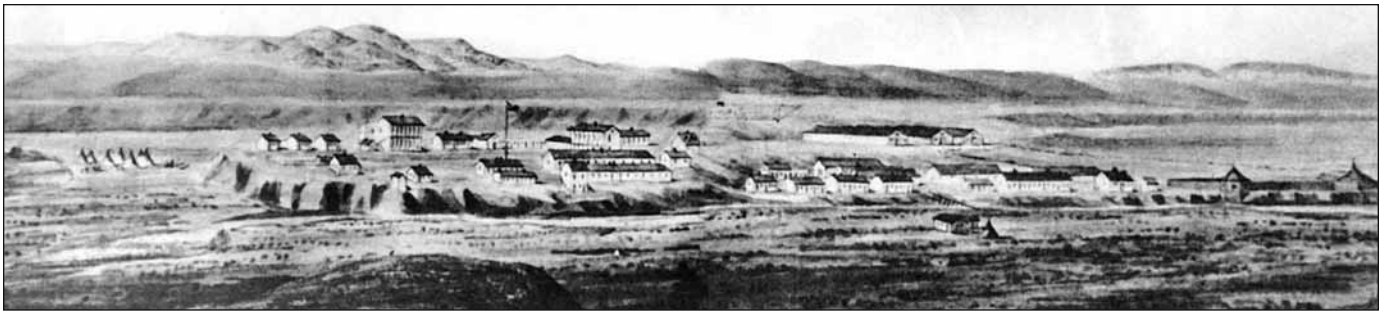
The major Indian raids of the summer centered on Platte Bridge Station, 130 miles above Fort Laramie, where late in July a large force of Indians wiped out a wagon train and killed 26 white men, including Lt. Caspar Collins who led a small party from the station in a valiant rescue effort.

In the meantime, a great campaign against the Indians, known as the Powder River Expedition, got under way with 2,500 men, directed by Gen. R. E. Connor. Of three columns planned to converge on the Indians in the Powder River country, the first, under Colonel Cole, started from Omaha, marched up the Loup River Valley, thence east of the Black Hills and on to the Powder River in Montana. The second, under Lieutenant Colonel Walker, left Fort Laramie, marched north along the west side of the Black Hills, and joined Colonel Cole's column as planned. The third, under General Connor, marched about 100 miles up the Platte from Fort Laramie, then north to the headwaters of Powder River where a small fort, Camp Connor, was established; thence, down the Powder River, where he destroyed the village and supplies of a large band of Arapahoes, but failed to meet the other two columns. The other commanders, lacking adequate supplies and proper knowledge of the country, lost most of their horses and mules in a September storm and, beset by fast-riding Indians, were forced to destroy the bulk of their heavy equipment. They were finally found and led to Camp Connor just in time to prevent heavy losses by starvation and possible destruction by Indians. The expedition straggled back to Fort Laramie, a failure.

## Peace Talk and War on the Bozeman Trail, 1866-68

Officials at Washington now decided to try peaceful measures with the Indians of the Fort Laramie region, and General Connor was succeeded in command by General Wheaton. Emissaries were sent to the tribes, inviting them to a general peace council at Fort Laramie in June 1866.

In March of that year, Col. Henry Maynadier, then in command at Fort Laramie, reported, as auguring success of the peace council, that



Fort Laramie in 1867. From a sketch by Anton Schoenborn. Courtesy of National Park Service.

Spotted Tail, head chief of the Brule Sioux, had brought in the body of his daughter for burial among the whites at Fort Laramie. Her name was Ah-ho-ap-pa, which is Sioux for wheat flour, although modern poets have referred to her as Fallen Leaf. In the summer of 1864, she was a familiar figure at Fort Laramie. While she haughtily refused the crackers, coffee, and bacon doled out to the Indian women and children at that time, she spent long hours on a bench by the sutler's store watching the white man's way of life. She was particularly fond of watching the guard mount and the dress parade, and the officer in charge was often especially decked out in sash and plumes for her benefit. She refused to marry one of her own people, attempted to learn English, and told her people they were fools for not living in houses and making peace with the whites. When the Sioux went on the warpath in 1864, however, Spotted Tail and his daughter were with them and spent the next year in the Powder River country. There the hard life weakened her, and she sickened and died during the following cold winter.

The grave of Spotted Tail's daughter near Fort Laramie, about 1881.

Courtesy Wyoming Historical Department.

Having promised to carry out her express wish to be buried at Fort Laramie, her father led the funeral procession on a journey of 260 miles. Colonel Maynadier responded gallantly to Spotted Tail's request. In a ceremony which combined all the pageantry of the military and the primitive tradition of the Sioux, her body was placed in a coffin on a raised platform a half mile north of the parade grounds. Thus, a long step had been taken toward winning the friendship of a great chief.

By June, a good representation of Brule and Oglala Sioux being present, the commissioners set about negotiating a treaty. In the meantime, unfortunately, the War Department sent out an expedition instructed to open the Bozeman Trail through the Powder River country to the Montana gold mines. Colonel Carrington and his troops arrived at Fort Laramie in the midst of the negotiations and caused serious unrest among the Indians. One chief commented, "Great Father send us presents and wants new road, but white chief goes with soldiers to steal road before Indian say yes or no," and a large faction, led by Red Cloud and Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses, withdrew in open opposition to all peace talk. Nevertheless, the remaining Indians agreed to a treaty which provided for the opening of the Bozeman Trail.

In late June the troops under Colonel Carrington marched up the trail, garrisoned Camp Connor (later moved and named Fort Reno), and began building Fort Phil Kearny at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains and Fort C. F.

Smith farther north in Montana. Immediately, it became evident that the peace treaty was meaningless. Fort Phil Kearny was the scene of almost daily Indian attacks on traders, wagon trains, wood-cutting parties, and troops. These attacks were climaxed on December 21 when Capt. William Fetterman and 80 men were led into an ambush and annihilated by Indians led by Crazy Horse and Red Cloud. The fort and its remaining garrison were in danger of being overwhelmed, and the nearest aid lay at Fort Laramie, 236 miles away. At midnight, John "Portugee" Phillips, trader and scout, slipped out into a blizzard on the colonel's favorite horse and in 4 days made his way across the storm-swept, Indian-infested plains to Fort Laramie in one of the truly heroic rides of American history. While his gallant mount lay dying on the parade ground, Phillips interrupted a gay Christmas night party in "Old Bedlam" to deliver his message, and a relief expedition was soon on its way.

The severe weather made an attempted winter campaign against the Indians unsuccessful, and there was no important fighting until summer. On August 2, 1867, the Indians again attacked a woodcutting party near Fort Phil Kearny, but the small detachment led by Captain Powell was armed with the new 1866 Springfield breech-loading rifles and fought off repeated charges by the Indians in the famous Wagon Box Fight.

### The Treaty of 1868

Again, the peace advocates in Washington were in the ascendancy, and in the summer of 1867 the Congress provided a commission to treat with the Indians, but authorized recruiting an army of 4,000 men if peace was not attained. Treaties with the southern tribes were concluded at Fort Larned in October, and the commissioners came to Fort Laramie in November to treat with the northern tribes. However, few came in and the hostiles, led by Red Cloud, sent word that no treaty was possible until the forts on the Bozeman Trail and in the valley of the Powder River were abandoned to the Indians. They did agree to cease hostilities and to come to Fort Laramie the next spring. In April 1868, the commissioners came again to Fort Laramie and were prepared to grant the Indians' demands, including abandonment of the Bozeman Trail. By late May, both the Brule and Oglala Sioux had signed the treaty, but Red Cloud refused to sign until the troops had left the Powder River country and his warriors had burned the abandoned Fort Phil Kearny to the ground.

This treaty gave the Indians all of what is now South Dakota west of the Missouri River as a reservation. It also gave them control and hunting rights in the great territory north of the North Platte River and east of the Bighorn Mountains as

unced Indian lands. The Indian agencies were to be built on the Missouri River. Many of the Indians, however, objected to giving up trading at Fort Laramie as had been their custom, and, in 1870, a temporary agency for Red Cloud's band was established on the North Platte River 30 miles below the fort, at the present Nebraska-Wyoming line. Finally, in 1873, after he and other chiefs had twice been taken to Washington and New York to view the numbers and power of the white men, Red Cloud agreed to having his agency moved north to a site on White River away from Fort Laramie and the Platte Road.

In the meantime, peace prevailed on the high plains, and, in 1872, it was reported that not a white man was killed in the department of the Platte.

Later in 1873, however, the attitude of many Indians toward their agents at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies became so hostile that the agents requested that troops be stationed at the agencies. Although the Indians protested this as a violation of their treaty rights, Camp Robinson and Camp Sheridan were established at these respective agencies in 1874. At the same time, funds were obtained for an iron bridge over the North Platte at Fort Laramie. Its completion, early in 1876, gave the troops there ready access to the Indian country.

### The Fight for the Black Hills

Rumors of gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota had persisted for many years, which induced the Government to send an expedition under Col. George A. Custer from Fort Abraham Lincoln on the upper Missouri to investigate the area. Proceeding without opposition from the Indians, the expedition confirmed the presence of gold in the hills and sent out word of their discoveries to Fort Laramie in August 1874. The resulting rush of prospecting parties was at first forbidden by the military, who rounded up several and imprisoned some of their leaders at Fort Laramie, while other parties were attacked by the Indians for flagrant violation of the treaty of 1868.

A second expedition, led by Col. R. I. Dodge and Prof. W. P. Jenney, set out from Fort Laramie the next spring to explore and evaluate the gold deposits in the Black Hills. Miners also thronged the hills, and efforts to make them await negotiations with the Indians were only partly successful. Meanwhile, the Government did make an effort to buy the Black Hills from the Sioux; but the Indians, led by Chief Spotted Tail, set a justly high price on the area, which the Government refused to meet. Moreover, the wild bands of Sitting Bull and other chiefs refused to sell at any price and warned the whites to stay out. No longer restrained by the

Army, the miners now swarmed into the hills, which became a powder keg.

Ignoring existing treaties, the Government decided to force the wild Sioux onto their reservation, and when the order for them to come in was not instantly complied with, the Army prepared for action. A double enveloping campaign was planned, to be led by Gen. George Crook with troops based at Fort Laramie and Fort Fetterman, and by Gen. Alfred H. Terry with Custer's Seventh Cavalry from Fort Abraham Lincoln and Col. John Gibbon's command from Fort Ellis, Mont. In March, Crook marched north from Fort Fetterman, 80 miles northwest of Fort Laramie, with 12 companies of soldiers. His cavalry surprised a large village of Sioux and Cheyenne on the Little Powder River in Montana, but Crazy Horse rallied the Indians and forced the troops to retreat. Again in late May, Crook moved north with 20 companies of men plus 300 friendly Shoshones and Crows, and once more, on June 17, on the Rosebud, he was defeated by a great array of warriors led by Crazy Horse. Retreating to his supply camp, Crook again decided to send for reinforcements.

Meanwhile, General Terry's command had marched west from Fort Abraham Lincoln and met Colonel Gibbon's detachment on the Yellowstone River. Again dividing his forces, Terry sent Custer and the entire Seventh Cavalry up the Rosebud River, while he and Gibbon, with 12 companies of infantry and four troops of cavalry, proceeded up the Bighorn River.

On the morning of June 25, 1876, Custer's scouts sighted the Indian village in the valley of the Little Bighorn. He divided his command to attack the village from three directions. The Indians, however, first met Maj. Marcus A. Reno's contingent of three troops in the afternoon in overwhelming numbers and forced them to retreat to a defensive position, where they were joined by a similar detachment under Capt. Frederick W. Benteen and the pack train. Meanwhile, the great part of the Indians had swung away to meet and wipe out Custer's personal command of five troops. Again the warriors attacked Reno, but since he was on favorable ground he was able to fight them off until the next day when their scouts detected the approach of General Terry. Firing the grass, the Indians moved off into the Bighorn Mountain, leaving over 260 soldiers dead on the battlefield. It was an empty victory, however, as the Indians were compelled to scatter to hunt for food. By winter, reinforced armies under General Crook and Colonel Miles had defeated bands led by Dull Knife and Crazy Horse, forcing them to return to the reservation and surrender, while Sitting Bull's band fled north into Canada.

In the meantime, the Government had decreed that no annuities should be paid to the hostile bands or to any Sioux until they had ceded the coveted Black Hills to the whites. A commission succeeded in getting the Sioux to sign an agreement effecting that end when it became law in February 1877.

The Northern Cheyennes were taken south to the Indian territory in 1877, but they broke away the next year, led by Dull Knife and Little Wolf, and headed north for their old home in the Dakotas. After hard campaigning by troops from Fort Laramie and other posts, many of Dull Knife's band were killed and all others were captured. These, however, were permitted to remain on the northern reservation.

The rush to the Black Hills gave new impor-

tance to Fort Laramie, for, with its bridge across the North Platte, it was the gateway to the gold-mining region via the trail leading north from Cheyenne, whose merchants advertised the route as being well guarded. Although the troops from the fort were virtually all engaged in the effort to combat Indian depredations and provide escorts, travel to the gold fields was in fact extremely hazardous. Regular service by the Cheyenne and Black Hills stage line was impossible, until conditions improved in the fall of 1876. But no sooner had Indian raids on the trail lessened than the activities of "road agents" threatened the traveler. Even armored coaches with shotgun guards failed to deter the bandits seeking gold shipments.

## Last Years of the Army Post, 1877-90

Beginning in the late 1870s, other changes took place around Fort Laramie. With the Indians removed to reservations, ranchers and other settlers came in, and great herds of cattle replaced the buffalo on the Wyoming plains. To many of these settlers the fort on the Laramie was a supply center, as well as insurance against Indian outbreaks and lawless white men.

During these same years, Fort Laramie was assuming a false air of permanence as many of the old buildings of frame, log, and adobe construction were replaced by sturdy new structures with lime-concrete walls. A water system changed the parade ground from a gravelly flat to a tree-shaded greensward. The last cavalry unit to be stationed at the fort rode away in 1883 with Col. Wesley Merritt. Part of the Seventh Infantry, commanded by Colonel Gibbon, then garrisoned the post.

Fort Laramie's importance had been threatened by construction of the Union Pacific Railroad 100 miles to the south. Its fate was now sealed by construction, in the late 1880s, of the Northwestern Line 50 miles to the north. This made Fort Robinson the logical guardian of the Indian reservations to the north, and by 1886 Col. Henry Merriam, then commanding officer of the Seventh Infantry and Fort Laramie, was ready to agree that further development of the old post was unwise. Not until August 31, 1889, however, was abandonment of the proud old fort decreed. At the request of Wyoming's Governor Warren, troops remained at the post until March 2, 1890, when the last two companies of the Seventh Infantry marched away. A few men were left to ship movable property, while a detachment from Fort Robinson dismantled some of the structures and on April 9, 1890, auctioned off the buildings and fixtures. At that auction, Lt. C. M. Taylor of the Ninth Cavalry sold the buildings of historic Fort Laramie at prices ranging from \$2.50 to \$100. Thirty-five lots of buildings and much miscellaneous furniture and fixtures brought a total of \$1,395.

## The Homesteaders Take Over

In June 1890, the military reservation of some 35,000 acres was turned over to the Department of the Interior and opened to homesteading. John Hunton was appointed custodian of the abandoned military reservation for the General Land Office. He first came to Fort Laramie in 1867 to work for the sutler. Later, he became a ranch operator, and in 1888 he succeeded John London as post trader. Hunton was a major buyer at the final auction and managed to homestead the northwest side of the old parade grounds of the

fort, continuing to operate the sutler's store briefly, and living next door in the former officers' quarters for nearly 30 years.

Another of the major purchasers at the auction was one Joe Wilde, who also homesteaded part of the fort grounds, including the commissary storehouse and the cavalry barracks. He converted the buildings into a combination hotel, dance hall, and saloon and operated them as a social center for North Platte Valley residents for over 25 years. The west end of the parade grounds and the site of the old adobe trading post which the Army had demolished in 1862 was homesteaded by the widow of Thomas Sandercock, a civilian engineer at the fort, who made her home in the officers' quarters which had been built in 1870.

A dozen or more buildings used by these civilian owners were preserved with some alterations; but the bulk of the buildings were soon dismantled for lumber by their purchasers, and the old fort became a part of many a ranch home, homestead shack, or barn.

## Efforts to Preserve the Fort

John Hunton and a few other citizens recognized the historic importance of the old fort and expressed regret at its decay. In 1913, despairing anything better, they erected a monument commemorating its long service as a military post on the Oregon Trail.

Lands and buildings changed hands. Absentee landlords, tenants, and souvenir hunters contributed much to the destruction of the historic buildings and to the scattering of priceless relics. Creation of the Wyoming Historical Landmark Commission in 1927 initiated efforts to achieve public ownership and to protect this historic site. Ten years later the State of Wyoming appropriated funds for the purchase and donation to the Federal Government of 214 acres of land, including the surviving buildings. By Presidential proclamation, this became Fort Laramie National Monument on July 16, 1938, under the administration of the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior.

## H Visitor's Center Interpretive Signs

### Fort William 1834-1841

The mountain man was a frontiersman of the first order—an adventurer, loner, and a part-time diplomat. But he was also an entrepreneur, seeking to make a living in the perilous Rocky Mountain fur trade, where many of those who went into the mountains were never heard from again.

Conflicts between Indians and trappers were relatively rare. Instead, mountain men often took Indian wives and established themselves in Indian families. Trade was mutually beneficial and, for the most part, honestly conducted.

Competition for Indian trade did not become ruthless and unscrupulous until large fur trading corporations arrived, each company trying to drive the others out of business. Fort William, the first fort at the confluence of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers, was established in 1834 in this atmosphere of competition and company rivalry.

Though the heyday of the fur trade lasted only 20 years, the changes it wrought were immense. The mountain men were truly the vanguard of the great migration West. The letters, reports, and tall tales that filtered east



*Fort Laramie Museum and Visitor's Center*

excited a nation to the seemingly limitless land, wealth, and possibilities that awaited in the West.

#### **Fort John 1841-1849**

By the late 1830s, the mountain men had opened trails through the Rocky Mountains and shown the practicality of wagon travel over the Platte River route. Missionaries, scientists, explorers, and sportsmen began filtering west. Their letters, reports, and stories painted a glowing picture of the paradise of Oregon and California. These glorified accounts of life beyond the Rocky Mountains filled the imaginations of the American people, inspiring the greatest mass overland migration the world had ever seen.

Many emigrants gave up everything they knew and owned to make the journey west. The goodbyes said to family and friends were known to be final, for in all likelihood, the emigrants would never return to see loved ones again. The travelers then plunged into the great unknown, into a wild and forbidding country called the "great American desert."

The travails of the journey were many. People and animals were pushed to their limits as they struggled to cross desert and mountain before thirst, snow, and starvation overtook them. Suffocating dust, quagmires of mud, violent thunderstorms, heat, and cold were everyday occurrences. In spite of severe hardship, most persevered and completed the journey. Only a few "saw the elephant" and turned back.

At Fort John, the second Fort Laramie, farmers heading for Oregon, Mormons seeking religious freedom near the Great Salt Lake, and aragonauts bound for the California gold fields, mingled with mountain men from another era, and Indians, through whose land the emigrants passed. The Oregon, California, and Mormon nation moving west.

#### **Fort Laramie 1849-1859**

By the 1850s, the trickle of westbound emigrants had become a flood. Few episodes in history can rival the drama that unfolded along the emigrant routes. Tens of thousands of people choked the dusty trails with masses of bawling farm and draft animals.

Destruction followed in their wake. As thousands of wagons passed over the trails, game was killed and driven off, depriving the Indians of subsistence. Emigrants' livestock destroyed the grass for several miles in all directions. The trail corridor scarred the land, and remains visible over one hundred and fifty years after its carving.

Soldiers and emigrants desired good relations with the Indians, and in 1851 a peace council secured safe passage for travelers and compensated the Indians for their trail-related losses. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, called the "Horse Creek Treaty," was the largest known gathering of Northern Plains tribes in history. More than 10,000 people from virtually all of the plains Indian nations gathered at Horse Creek to make peace with the whites and end intertribal warfare. The headmen of each tribe and representatives of the U.S. government met and pledged peace to each other from that time forward. Unfortunately, the peace would last but a few short years.

The Platte River Ferry incident and the Grattan Fight brought peace to an abrupt end, and the resulting Northern Plains Indian wars would rage for the next 25 years. By the late 1850s, waning emigration and rising tensions with the Indians had changed Fort operations against the Northern Plains tribes.

#### **Fort Laramie 1859-1869**

The 1860s were tumultuous years for the nation and Fort Laramie. On the eve of the Civil War, Fort Laramie stood as a vital supply and communications link between the east and west coasts.

Almost 500,000 Americans now lived west of the Rocky Mountains. Rapid, dependable communication between east and west have become a necessity. The first transcontinental express mail service was launched in the spring of 1860; the celebrated Pony Express. Yet shortly after the first hoofbeats were heard, workmen began stringing miles of galvanized iron wire to tie the nation together. With the completion of the Transcontinental Telegraph in October, 1861, messages now flashed almost instantly from shore to shore.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, troops were

withdrawn from most western forts and sent east. Volunteer units at Fort Laramie faced the daunting task of keeping hundreds of miles of telegraph line and the Central Overland mail route open and operating.

Between 1864 and 1868, Indian attacks on military outposts, telegraph stations, mail stages, and civilians increased. The opening of the Bozeman Trail infringed on Indian territorial rights. When three new forts were built along the trail in 1866, the Indians struck back. By 1868, Red Cloud and his Sioux warriors had forced the abandonment of the "bloody Bozeman" and driven the federal government to the peace table once more.

The Fort Laramie treaties of 1868 held the promise of lasting peace on the plains. Reservations were organized, and promises were made to keep out trespassers. Once again, peace was fleeting. The pattern of empty promises and broken treaties continued.

#### **Fort Laramie 1869-1879**

The opening years of the 1870s offered hope of lasting peace on the Northern Plains. Destruction of the buffalo herds by hide hunters left the Indians with little choice but to settle on the new reservations in Dakota, where food and supplies were promised. Despite Red Cloud's pleas to remain near Fort Laramie, the government moved his agency to the White River in Nebraska. After 1873, Fort Laramie was no longer the traditional center of trade between the whites and the Sioux.

News of gold in the Black Hills electrified the nation in 1874. Despite government attempts to preserve Indian treaty rights, miners poured into the region. Submitting to public pressure, in the spring of 1876, the army launched the Bighorn—Yellowstone Expedition to force the Indians back to their agencies. Several major battles ensued, culminating in the defeat of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer at the Little Bighorn. The fate of a people was sealed.

Relentlessly pursued by the army throughout the following winter and summer, bands of warriors surrendered one by one. The Indians were no longer a proud, free roaming people, but starving, ragtag refugees, and prisoners in their own land.

By the late 1870s, the Northern Plains Indian Wars were essentially over. Settlers now made their homes on former Indian lands, and ranchers acquired great expanses of territory, where cattle replaced the buffalo. Fort Laramie was no longer a strategic outpost in the wilderness, but a fort whose military purpose was waning, a remnant of the old frontier.

#### **Fort Laramie: 1879-1890**

The 1880s were the golden years of Fort Laramie. A false sense of permanence prevailed as major building and public works projects were undertaken. Many old frame, log, adobe, and stone buildings were replaced by new lime grout structures. Streetlights, board walks, picket fences, and birdbaths lined Officers' Row.

While the enlisted soldiers were occupied with routine drill, fatigue details, and occasional field maneuvers, officers spent many hours socializing, hunting, fishing, picnicking, and staging amateur theatricals. By the mid-1880s, a railhead within thirty miles of Fort Laramie brought all the amenities of late Victorian life.

The last cavalry unit rode away in 1883, leaving only the infantry to garrison the fort.

In 1886, the construction of a new railroad near Fort Robinson, Nebraska, made the closure of Fort Laramie inevitable. On August 31, 1889, General Orders 69 ordered the abandonment of the "Grand Old Post." The remaining buildings and land were sold at public auction and in April, 1890 the army marched away for the last time.

1890, the end of an era: Fort Laramie abandoned, Wyoming proclaimed a state, the last major Indian conflict on the Northern Plains at Wounded Knee Creek, and the Superintendent of the Census declared that the American frontier had ceased to exist.

### Fort Laramie 1890-Present

Life continued at Fort Laramie after the 1890 public auction. The old post was homesteaded by three local families and the fort remained the social and economic center of the area's civilian community.

In 1900, a rail line was built on the north side of the North Platte River, and a new community was established, taking the name "Fort Laramie." As the town grew, the importance of the old fort declined, and time took its toll on the remaining structures. A few early visionaries recognized the historic importance of Fort Laramie. In 1937, their preservation efforts convinced the state of Wyoming to purchase 214 acres and the old post's surviving buildings. Since 1938, the National Park Service has preserved and interpreted this historic site.

We hold the past in trust for the future. Thanks to the far-sighted preservation efforts of a few concerned citizens, Fort Laramie is as alive today with visitors, researchers, staff, and neighbors as it ever was as a trading post, emigrant way station, fort, and homestead center. They saved this place for us, we must save it for the future.

### Fort Laramie and the Fur Trade

In the early 1800s the wealth of the wilderness was measured in the furs of wild animals, and the beaver was the most important. During that period a new breed of western explorer appeared upon the scene, the mountain man. Essentially a trapper of beaver, he was a staunch individualist and romantic adventurer who roamed the mountains and explored the rivers.

The river below, once abundant with beaver was named for one such trapper-explorer, a French-Canadian, Jacques La Ramee, (Laramie). His arrow-pierced body was found in the spring of 1821 near the mouth of the river that bears his name.

In the 1830s silk replaced beaver in fashionable hat styles. This combined with the increasing scarcity of beaver, signaled the end of the trapping era and the mountain's rendezvous, (where trappers and traders met to exchange furs for goods). A flourishing trade in buffalo hides and robes soon took its place and the need for permanent trading posts to store the bulky hides became apparent. Thousands of buffalo hides were shipped east from Fort Laramie in the 1840's.

In 1834, during the decline of the beaver trade, Robert Campbell and William Sublette established the first Fort Laramie, christened Fort William, the small fort constructed of cottonwood logs remained in existence for eight years. Fort William was then replaced by Fort John (1841). Like its predecessor it was commonly known as Fort Laramie.

### Fort Laramie and the Westward Movement

In addition to being an important fur trading post and, later, a strategic military installation, Fort Laramie was the most significant outpost of civilization on the Oregon Trail.

The first (true) covered wagon party embarked from what is now Kansas City, Missouri in 1841. Between 1841 and 1867 an estimated 350,000 emigrants crossed the continent on their way to Oregon, California and the Salt Lake Valley.

Fort Laramie was a place to replenish supplies, repair wagons, mail letters (home) and acquire fresh animals for the trail ahead. Here many abandoned their cumbersome wagons and continued the journey with pack mules or on foot. Others lightened their loads, keeping only bare essentials.

As you look across the river you will notice a large, flat, open area. This was a choice campsite for weary travelers.

Imagine, (as far as you can see) covered wagons, cattle and horses grazing and the activities of the evening camp—men unyoking oxen and discussing the trail ahead, women and children building fires and making preparation for the evening meal.

Construction of the first transcontinental railroad in 1867 diminished animal powered overland travel along the trail and led to its eventual abandonment.

### H Fort Laramie National Historic Site Interpretive Signs

Fort Laramie National Historic Site

#### Sawmill

Through a succession of accidental fires, Fort Laramie's sawmills gained a reputation of being ill-fated. The lime-grout building erected upon this site in 1887 was the last of several such structures that sheltered steam engines used for sawing wood and pumping water.

Site of Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage Station

Cheyenne 93 Miles (arrow pointing to the right)

213 Miles (arrow pointing to the left)  
Deadwood

#### The Rustic Hotel

The Rustic Hotel opened in 1876. During that year it probably provided the best accommodations for travelers between Cheyenne and the Black Hills. It also served as a station for the Cheyenne-Black Hills State and Express Line.

By 1883, when this photograph was taken one lady traveler found "horrid little bugs" in the sheets. Three years later, the stage station corals were polluting the fort's water supply and had to be removed.

#### The Post Hospital

These walls are all that remain of a twelve-bed hospital built on this in 1873-1874. The 1888 photograph shows the hospital in better days, with spacious verandas, flower gardens and picket-fenced yard. Posing in the garden is Post Surgeon Brechemin and enlisted men of the Medical Department. The site selected for the hospital had been used as a post cemetery prior to 1867. Six burials found within the lines of construction were first moved to a nearby cemetery, and finally to Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Nebraska.

#### Noncommissioned Officers Quarters

A six-unit apartment, built on this site in 1884,

was the best housing available for married enlisted men until the abandonment of the post in 1890. Pictured in 1885, it usually housed ranking NCOs such as Chief Post Musician, Post Quartermaster Sergeant or Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant.

Post Ordnance Sergeant Schnyder and his family lived in the next-to-last apartment during the final two years of his 35-year Fort Laramie residency.

### Site of Workshops, Storehouses and Stables

Extending from here to the river was a succession of storehouses and workshops that supplied goods and services to the army. As much as 500,000 pounds of grain were stored here in addition to coal, oil, paint, hay, wood and other quartermaster supplies.

Since soldiers were seldom skilled workers, as many as 100 civilians were hired in Denver, Omaha and Cheyenne to serve as wheelwrights, blacksmiths, carpenters, saddlers and laborers. These men received rations and shelter in addition to \$30 to \$100 a month.

To the left once stood stables, a constant source of aggravation to the shovel-wielding soldier.

### Cavalry Barracks

The building before you is the only surviving enlisted men's barracks at Fort Laramie. The building proper was completed in late 1874 and was designed to provide quarters and other needed support facilities for two companies of soldiers. The veranda, although originally planned, was not added until 1883. As constructed the entire second floor was made up of only two equal, large rooms. These were the company dormitory bays or squad rooms where the enlisted soldiers lived. Each could house about sixty soldiers or one company. On the first floor below each squad room, the building was divided into a kitchen, messroom, cook's room, storage room, wash room, library, armory and orderly room for the N.C.O. 's and non-commissioned officers room.

### The Sutler's House

The Victorian-style cottage, built in 1863 and shown in this 1868 photograph, must have been a strange sight on the untamed Northern Plains.

Sometime between 1875 and 1882, the cottage was replaced by a much larger lime-grout structure, used by the Sutler or his agents until the abandonment of the post in 1890.

### Commissary Storehouse

This building was completed in 1884. It was built as a commissary storage facility. As such it would have been primarily divided into two large storerooms: one for meat and one for flour, rice, and beans. Three or four smaller rooms would have been used as offices, an "issue room" and a storage room for canned goods. This building also had a partial cellar with a trap door for use with a hand-operated elevator. Rations and other official Army food items were issued from this building. A commissary officer and sergeant ran the operation.

### The Post Bakeries

Four different bakeries operated successively at Fort Laramie. The remains of two bakeries stand before you. The nearer, built in 1876, was used until 1884, when it was converted into a school. A bakery built upon the far site

operated from 1884 until 1890. Army bakers produced one eighteen-ounce loaf daily for each man at the fort. With a garrison numbering as many as 700 men, imagine the production that resulted!

#### Site of Army Bridge

The Laramie River was unpredictable and unchecked by dams. High water during the spring of the year often damaged or washed away existing bridges; therefore, from 1853 to post abandonment in 1890 the river was spanned by several successive bridges on or near this site. The first was constructed by a private firm

#### Fort Laramie and The Fur Trade

In the early 1800s the wealth of the wilderness was measured in the furs of wild animals, and the beaver was the most important. During that period a new breed of western explorer appeared upon the scene, the mountain man. Essentially a trapper of beaver, he was a staunch individualist and romantic adventurer who roamed the mountains and explored the rivers.

The river below, once abundant with beaver was named for one such trapper-explorer, a French-Canadian, Jacques La Ramee (Laramie). His arrow-pierced body was found in the spring of 1821 near the mouth of the river that bears his name.

In the 1830s silk replaced beaver in fashionable hat styles. This combined with the increasing scarcity of beaver, signaled the end of the trapping era and the mountain's rendezvous, (where trappers and traders met to exchange furs for goods). A flourishing trade in buffalo hides and robes soon took its place and the need for permanent trading posts to store the bulky hides became apparent. Thousands of buffalo hides were shipped east from Fort Laramie, in the 1840s.

In 1834, during the decline of the beaver trade, Robert Campbell and William Sublette established the first Fort Laramie, christened Fort William. The small fort constructed of cottonwood logs remained in existence for eight years. Fort William was then replaced by Fort John (1841). Like its predecessor it was commonly known as Fort Laramie.

#### Officers' Quarters

Here stood a frame duplex built in 1858.

#### Ice Houses

During the winter months ice blocks were cut from the Laramie and Platte Rivers and hauled to ice houses at this and other sites. Thick walled and partially underground, the frame or sod structures could each store as much as 150 tons of ice. Ice distribution began with the onset of warm weather and, if carefully rationed, ice could last until September.

Officers, enlisted men and laundresses, as well as the hospital and butchershops, were among the recipients. The post commander determined who could receive ice and in what order and amount. Immediately after reveille, often on alternating days, those entitled could come to the ice houses to receive their shares.

At left is the headquarters circular of April 20, 1876, announcing the first of ice and determining a generous daily allotment.

#### CO's Chicken Coop (Built in 1881)

High ranking officers commonly kept chickens

for their own use. The consumption of chickens and eggs provided a welcome change from meals of wild game and tough army beef. Individual soldiers and cooks utilizing company funds could purchase chickens and eggs from civilians. However, such items were a luxury which seldom appeared on the enlisted man's table.

#### Refinement at Fort Laramie

Fort Laramie began as a dusty, drab frontier outpost as pictured above in the 1868 photograph. However, by the 1880's, the Army had embarked upon a major cleanup and improvement campaign. The delightful results are evident in the 1887 view—trees and grass, gaslights, boardwalks, picket fences and vine-covered verandas, modern, comfortable quarters... even birdbaths!

#### Officers Quarters

This 1885 photograph (on plaque) shows the buildings constructed on this site in 1881. Previous adobe structures, built in 1855, were left standing as rear wings. On the far left was the Commanding Officer's residence. Between 1881 and 1890 it was successively occupied by the families of Colonels Merritt, Gibbon, and Merriam and the only one equipped with inside plumbing, with a full bathroom upstairs and water pipes into the kitchen. The other two buildings were customarily occupied by Lieutenants or Captains and their families.

#### Old Bedlam

This graceful old structure, built in 1849, is the oldest standing building in Wyoming. It was nicknamed "Old Bedlam" because of boisterous sounds supposedly heard while it was occupied by bachelor officers.

Shown in an 1889 photograph, "Old Bedlam" is generally regarded as a Bachelor Officers Quarters. However, the left half was used as Post Headquarters and Commanders Apartment in the 1860's, and at various times, the building was occupied by married officers.

#### John (Portugee) Phillips

Here on December 25, 1866 John (Portugee) Phillips finished his 236 mile ride to obtain troops for the relief of Fort Phil Kearny after the Fetterman Massacre.

#### Magazine (Built in 1849)

Restored here to the 1850-1862 period, the magazine is among the oldest surviving structures at Fort Laramie. It was during this early period that George Balch, 1st Lieutenant Ordnance Corps, sent the following report to the Assistant Adjutant General:

*"I find all the ordnance property with the exception of the field guns and their cartridges stored in the magazine arranged with much order and preserved with great care. The different kinds of ammunition piled together in such positions as to be easily reached, and the artillery implements and equipments, the small arms and their equipments properly disposed of on shelves and in boxes."*

#### Infantry Barracks

In answer to the perpetual need for housing, construction of an enlisted men's barracks commenced at the opposite end of these foundation ruins. The barracks were extended in this direction as more men were assigned. Kitchens, mess halls, laundress' quarters and latrines

were built behind (to your left).

Home to about 150 men, the two-story barracks were sparsely furnished. Bunks, made of wood by the quartermaster, were two tiers high with each tier accommodating two men. The Indian wars term "Bunkie," referring to a soldier's closest comrade, derived from this sleeping arrangement.

The two-story barracks were replaced in 1868 by a one-story barracks.

#### "Officers Row"

This 1889 winter scene (on plaque) shows buildings along the west side of the Parade Ground which housed Fort Laramie's officer complement—hence "Officers Row."

Right to left, the "Burt" House, the "Surgeon's" quarters, two adobe quarters and "Old Bedlam".

The surgeon's eminent position in the social line at Fort Laramie is reflected in this 1888 view (left).

#### The Sutler's Store

Parts of this building date from the earliest periods at Fort Laramie. The adobe portion on the left, built in 1849, housed the Post Trader's Store.

In 1852, the right section was added and used at various times as the Sutler's office, the Post Office and a game room. The photograph shows an 1877 view.

The rear portion was built in 1883. The Enlisted Men's Bar and a rustic saloon were on the right; The Officers Club on the left housed the Sutler's Store in 1875. (Courtesy University of Wyoming Archives and Western History Dept.)

#### Fort Laramie Army Bridge

This bridge was constructed in 1875. It is believed to be the oldest existing military bridge west of the Mississippi River.

Once the then-broad and turbulent North Platte River was spanned, the Cheyenne to Deadwood Route was considered the best road to the Black Hills gold fields. The bridge also influenced the establishment of the famous Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage and Express Line. The bridge remained in use until 1958.

#### Fort Laramie and The Transcontinental Telegraph

The transcontinental telegraph reached Fort Laramie from the east on August 5, 1861. From then until May, 1869, Fort Laramie was a major station on the telegraph line. Soldiers from Fort Laramie protected the line, made repairs, and operated remote repeater stations from Julesburg, Colorado (150 miles to the east) to South Pass, Wyoming (300 miles to the west).

#### Electrical Engineering Milestone Transcontinental Telegraph

Between July 4 and October 24, 1861, a telegraph line was constructed by the Western Union Telegraph Co. between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California, thereby completing the first high speed communication link between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. This service met the critical demand for fast communication between these two areas. This telegraph line operated until May, 1869, when it was replaced by a multi-wire system constructed with the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroad Lines.