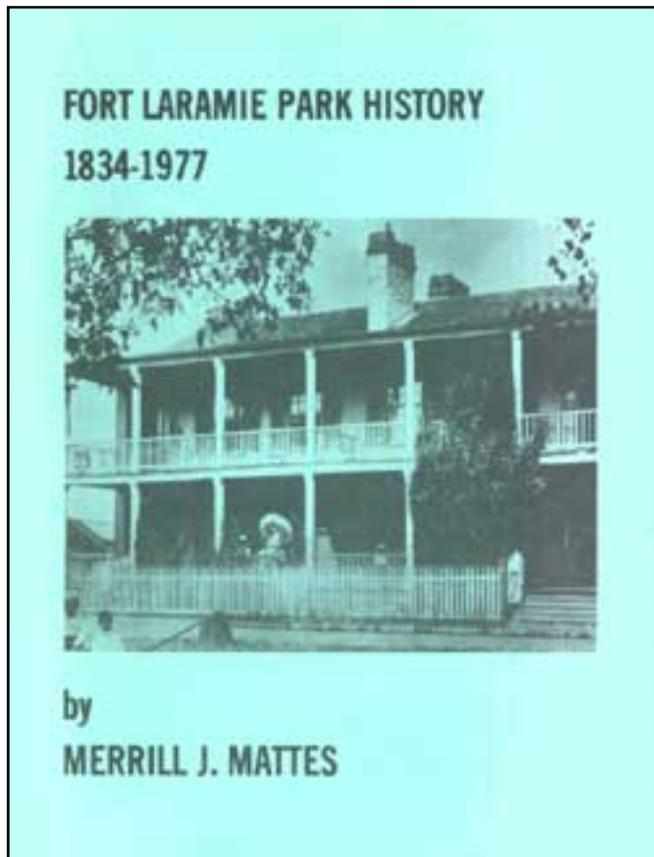


Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



FORT LARAMIE PARK HISTORY 1834-1977

by
Merrill J. Mattes

September 1980

Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Editor's note: This printing of FORT LARAMIE 1834-1977 combines two typescripts which were first conceived as separate publications. Part I, FORT LARAMIE 1834-1890, bears its original title. Part II, THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE, and Part III, THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE, are discussed in the following preface as one entity originally titled PARK HISTORY.

This officially authorized, sponsored, and documented FORT LARAMIE PARK HISTORY is submitted in fulfillment of my Contract No. CX-1200-6-B028 dated June 24, 1976 with the Rocky Mountain Regional Office, National Park Service, Denver.

Although more glamorous titles occurred to me, PARK HISTORY seems to be the only one that adequately describes the purpose, which is to document the origins of the park unit established by Presidential Proclamation as a National Monument in 1938 ("The Crusade") and to provide an integrated narrative account of events since then, dominated by the one major theme - "The Restoration". At the same time this title clearly differentiates this work from the usual kind of "Fort Laramie History" which is concerned with the frontier period, 1834-1890.

The alternative title, "Administrative History", was discarded as not being properly descriptive of the two major historical movements, "The Crusade" and subsequent "Restoration."

While not as glamorous as the frontier episodes, the happenings of the post-military period, 1890 to the present, are interesting, sometimes colorful, and even exciting to those with special interests, i.e., Wyoming history, Oregon Trail history, local history, historic preservation, etc. I have tried to make the story readable, to avoid a dull encyclopedic approach or the deadly chronology of a straight daily log. I have not refrained from injecting color and humor where situations warrant, and I have even "editorialized" where it would serve to give perspective to the larger meaning of events. However, the primary purpose of this history is not to entertain. Its purpose, its justification, is to do something never attempted before, to objectively detail and document the background of the present Fort Laramie National Historic Site, and how it came to be what it is today - one of the most significant, most authentic, and inspirational historic shrines in Western America.

The immediate practical purpose of a PARK HISTORY is to provide an official documented report that should serve as an important reference work for all responsible and conscientious park and Regional Office employees, present and future. Whether one's primary function is administration, interpretation, protection, research, or planning, certainly a vital ingredient of intelligent management of any of these departments is

knowledge of what has gone before. To believe otherwise is to take the arrogant and dangerous viewpoint of "an ego in a vacuum."

While, therefore, this history serves primarily as an indispensable management tool, it may also have beneficial side effects. That is, it may be of sufficient interest to some people outside of the National Park Service that a wider distribution or availability, beyond that of a limited edition in-house document, might be warranted. Since there is a consensus that Fort Laramie is Wyoming's Number 1 historic site, some details of the story might be of keen interest to Wyoming citizens generally, young and old. Since the decades-long painstaking restoration of the Fort has resulted in an exemplary model of historic preservation integrity, the story may be of more than passing interest to a wide circle of historic preservationists.

The most logical vehicle for publication to reach these specialized audiences is the periodical, Annals of Wyoming. Accordingly, with the approval of the Regional Director, that portion of the manuscript called "The Crusade to Save Fort Laramie" (revised and corrected since my original submission of June 10, 1977) has been submitted to Katherine Halverson, head of the Research and Publications Branch, Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, and accepted by her for publication in 1978, by way of celebrating the 40th anniversary of the creation of Fort Laramie National Monument/Historic Site. A condensed version of the lengthier history of the Restoration period, 1938-1977, which would be prepared voluntarily by the writer may, with any required official approvals, follow later.

While the civilian or "post-post" history of Fort Laramie begins in 1890 with the military abandonment and the auctioning off of the buildings, it has proved to be impractical, if not altogether impossible, to include here a meaningful resume of those local events which preceded "The Crusade" which, from all available evidence, began circa 1915. Aside from the dismal fact that almost all structures not preserved today were obviously torn down for salvage by or with the consent of private owners, the record of this remote period is at best fragmentary and, from the vantage point of national significance which invests the Fort proper, somewhat trivial. Worse yet, the main source of evidence for this dim period, the records of the venerable John Hunton, who was "Mr. Fort Laramie" in the post-abandonment era, are to a considerable degree inaccessible for present serious research. That is, the unpublished Hunton Diaries for the period after 1889 are held by Mrs. L. G. Flannery of Cheyenne, who denied permission for this writer, as she has all others, to examine these diaries and extract pertinent information. The John Hunton Letter Books in the special collections of the Wyoming University Library are for the most part dim or illegible, threatening the eyesight of any reader. My genuine efforts at exploration of the John Hunton period, aside from those aspects included in "The Crusade" section herewith, became a futile antiquarian exercise, expensive of time, money, and energy, which yielded returns which were not only meager but mainly irrelevant to the primary theme that concerns us. (Worse yet, this frustrating search contributed to delays in the submission of this final manuscript). If enough can ever be scrounged up from these "dark ages" of Fort Laramie history to make a coherent story, that can be done later as a historical foot-note. The treatment of our grand theme has been in no way impaired by the meagerness of the pre-1915 data.

There is one aspect of this history, of a personal nature, which requires editorial comment. Sometimes an actor in a play happens also to be the writer of that play. In this case, the present writer was also a figure in the Fort Laramie scenario, intermittently from 1935 to the present (1978), a period of 43 years. Beginning in 1935, as set forth in this history, I played various roles as Fort Laramie promoter, unofficial and official Historian, planner, and restoration project coordinator, while stationed successively at Scotts Bluff National

Monument, the old Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, the Western Service Center in San Francisco, and the Denver Service Center. Because of these long and intimate associations, my name crops up with awkward frequency in the narrative but there is no help for it if we are to be both accurate and specific about who did what when. Despite this disclaimer, critics may feel that this is an ego vehicle, that I should have been more anonymous, and they if any are entitled to their opinions. My assumption is that the Rocky Mountain Regional Office asked me to undertake this heavy task for the reason that I was long and intimately involved in the subject and should be able, therefore, to provide insights and an overview that another Historian, chosen at random, "a stranger to Fort Laramie," would lack. It would seem dishonest, therefore, rather than merely modest, to omit or play down legitimate references to "the author as actor."

Thus much of this recent history is drawn from personal memory of events back to 1935, although most of it can be verified in official files. The principal people interviewed were former Superintendents Dave Hieb and Charlie Sharp, whose combined Superintendencies spanned nearly a quarter of a century, during which time the bulk of the restoration work took place. Others interviewed included Doug McChristian, Jim Petty, and Kenneth Weber of the current staff, and a few key people in town, like Ida Mary (Sandercock) Melonuk of Fort Laramie, Earl D. (Slim) Warthen of Lingle, and Curtiss Root in Torrington. (Superintendent Maeder "skipped out" before he could be interviewed, but his quite recent activities the official ones, anyhow are an open book.)

Many of the important actors in the official cast of characters, like Dave Canfield, Thor Borreson, and Bob Gann, as well as unofficial figures like John Hunton, Meade Sandercock, Governor Leslie Miller, Bob Rymill, and L. G. Flannery were not available for interview, having passed into the Great Beyond. However, the written record has been so complete and so gratifying that it seems there are few mysteries unsolved.

The prime source of information was the totality of official records at Fort Laramie National Historic Site, including not only current files in the Superintendent's office, but old files stored elsewhere in the Commissary building, plus the body of valuable technical reports on history, archeology, architecture, restoration, furnishings, Master Plans, etc. which are preserved in the area Library, the Research files, or the Curator's office. I cannot congratulate the successive area Superintendents too warmly for their remarkable good sense in seeing to it that these records have been preserved. If this accomplishment seems like nothing out of the ordinary, keep in mind that periodically Superintendents have been admonished to dispose of old records. These actions reflecting a well-intentioned policy of the General Services Administration may have been merited in the case of many agencies, but it has been a disaster in some Park Service areas where, in cases like Yellowstone and Grand Teton, historically valuable records have been mindlessly destroyed because of poorly implemented bureaucratic directives. The Fort Laramie Superintendents should get some special award, in Heaven if not down here, for having the wisdom to ignore the call for arbitrary "Records Disposal," at least until an official park history could be written up! (Furthermore, despite the completion of this PARK HISTORY, there are some categories of administrative records of sufficient value to be kept intact for posterity; we will be glad to cooperate with the current Superintendent in recommending steps to preserve such records.)

The Superintendents and their interpretive staffs who operate the Fort Laramie Historical Association must be commended also for their diligence in preserving and providing hardcover binders and catalog identification for most if not all of the valuable technical reports assembled over the years. If this too sounds like nothing extraordinary, consider the fact that valuable reports of this type from Yellowstone and Grand

Teton, like early wildlife censuses, thermal data, and historical studies, as well as official files, were wiped out by record disposal programs of the 1950s. The technical reports as well as cumulative research files at Fort Laramie comprise the very backbone of the unique and highly admired Fort Laramie Research Program.

This preservation of records at the field area is even more important in view of the fact that Rocky Mountain Regional Office records pertaining to Fort Laramie are so sparse, presumably because such records received from the Midwest Regional Office in 1974 were sparse also. What old records there were in Omaha must have been either destroyed or sent to some remote and inaccessible warehouse.

There were three other documentary archives which were specially helpful on the early phases of park history, often supplementing the Merrill Mattes Memory Bank. The most important of these were the files of the old Midwest Office Regional Historian, accumulated by me from 1946 to 1966, preserved by that office until 1975 when a whole truckload of such records was transferred to the Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Denver (and which, in accordance with agreement between myself and this Region, have now been transferred to appropriate outside research repositories). The correspondence copy file pertaining to Fort Laramie alone is two feet thick, and yielded valuable insights into early Fort Laramie park activity.

The second auxiliary source was the old files at Scotts Bluff National Monument, which yielded important data and clues for the period 1935-1946 when I as Custodian there was also much involved in Fort Laramie promotion, research and management. (It seems that at Scotts Bluff also valuable historical records were providentially preserved despite GSA records disposal directives.)

Among park records the most important single category was the Custodian or Superintendent's Monthly Narrative Reports, 1938 through June, 1966 when this sensible and time-honored method of systematically recording what went on in each park, in chronological sequence, was arbitrarily abolished by the decree of Director George Hartzog for the dubious reasons that the reports were "unnecessary" and took time to prepare. The original wisdom of requiring such reports and the lack of wisdom in abolishing them are amply demonstrated by the fact that through June 1966 the writer had a frame-work of reference for his history, and after that date he had to flounder around in a random way looking for documentary data on everything. Even annual reports were abolished until 1972, so that 1966-1971 are "the dark ages" at Fort Laramie as far as coherent records are concerned. Beginning in 1972 the availability of Annual Reports was a great help, but nothing as helpful as the old Monthly Narrative. Heaven help future writers of Park Histories if such reports are not re-instituted.

Correspondence files and technical reports were also relied on heavily, of course, to fill in details; I estimate that I plowed through 40 linear feet of accumulated flat files and reports, for 1938-1977, to make sure that nothing of importance was omitted. (Fortunately all or most of the correspondence generated during the Coordinating Superintendency, 1938-1951, was transferred to the area from Rocky Mountain National Park.)

In addition to the above-mentioned official and semi-official records pertaining to the Park Service period, stress must be placed on records which threw light on the pre-park period. The most important of these sources were the extensive records of the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming, 1927-1951, which are to be found in the Archives Division of the Wyoming Archives and Historical Department in Cheyenne. These which fill two sizeable cardboard boxes, plus several reels of microfilm, are indispensable in throwing

light on early efforts to save Fort Laramie, as well as the final successful push of 1936-1937. For like reasons, correspondence of local exponents L. G. Flannery and Robert Rymill, made available by surviving members of their families, were invaluable. Crucially important for the period of "The Crusade" were local newspapers, principally the Guernsey Gazette, the Fort Laramie Scout, and the Torrington Telegram. Since copies of these newspapers are incomplete locally, microfilm copies of fairly complete runs in the research department of the Wyoming Historical Department at Cheyenne proved to be vitally important.

While the completeness of the records at the Fort made it unnecessary to go to Washington, D.C. to explore National Park Service records in the National Archives, there were problems relating to puzzling events leading up to the Act of Establishment of the National Monument which required that I correspond with the Archives. I had the good fortune to get in touch with a keenly conscientious staff archivist back there who was able to supply me with missing links in the chain of events in the Director's Office and the meetings of the National Parks Advisory Board.

There is no evidence that anyone, any scholar, any historian, or whoever prior to myself ever searched any of the above records, Federal, State, or personal, in an effort to record aspects of Fort Laramie civilian history, either the pre-park or the park restoration periods. This was really plowing virgin territory and, while it was work, it was also fun.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the unselfish and whole-hearted assistance I received from all staff members at the Fort, in digging out files, assembling data, and making facilities available during those extended periods when I was working there. In particular I want to thank Lois Woodard, Beth Eaton, and Lew Eaton for patiently answering questions and scrabbling around for elusive facts. I thank ex-Superintendent Maeder, Historian Frank Sarles and Programmer George Fisher of the Regional Office for being instrumental in launching this project in the first place, and requesting me to undertake it. This has been a long and laborious job but withal a wonderful journey back into nostalgia.

Merrill J. Mattes
Littleton, Colorado
December, 1977

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

One of the most memorable shrines in Western America is to be found in Eastern Wyoming, at the junction of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers. Here preserved as a National Historic Site are the restored remains of Old Fort Laramie, 1834-1890. Perhaps no other place equals its star role in the long epic of frontier history. Few others equal it as a vivid reminder of a heroic past.

Serving successively as log stockade, adobe trading post, and evolving military post, Fort Laramie was a classic setting for the colorful pageant of the West. Explorers, trappers, traders, missionaries, emigrants, freighters, Pony Express riders, stage drivers, cowboys, and homesteaders, as well as soldiers and Indians, all perceived Fort Laramie whether camp-ground, way-station, provision point, fortification, or temporary home as a unique island of civilization in the Big Sky wilderness, where the Great Plains merge with the Rocky Mountains.

The key to Fort Laramie's importance was its strategic location on the great central continental migration corridor via the Platte and North Platte Rivers to South Pass. By tradition this is most commonly known as the Oregon Trail.

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter II: FUR TRAPPERS DISCOVER THE OREGON TRAIL

American and French-Canadian beaver hunters were the first men of European origin to explore the headwaters of the North Platte. The first visit to the mouth of Laramie Fork that can be documented was that of seven men of the American Fur Company led by Robert Stuart, taking dispatches from the new post of Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River to St. Louis, by way of Jackson's Hole, South Pass, and the Platte. On December 22, 1812 Stuart noted in his journal that here "a well wooded stream apparently of considerable magnitude came in from the South West." He also referred to buffalo, antelope, and wild horses in this region. The Stuart party, compelled to winter near present Torrington, Wyoming, is credited with the effective discovery of South Pass and the near-level Platte River route which led to this natural mountain gateway.

Several geographical names attest to the early infiltration here of French-Canadians, among them one "Goche" who has become immortalized as the namesake of present Goshen County. Another was a shadowy figure commonly identified as Jacques Laramie or Laramie.

According to an 1831 report by Indian Agent John Dougherty at Fort Leavenworth this was "J. Loremy, a free man" killed in 1821 by Arapahoe Indians "on the Platte", presumably near the river and later fort which now bear his name. The euphonious "Laramie" has also been bestowed on other features of Wyoming, notably the county which contains the State Capital, the city which boasts the State University, and the mountain which dominates the horizon west of the fort.

In 1823 Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, and other enterprising Americans in the employ of William Ashley of St. Louis, going over land from the Upper Missouri, rediscovered South Pass and the lush beaver country in Green River drainage, west of the Continental Divide. In 1824 a small party of "mountain men" under Thomas Fitzpatrick cached furs near Independence Rock and hiked down the Platte to Fort Atkinson on the Missouri River (north of present Omaha), arriving in scarecrow condition. Their glowing account of beaver riches in the Rockies and the merits of the rediscovered Platte River route prompted Ashley to mount an expedition up the Platte to explore the Utah Canyon country, 1824-1825. In the spring, at Henry's Fork of the Green, he inaugurated the large-scale exploitation of the beaver which became known as the rendezvous system. Thereafter for 16 years St. Louis traders would send supply trains up the Platte to the annual

rendezvous of the trappers and traders for purposes of riotous celebration and trade, most often in the valleys of the Upper Green or Wind Rivers. In 1826 the first wheeled vehicle, a small mounted cannon in the caravan of Captain Benjamin Bonneville, rumbled past the future fort site en route to a rendezvous at Salt Lake. That same year Ashley sold out to a famous trio, Jed Smith, William Sublette and David Jackson, who made history with their heroic explorations of the Far West while captaining fur brigades.

In 1830 Sublette brought the first wagon caravan up the Platte, instead of the usual pack train. At Wind River he and his partners sold out to Bridger, Fitzpatrick and others, who were soon confronted with competition from other outfits, principally Astor's powerful American Fur Company. In 1832 William Sublette and Robert Campbell formed a trading partnership, contracting to supply others at the rendezvous. In 1834 they built the first Fort on the Laramie.

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Fort Laramie

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter III: FORT WILLIAM, THE FIRST FORT LARAMIE

Sublette and Campbell saw hand-writing on the wall. With intense competition the supply of beaver pelts was declining; at the same time silk hats were replacing beaver hats on Eastern markets. The salvation of the fur trade would be the vast buffalo herds of the Plains, and this dictated the need for a strong fixed post for the storage of robes. The choice of a site for the new establishment seemed foreordained. "Laramais' Point," named in their trading license, had many natural advantages as well as being roughly equi-distant from the Missouri River steamboat landings and the Upper Green River. This inspired the birth of Fort Laramie, which would soon become the capital of a fur trade empire, rivalled in importance only by Bent's Fort on the Santa Fe Trail, and Fort Union on the Upper Missouri.

On May 30, 1834, Sublette and company reached "Laramie's Fork." On the following day they laid the foundation logs. One of the party, William Anderson, reveals that the name "Fort William" was in honor of the common name of himself and Sublette. En route to St. Louis later in the season Lucien Fontenelle reported to Pierre Chouteau Jr. of the American Fur Company the completion here of a substantial palisaded fort as a "central place for the Sioux and Cheyenne trade in buffalo robes."

In 1835 there were several noteworthy events at Fort William or "Fort William on the Laramie." Among those arriving with the supply train that spring were the famed missionaries Marcus Whitman and Samuel Parker who referred to "the fort of the Black Hills," an allusion to the dark forest cover of distant Laramie Peak. The scandalized Reverend Parker also mentions the free use of "ardent spirits," the result of which "not infrequently terminates with a catastrophe of some kind." He also describes a visit by 2,000 Oglala Sioux who brought skins, moccasins, and belts to exchange for knives, awls, combs and vermilion, and "imitated brute beasts" in performing their buffalo dance.

Also in 1835 Sublette and Campbell sold Fort William to Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick and Milton Sublette. Within a year these veteran mountain men were persuaded to relinquish their interest to the American Fur Company, which would thereafter be represented locally by such fur trade stalwarts as Fontenelle, James Bordeaux, and Andrew Drips. Pierre Chouteau, Jr. at St Louis headquarters became the guiding spirit of this famous enterprise.

The 1836 overland caravan, led by Fitzpatrick, escorted the first white women to cross the continent, Narcissa Whitman and Elizabeth Spalding, missionary wives who enjoyed the hospitality of the fort. They considered chairs with "buffalo skin bottoms" a special luxury. At the Green River Rendezvous the genteel ladies caused a sensation among the wild trappers and Indians.

In 1837 Sir William Drummond Stewart, a Scotch nobleman, was a guest, accompanied by the artist, Alfred Jacob Miller, whose sketches constitute our only pictorial record of Fort William. In his notes Miller describes the fort as

. . . of quadrangular form, with block houses at diagonal corners to sweep the fronts in case of attack.

Over the front entrance is a large block house 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 block house, 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 view [of the interior, reproduced herewith] is from the great entrance looking west and embraces more than half the court. . . Indians and traders. . . gather here from all quarters; from the Gila at the south, the Red River at the north, and the Columbia River west. . . There are Canadian trappers. . . Kentuckians, Missourians, and Down Easters. A saturnalia is held the first day and some excesses committed. But after this the trading goes briskly forward.

Later visitors of record include famous mountain men like Kit Carson, Joe Meek and Osborne Russell, the explorer-missionary Father De Smet, and Augustus Johann Sutter, a Swiss whose ranch on the Sacramento River would become the scene of James Marshall's electrifying discovery of California gold in 1848.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter IV: FORT JOHN, THE SECOND FORT LARAMIE

At the time of its founding Fort William enjoyed a monopoly of the trade in the North Platte region. There was no serious threat of competition until 1841 when, much to the consternation of the proprietors, a new fort was built right under their noses, so to speak. This was adobe-walled Fort Platte, on the right bank of the North Platte, just three-fourths of a mile above its junction with the Laramie, almost within rifle-shot of Fort William or, according to several accounts, "about a mile apart." The founder of this rival emporium was brash young Lancaster P. Lupton, who had built the first fort on the South Platte, in present Colorado.

The appearance of this obnoxious neighbor, coupled with the rotting of the log palisades, prompted the American Fur Company to abandon Fort William and build a new establishment nearby. This was a massive structure of adobe or sun-dried brick in the New Mexico style that had already been adapted by Lupton, and involved the importation of native labor from the Southwest. The time of construction is fixed by an eye-witness, missionary Joseph Williams who in the summer of 1841 says that he "went up to a new fort that they were building called Fort Johns [sic]". This name, honoring John B. Sarpy, an officer of the company, was used consistently in official correspondence but, as in the case of Fort William, the name Fort Laramie prevailed in popular usage.

For a few years rivalry between the two posts was intense. Both sent out trading parties to distant Indian camps with goods, such as blankets, tobacco, mirrors, bells, and glass beads. However, the principal trade item was alcohol transported in wooden casks lashed to pack mules, and dispensed in diluted form in tin cups. It was illegal to sell liquor to Indians but this law was flouted in the cut-throat competition.

For a while both of these bizarre establishments thrived from the trade in buffalo robes, and each spring they would send forth to St. Louis wagon caravans or flat-boat flotillas down the Platte. Navigation of this fickle stream, which depended upon the spring rise from melting mountain snow, was a treacherous business, and cargoes commonly had to be beached and cached or retrieved by wagons. The year 1845 was a particularly bad year for boats. This coupled with the rigors of the 600-mile overland trip to Missouri River posts via the Platte, led the company to develop a new 300-mile wagon road northeastward to Fort Pierre, in present South Dakota, where company steamboats would pick up the cargo. Another significant development that year was the abandonment of Fort Platte by Pratte and Cabanne, Lupton's successors, leaving the field

mainly to the American Fur Company.

There are a few eye-witness descriptions of Fort John, notably by Rufus Sage in 1841, Lieutenant John C. Fremont in 1846, and Captain Howard Stansbury in 1849, but the most vivid one is by the young Bostonian, historian Francis Parkman, whose visit there in 1846 is to be found in his classic work, The Oregon Trail:

Fort Laramie well-nigh monopolizes the Indian trade of this region. . . it suppresses all opposition. 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 . . . fort. . . externally is of an oblong form. . . The roofs of the apartments within, which are built close to 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 store-rooms, 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. . .

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter V: EARLY MIGRATIONS TO OREGON AND UTAH

Prior to 1841 Fort Laramie visitors consisted exclusively of trappers and traders, Plains Indians, missionaries bound for the Northwest, and random adventurers. That year, however, saw the arrival of the Bidwell-Bartleson expedition, the first avowed settlers bound for the west coast. They were followed in 1842 by the White-Hastings expedition to Oregon, the journal of which mentions "Fort Laramy, the great central trading post of the American Fur Company." Both of these expeditions utilized the services of Thomas Fitzpatrick, veteran mountain man, as guide.

Though Oregon (present Oregon, Washington, and Idaho) was still British territory, it was claimed by the United States, and Americans interested in settling there were spurred by stories of its natural wealth. The year 1843 saw the first great migration to Oregon, about 1,000 persons led by the zealous Marchus Whitman and Peter Burnett, who would become the first American governor of California. They crossed the swollen Laramie by improvised ferry, and obtained supplies at the post.

Another 1,000 Oregonians paused here to camp in 1844. Among them was James Clyman, one of Fitzpatrick's starving trappers who had visited the virgin site in 1824, and now beheld "the white battlements of Fort Larrimie."

The trickle of migration to Oregon became a respectable stream of 5,000 souls in 1845, and for twenty years thereafter Fort Laramie would witness the annual emigrant cavalcade, at times becoming a flood of humanity moving westward on wagon wheels. Camping, repairing equipment, buying provisions at the fort, and mingling with its swarthy employees and gaudily clad Indian customers became standard trail procedure.

In 1846 Edwin Bryant noted "two brass swivels" defending its gate. He also observed that buffalo meat and venison formed the staple diet of fort personnel. Another emigrant party pausing at the fort that year was the Reed-Donner wagon train, destined for disaster in the snows of the Sierra Nevadas because of fatal misjudgements on their choice of routes west of South Pass. From the parapet of the fort Parkman observed the arrival of this ill-starred company, as well as the barbaric spectacle of Sioux Indian bands with naked warriors, gaily attired squaws, horse-drawn travois, and packs of noisy children and dogs.

In 1847 Brigham Young led his band of Mormon Pioneers (143 men, 3 women, 2 children, 72 wagons) west from Winter Quarters at Council Bluffs to the new Zion which became Salt Lake City. Fort Laramie was the only sign of civilization on their 1,000 mile journey. On June 1 Young and a delegation of elders crossed the Platte by their own expedition boat, explored the ruins of Fort Platte, and then visited Fort Laramie where they plied Bordeaux for information. Later they ferried the wagons over by rented flat-boat and, while the company rested and made repairs, clerk Thomas Bullock and official journalist William Clayton measured both adobe structures.

In addition to 2,000 Mormons who followed the Pioneers later in 1847 an estimated 5,000 non-Mormons travelled to Oregon. In 1848 there was a decline in the numbers of "gentiles" going to Oregon, but an upsurge of 4,000 "Saints" to Salt Lake.

There was a moderately brisk business with the emigrants in provisioning, ferrying, and exchange of stock and equipment, but the Indian trade at the fort continued to decline. Conditions were now ripe for the retirement of the American Fur Company from the scene, and the advent of a new owner better attuned to the music of Manifest Destiny.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter VI:

FORT LARAMIE, THE U. S. ARMY, AND THE FORTY-NINERS

For some years the Government had considered establishing military posts along the Oregon Trail for the protection of emigrants, and the site at Laramie Fork had been recommended by Lieutenant Fremont. In December, 1845, such action was proposed by President James K. Polk and in May 1846 Congress approved "An Act to provide for raising a regiment of Mounted Riflemen, and for establishing military stations on the route to Oregon." Early in 1848 Fort Kearny was established on the south bank of the Platte near the head of Grand Island. Later that year news of the discovery of gold in California raced through the country like wildfire, and the resulting fevered preparations to trek westward the next spring increased the urgency of extending the chain of forts.

In March, 1849, Adjutant General Roger Jones directed General D. E. Twiggs at St. Louis to carry out establishment of a second post "at or near Fort Laramie, a trading station belonging to the American Fur Company." Lieutenant 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.

Major W. J. Sanderson with 4 officers and 58 men of Company E left Fort Leavenworth early in May and arrived at the Laramie on June 16 without incident. On June 27 he reported to the Adjutant-General that after making a thorough reconnaissance within a radius of 75 miles of the trading post 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 Company, for \$4,000.

On June 22 Major Osborne Cross and Private George Gibbs, with a contingent of Mounted Riflemen en route to take over Fort Hall on Snake River, in present Idaho, paused at Laramie Fork where they found Company E encamped opposite the adobe fort while Woodbury was scouting the territory. Both thought the situation there "forlorn and destitute of interest." However, Sanderson reported that good 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. On August 12 the two officers and 53 men of Company G, Sixth Infantry, completed the garrison and joined in the work of preparing quarters. While purchase of the adobe post provided the Army with temporary shelter for men and supplies, it was decrepit and infested with vermin. Before the ink was dry on the purchase agreement Sanderson had the entire command employed in cutting and hauling timber and burning lime. Stone was quarried and a horse-powered sawmill placed in operation. By winter a two-story block of officers quarters, a block of soldier quarters, a bakery, and two stables had been pushed to completion. Thus began Fort Laramie's forty years as a frontier command post of the United States Army.

The takeover, however fraught with portent, was but an incident in the epic of the Forty-Niners, the first wave of humanity magnetized by California gold. Fortunately some of these Argonauts kept diaries and from them we learn something of their reaction to this oasis of civilization in a region viewed at that time as "the Great American Desert."

Among those emigrants ahead of the Mounted Riflemen was William Kelly who was not impressed by the adobe fort: "My glowing fancy vanished before the wretched reality a miserable, cracked, dilapidated enclosure. . . some of it propped with beams of timber which an enemy had only to kick away and down would come the whole structure." J. G. Bruff, who has left one of the few emigrant sketches of the fort, owned that "it had suffered much from time and neglect." On the other hand Alonzo Delano was impressed by its "neat white-washed walls," while Joseph Wood thought that it presented "quite an imposing appearance as you approach it." Some noted that the place was inhabited mainly by Indian squaws and half-breed children, the families of employees absent on their annual trek eastward with furs.

On June 16 Isaac Wistar observed the coming of "a U. S. Government train of one company of Dragoons under Major Saunders." On that same day E. B. Farnham reported that "the sound of the cannon that was fired to greet the arrival of Major Sanderson came booming from the fort." Although sale of the fort was not consummated until the 26th, there must have been an early understanding for on June 17, reports Wistar, "the stars and stripes went up on the fort this morning, receiving our hearty cheers."

A total of 30,000 Forty-Niners has been estimated, every one of whom paused at or passed Fort Laramie, the only fixed establishment between Fort Kearny and Salt Lake City. By late July the emigrant tide had subsided when Colonel Aeneas Mackay, Quartermaster Corps, arrived for an inspection. As to the adobe fort he reported that,

. . . it is a good deal in decay and needs repairs. Those the Engineers are employed in making and in addition have commenced the construction of quarters outside the walls. . .

Since my arrival here I have been much more favorably impressed with the advantage of this station than I had ever expected to be. . . In comparison with Fort Kearny it goes far beyond it in respect to almost every requisite. . . I have no doubt that it will become a most comfortable and desirable station.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter VII: THE GREAT CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

The Forty-Niners were but the first wave of covered wagon emigrants stampeding toward the California mines. The following five years, 1850-1854, saw even larger hordes of Argonauts that all but swamped the little Army post on the Laramie. The biggest waves were in 1850 and 1852 when the migrant populations exceeded 50,000 each season. In the other three years of this frantic half-decade the combined numbers approximated another 50,000. From 1855 to 1858, when the California gold fever had subsided, there was perhaps a total of 25,000 pilgrims who rolled past the fort. Thus the total migration up the North Platte for the decade beginning in 1849 exceeded 200,000, a stupendous cavalcade witnessed by the tiny garrison.

Much of our knowledge of Fort Laramie in the 1850s is derived from journals and letters kept by a surprising number of emigrants themselves. Indeed, to a very large extent the history of the fort during this period is essentially its unique role in serving, in various ways, this transient population during its Exodus from "the States," across the vast wilderness known vaguely as Indian Territory, to "the Promised Land."

Fort Laramie was between 600 and 700 miles from the various Missouri River "jumping-off places," the exact distance depending on whether your point of origin was the Council Bluffs area (including Omaha after 1854), Table Rock (later Nebraska City), St. Joseph. or Independence, Missouri. While Fort Kearny on the Platte, where all trails converged, was viewed as the gateway to the Great Plains, Fort Laramie, with Laramie Peak looming in the distance, was looked upon as the gateway to the Mountains. Here one left the relatively level North Platte Valley of Nebraska and embarked on more rugged terrain, climbing toward South Pass on the Continental Divide. For many the brave little post on the Laramie was the only civilized place encountered between Fort Kearny and the West Coast. The sight, with its aura of settlement, uniformed soldiers, and American flag flying, aroused nostalgic emotions. Aware of the long dangerous journey across mountains and deserts ahead, leaving the fort seemed to one emigrant "like parting anew from all that was hallowed on earth."

The emigrant season at Fort Laramie was short, a maximum of 45 days. The timing of one's visit there hinged on two factors in an equation of survival. One left the Missouri River jumping-off place no sooner than the spring rains could green up the prairies for vital pasture for mules and oxen. This could be any time the last half of April. Near the other end of the journey was the barrier of the Sierra Nevadas; if you got

there too late after your exhausting traverse of the arid Great Basin you could die of exposure in October snows. So you aimed to reach Hangtown (later Placerville) in the Mother Lode country no later than mid-September. Averaging 12 to 15 miles per day, including rest stops, over the total distance of near 2,000 miles, this meant a journey of four to five months, depending on the fortunes or misfortunes of the trail. This also meant that in 35 to 40 days from your starting point you should be at Fort Laramie, where you could rest, gird up, and regroup for the ordeal remaining. Thus the emigrant travel season at Fort Laramie was in the range of May 20 to the 4th of July, with the climax period the middle of June.

From 1849 to 1852 the dreaded Asiatic cholera was rampant, with thousands of victims buried in hastily dug shallow graves along the roadside between Fort Kearny and Fort Laramie. Also, there was a high casualty rate from trailside accidents, such as drownings, the careless use of firearms, and injuries from ornery mules and oxen. Because of overloads there was wholesale abandonment of excess baggage and equipment at Fort Laramie, and heavy wagons were often reduced to two-wheel carts. There was also the occasional abandonment of stricken fellow travellers, some of whom found a resting place in the old fort cemetery.

While some emigrants disposed of their surpluses here, others were in need of provisions, principally grain, flour, bread, and other staples, which the Post Quartermaster was able to supply some times in rationed quantities, and the post blacksmith did a land-office business. However, the busiest place was undoubtedly the post sutler's store where emigrant coins and valuables were exchanged for canned goods, liquor, patent medicines, lotions, muslin, subonnets, and other items which the emigrants needed for survival.

Another busy functionary at the fort was the post adjutant, who assigned details to the Officer of the Day to keep tabs on the migration. There is evidence that Guard Reports were kept which identified wagon trains, but unfortunately these priceless records have not survived. There was also an official emigrant register, evidently tabulated by soldiers inspecting or interrogating emigrants upon arrival. None of these registers have been found, either, but there is clear evidence of them in allusions by journalists. In 1850, for example, John Wood states that his Captain "gave a list of the numbers of cattle and wagons in our camp, a customary thing." In 1852 Bernard Bloemker states that "they stop every wagon, and check upon the numbers of oxen, horses, wagons and men in each." Several others give actual figures compiled. Henry Stine's entry for July 5, 1850 gives the season's totals to that date: "33,171 men, 803 women, 1,094 children, 7,472 mules, 30,616 oxen, 22,742 horses, 8,998 wagons, 5,270 cows."

No account of emigrant facilities at Fort Laramie would be complete without reference to the two main trail approaches and river crossings. The heaviest travel westward followed the south bank of the Platte and the North Platte, via Ash Hollow. Approaching Fort Laramie, this Oregon Trail mainline branched into several crossing points or fords, the principal one being downstream from the military post. In June the Laramie was apt to be in flood, causing wagons to capsize and emigrants to be swept to their deaths. There is evidence of a flat-boat shuttle across the Laramie on occasion, but most crossings were "cold turkey" until 1852 when a crude toll bridge was erected. However, a solid flood-proof bridge did not materialize until 1859.

All of the migration on the north bank of the Platte, out of Council Bluffs-Omaha, had to cross that dangerous river to reach the fort. Most everyone did that until 1850, under the impression that the only feasible route westward from that point was on the south side of the river. That year, however, the situation changed. A ferry was installed, which reduced the fatalities for those who crossed, but antagonized others

because of the toll charge. With this incentive, several emigrant parties blazed a tough but negotiable north side trail. By 1852 continuing on the north side became the accepted thing to do, although many "north-siders" would make side-trips to the fort to look for mail or supplies.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter VIII: **THE INDIAN PROBLEM: TREATY AND MASSACRE**

Contrary to popular fiction writers the Plains Indians were not in the habit of attacking wagon trains, at least during the main period of migrations up the North Platte, 1841-1858. Because of chronic rumors in the border towns about the Indian menace, emigrants were wont to arm themselves heavily and practice the formation of defensive corrals, but actual sieges were rare. In practice the emigrants came to look upon the natives as, at worst, a nuisance because of their habits of begging and pilfering. At best they were a curious part of the scenery, particularly at Fort Laramie where they had tipi encampments, and buried their dead in tree scaffolds. As to the Indians, they stoically observed the white nation on wheels, hoping that the Platte region would soon revert to its accustomed solitude. But when the great migrations continued year after year, disrupting the buffalo herds, unrest smoldered and finally broke into flame.

In 1845 the Government had sent five companies of Dragoons under Colonel S. W. Kearny on a peaceful mission to Fort Laramie to impress the natives with American might, and to discourage depredations against Oregon Trail travellers. In 1847 Thomas Fitzpatrick, veteran of the fur trade and trail guide, became the first agent for Indians of "the Upper Platte and the Arkansas." Aware of the mounting tension he urged a treaty council to ensure the peace. Early in 1851 Congress appropriated \$100,000 for such a purpose. This led to the great Fort Laramie Treaty Council in September of that year, unique in western annals because of its immense size and the number of different tribes from all over the Northern Plains, including hereditary enemies such as Cheyenne and Shoshone, Sioux and Crow, who attended peacefully. Superintendent of Indian Affairs D. D. Mitchell, Jim Bridger with the Shoshone, and the Catholic missionary Father De Smet with Mandan, Gros Ventres, and others tribesmen from the Upper Missouri, were among other white notables present. The countless ponies accompanying an estimated 10,000 Indians required much forage, and grass around the fort was so depleted, that the commissioners decided that the vast assemblage should move 30 miles east, to the meadows at the mouth of Horse Creek, near Scotts Bluff. There parades of Indian tribes in full regalia were held, oratory flowed, presents were distributed, the pipe of peace was smoked, and a solemn agreement finally reached that peace should reign between red man and white. For promising not to molest Oregon Trail travellers, the Indians would receive annual gifts or "annuities" worth \$50,000.

During the large migration of 1852 all went smoothly, but a serious incident occurred in mid-June of 1853. When a North Platte ferryman, busy with emigrants, refused to transport a party of young Sioux, they seized

the boat, and one of them fired on the soldiers, who recaptured it. Lieutenant H. B. Fleming and 23 men were dispatched to the nearby village of Minniconjou Sioux to arrest the offender. The Indians refused to give him up. In the ensuing exchange of gunfire three Indians were killed. The enraged Sioux then threatened the fort and passing emigrants. Through skillfull diplomacy Captain Richard Garnett, post commander, was able to calm them down and persuade them to accept their annuities for that year, but the seeds of mistrust had been planted.

Until August 18 the migrations of 1854 saw little trouble with Indians. On that day, eight miles east of the fort, a Mormon caravan passed a village of some 1,000 Brule Sioux waiting for their annuities, and a cow strayed into the village where it was promptly butchered for meat by a hungry Indian. Upon complaint of the aggrieved owner, Captain Fleming sent Lieutenant John Grattan, Sixth Infantry, with a half-breed interpreter and 28 enlisted men to arrest the offender. After a brief parley, a fusillade by the soldiers resulted in the death of Chief Conquering Bear, and the retaliatory massacre of Grattan, the interpreter and his entire command. The Indians then pillaged Bordeaux's nearby trading post and helped themselves to goods stored at the American Fur Company post three miles upriver. The Fort Laramie garrison was then threatened but the Indians moved away before inflicting any casualties there. Thus the harmony of 1851 was destroyed and 25 years of intermittent warfare began.

In 1855 most Indian leaders, fearing reprisals for the Grattan affair, brought their bands into Fort Laramie in accordance with orders received by Agent Thomas Twiss to round up all those "friendly and peaceable." Unfortunately the Brule Sioux under Little Thunder were off on a buffalo hunt north of the Platte. In August a force of 600 cavalymen under General W. S. Harney rode westward from Fort Kearny to punish the Sioux. On September 2 the expedition arrived at Ash Hollow, 150 miles below Fort Laramie, and scouts located the "hostiles" in camp six miles north. Early the next morning the troops attacked the village from two sides, killing 86 Indians, wounding countless others, and capturing a large number of women and children. After burying the dead, treating the survivors, and destroying the Indian equipage, Harney continued up the Platte to Fort Laramie. After lecturing the cowed "friendlies" there, he reinforced the garrison, then with 450 men marched northwestward to Fort Pierre on the Missouri.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter X: UPRISING OF THE SIOUX AND CHEYENNE

The outbreak of Civil War in April, 1861, with the call to arms of both Union and Confederate forces, led to the reduction of western garrisons. By the end of that year Fort Laramie had only a skeleton crew. With the transfer of the overland mail and stage lines to the Central route on July 1, offering juicy targets for Indians on the prowl, the situation along the North Platte became double precarious. However, the first serious disturbances did not occur until the spring of 1862 when Sioux raided stations west of the fort, running off horses and scalping the tenders. To protect tenuous lines of communication vital to the Union, the Adjutant-General ordered volunteer cavalry companies to the western theatre. In response, Utah and California militia under General P. E. Connor assembled at Camp Douglas near Salt Lake City, while Colonel William O. Collins arrived at Fort Laramie in May with a battalion of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry. It was his unenviable duty to guard the route between Courthouse Rock and South Pass, a distance of over 500 miles. It was infested with mounted warriors who made random raids on mail and telegraph stations. The thin blue line seemed powerless to intercept the raiders or to chase them down after their devilry.

News of a great uprising by their Sioux cousins in Minnesota, with the deaths of hundreds of settlers there, bolstered the arrogance of the Plains tribes. Anticipating open warfare, the Army ordered the construction of a series of new fortified posts. Among these were Camp Rankin (later Fort Sedgwick) near Julesburg, Mud Springs near Courthouse Rock, Fort Mitchell at Scotts Bluff and, to the west, Platte Bridge and Deer Creek Stations.

In the spring and summer of 1864 there were large-scale Indian attacks on stations and ranches in Nebraska and Colorado, disrupting all travel. Then came the unauthorized surprise attack in November by volunteer troops under Colonel Chivington upon a Cheyenne-Arapahoe camp at Sand Creek near Fort Lyon in southeast Colorado. The virtual massacre of around 250 men, women and children, far from squelching the Indian spirit, precipitated a powerful and vengeful alliance of all hostile tribes.

In January 1865 Sioux and Cheyenne warriors focussed their wrath on the key trail junction of Julesburg, where they sacked the town and killed a bout 20 soldiers and civilians. After ravaging the South Platte they started a retreat northward. When Colonel Collins learned of the advance on Mud Springs he assembled a picked force from Forts Laramie and Mitchell, reaching Mud Springs in time to aid in its successful defense

against a siege by massed warriors, who then withdrew to Powder River.

With the end of the Civil War in the spring, and the release of regular troops to replace volunteers, the Government laid plans to restore order to the Plains. However, the vastness of the desolate terrain, Indian aggressiveness and agility, and poor initial organization and execution by the Army resulted in 1865 being a banner year for the Red Man.

When Colonel Collins was assigned to establish Fort Collins, Colorado he was replaced by the ill-starred Colonel Moonlight. His order to execute by hanging two Oglala Sioux who voluntarily brought in some white captives added to the fury of the Sioux, who now stepped up their hit-and-run tactics against isolated stations. In June Colonel Moonlight ordered that a large village of Brule Sioux, encamped at Fort Laramie as friendlies, be transferred to Fort Kearny to reduce the expense of feeding them. Marching orders were given to an escort of the Seventh Iowa Cavalry. At Horse Creek, as if by pre-arranged signal, the Brules turned upon their escort, killing Captain Fouts and several enlisted men. They escaped across the river to join the hostiles despite cavalry efforts to intercept them.

Next came the Platte Bridge fight, another disaster because the troops and civilians involved were simply overwhelmed by numbers. The station at this crossing of the North Platte was near present Casper, Wyoming, so named for Lieutenant Caspar Collins, son of Colonel Collins, who died here in a heroic effort to reach and escort an approaching Army supply train. The hostiles swarmed over and decimated the would-be rescuers, then picked off a detail assigned to repair the torn telegraph line, and finally surrounded and annihilated the approaching wagoneers and soldier guards.

Late in the year a campaign against the hostiles, known as the Powder River Expedition, finally got under way with a force of 2,500 men, directed by General Connor. Three columns were to converge in Powder River country, one from Omaha and one going directly north from Fort Laramie met west of the Black Hills. The third, under Connor, marched about 100 miles up the Platte from the fort, then north to the headwaters of the Powder where Camp Connor was established. Descending the Powder, he destroyed a village of harmless Arapahoe, the only Indians he could find. The other columns barely escaped starvation and massacre by the Sioux. The expedition straggled back to Fort Laramie, the crowning failure of a dismal year for the U. S. Army.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter XI: RED CLOUD'S WAR

Despite the challenge to the Army by the daring "Cossacks of the Plains," a peace party with a benign attitude toward the rampaging nomads gained ascendancy in Washington. In 1866, therefore, instead of a campaign to crush the Indians there was mounted a peace offensive, with Fort Laramie as the setting. Runners were sent out from the fort in January to hostile camps with invitations to a great council to be held in June.

In March of that year Colonel Henry Maynadier, the Fort Laramie commander, reported a good omen. Spotted Tail, head chief of the Brules, brought in the body of his daughter for burial among the whites because that was her express wish. In a ceremony which contained all the pageantry of the military and the primitive tradition of the Sioux her body was placed in a coffin on a raised platform on the plateau beyond the fort cemetery.

The peace commissioners assembled on June 1 with the principal chiefs of the Sioux and Cheyenne. Although some 3,000 Indians showed up for the ceremonies there were still some die-hard factions missing. Nevertheless the delegates present signed the treaty and the usual presents of gay-colored cloth, mirrors, cheap jewelry, peace medals, and some weapons were distributed. The treaty had a provision, not clearly explained, which permitted passage of whites over the Bozeman Trail, the new road from Fort Laramie northwestward to Virginia City and the recently discovered Montana gold mines.

While ceremonies were still in progress, Colonel Henry B. Carrington arrived on the scene with 2,000 troops, heavily armed and equipped to set up a chain of posts along the Bozeman Trail. To Red Cloud, leader of the rebels, such armed occupation would make a mockery of any peace treaty, and he withdrew in fury. Construction of the new forts in Sioux territory amounted to a declaration of war. Thus the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1866 was broken faster than any other treaty on record.

On June 17 Carrington marched north with the Eighteenth Regiment of Infantry, plus cavalry units and hundreds of mule teams hauling vast quantities of equipment and supplies. After garrisoning Camp Connor on Powder River, later relocated as Fort Reno, he moved toward the Bighorn Mountains, and in their

shadow on Piney Creek built an outsize log stockade called Fort Phil Kearny. Shortly thereafter he directed the establishment of Fort C. F. Smith at the crossing of the Bighorn River in Crow country, south-central Montana. Soon the environs of both these new forts became scenes of almost daily Indian attacks on traders, wagon trains, wood-cutting parties, and troops, with many scalps lifted. The tragic climax came on December 21 when Captain William Fetterman, disobeying orders, led 80 men into an ambush near Phil Kearny, and all were killed and mutilated by warriors led by Red Cloud and Crazy Horse. Alerted by Scout "Portugee" Phillips, Fort Laramie troops under General Wessels rode through sub-zero weather to relieve the garrison. In 1867 the Army scored victories in the Wagon Box Fight near Phil Kearny and the Hayfield Fight near C. F. Smith.

The suffering and heroism enacted along the Bozeman Trail was destined to have little impact on the course of history because of larger events elsewhere. First was the westward progress of the Union Pacific Railroad, reaching Cheyenne in 1867. The completion of this modern "Overland Route" would lessen the importance of the Oregon Trail or Platte route, and thereby make it less imperative to dispossess the Indians of the Northern Plains. Secondly, again the "doves" in Congress prevailed over the "hawks." Accordingly, an Act of July, 1867 set up a new Commission to make peace, once and for all.

Arriving at Fort Laramie via Cheyenne in November, the Commission under General W. T. Sherman was dismayed to find no Sioux to parley with as planned. Red Cloud refused to come in until the garrisons at Forts Reno, Phil Kearny and C. F. Smith were withdrawn. The Commission acceded and in March, 1868 the President ordered their abandonment. However, it was not until the hated forts were totally evacuated in August, and then burned to the ground by the implacable Red Cloud, that he came in to Fort Laramie to affix the final Indian signature.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 gave the Sioux as a reservation all of what is now South Dakota west of the Missouri River. It also gave them hunting rights in the great expanse north of the North Platte and east of the Bighorn Mountains, designated as unceded Indian lands. The First Red Cloud Agency was established in 1871 on the North Platte, just 25 miles below the fort, at the present Nebraska-Wyoming line. In 1873 it was moved north to a site on White River in northwestern Nebraska.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter XII: BLACK HILLS GOLD AND THE SIOUX CAMPAIGN

Ratification of the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1869, coupled with the completion that year of the first transcontinental railroad, seemed to presage a new era of peace on the Plains, but it again proved to be a fragile peace. There were many scattered hostile actions in the Fort Laramie region, 1869-1873, such as the killing of Lieutenant Levi P. Robinson on a wood-cutting detail near Laramie Peak. Renegades under Sitting Bull in Montana harassed surveyors of the proposed Northern Pacific Railroad. Accordingly, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs recommended the establishment of U. S. military forces at the agencies to preserve law and order, and to prevent the Sioux from straying off their reservations. Furthermore, he enjoined that "any found off be forced in and brought to obedience by the military."

It should have surprised no one that the Sioux at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Agencies were restless, simply because they felt their style somewhat cramped after generations of untrammelled buffalo-hunting and inter-tribal warfare. There was also deep-seated repugnance to suggestions of agriculture, and chronic dissatisfaction with the beef issues. Threatening demonstrations against civilian employees led in 1874 to the establishment of military posts in their midst Fort Robinson at Red Cloud Agency (named for the slain Lieutenant), and Camp Sheridan at the Spotted Tail Agency further east, both linked to the Fort Laramie command post by the old Fort Pierre Trail.

The Fort Laramie Treaty was sabotaged by the discovery of gold in the Black Hills. The motives of the Custer Expedition out of Fort Abraham Lincoln (on the Missouri River, opposite Bismarck, North Dakota) in the spring of 1874 may have been scientific, but the results were cataclysmic. When the excitable Custer sent Scout Charley Reynolds to Fort Laramie to telegraph the news to the world, the wholesale invasion of the Sioux Reservation was bound to follow. In 1875 the Government sent out a second scientific expedition to the Hills, this time from Cheyenne, to make sure the gold was real. Escorted by Fort Laramie troops under Colonel I. R. Dodge, Professor W. P. Jenney of New York prospected the Hills and confirmed the presence of the glittering metal.

When a Commission sent by the Government to Red Cloud Agency failed in its mission to buy back the Black Hills, the Army gave up its efforts to keep prospectors away, large numbers of Sioux and Cheyenne then expressed their anger by withdrawing to Powder River country, to hunt buffalo and plan retribution.

The wayward tribesmen were issued an ultimatum: return to their respective reservations by January 31, 1876 or the Army would take appropriate action. The sullen warriors elected to fight for their freedom.

In the 1876 war against the defiant tribes Fort Laramie played a primary role as a base of operations, supplemented by the new Fort Fetterman at the main North Platte crossing 80 miles upriver. Thus it took on vigorous new life as a staging area for thousands of blue-clad troopers and hundreds of Army supply wagons heading north towards the headwaters of the Powder and other tributaries of the Yellowstone River. In March Colonel J. J. Reynolds left Fort Laramie with cavalry to surprise an encampment of Sioux and Cheyenne on the Little Powder. In June General George Crook led a large force northward to a head-on clash with massed warriors under Crazy Horse. This Battle of the Rosebud was a triumph for the Sioux because Crook was put out of action, unable to effect a junction with General Terry's forces moving south from the Yellowstone. The stage was set for the famous disaster to the Seventh Cavalry on the Little Bighorn.

If Custer's annihilation was the zenith of military glory for the Plains Indians, it was a sun that sank quickly. While the tribes scattered to hunt for food, the Army was given full support for a final solution to the Indian problem. Again Fort Laramie figured in the clean-up campaigns now set in motion. It was the base for General Crook's control of the now subdued Red Cloud Agency, and a successful campaign against Dull Knife's Cheyenne village on Crazy Woman Fork of Powder River. Early in 1877 Crazy Horse himself surrendered, while the incorrigible Sitting Bull fled to Canada. The Government was now able to dictate the formal relinquishment of the Black Hills.

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter XIII: THE CHEYENNE-DEADWOOD STAGE ROAD

Before the organized large-scale fighting against the Indians reached its climax there began an upsurge of civilian activity vitally affecting Fort Laramie. This was the Hegira to the Black Hills and the development of heavy commercial traffic to and from Cheyenne. The historical axis of which Fort Laramie was the fulcrum now did a 90 degree turn, from the east-west orientation of the Old Oregon Trail to the north-south flow of traffic over the new route to the Black Hills.

Fort Laramie's destiny was welded to that of Cheyenne when that "Magic City of the Plains" about 100 miles to the south began as a huddle of shacks springing up at "the end of track," when the Union Pacific construction crews reached that point in 1867. The Sioux wars and the stampede to South Dakota combined to make Cheyenne a great supply depot and jumping-off place for the Black Hills while Fort Laramie became its principal gateway and guardian. This dual role was assured by the construction of a handsome new iron bridge over the North Platte, just in time to accommodate the new wave of Argonauts.

The traditional method of crossing the North Platte, after the often-disastrous wet crossings by early emigrants, was by a precarious Government-operated ferry. Recognizing how much their prosperity depended upon freighting contracts to supply new camps and agencies north of the Platte, and disturbed by competition from a new road north from Sidney, Nebraska (with a timber bridge near Courthouse Rock), Cheyenne business interests agitated for a proper bridge at Fort Laramie. Congress passed a bill in January, 1874, authorizing \$15,000 for this improvement. The successful bidder was the King Bridge Company of Cleveland, Ohio. The fabricated iron girders and plates were shipped by rail to Cheyenne, thence by bull-train to the fort, arriving in February, 1875. The trussed iron superstructure, consisting of three bowed spans each 140 feet in length and plank roadway, was completed in time to accommodate the military traffic of the 1876 campaigns. While the Army was settling accounts with the Sioux and Cheyenne, the clatter of civilian traffic over the marvellous new span reached a crescendo.

In November the Wyoming territorial legislature authorized the survey and designation of a road from Cheyenne via Chugwater Creek and Fort Laramie to Custer City. The firm of Gilman, Salisbury, and Patrick, awarded a monopoly in commercial transportation, pushed the construction of a chain of road ranches or stations, assembled personnel and equipment and, by March 1, 1876, their new line was in

operation. The assemblage of vehicles on the new Black Hills Road included bull-trains, buckboards, spring wagons, anything that would roll. However, the aristocrat of the road, the trade-mark of the company and bright symbol of Fort Laramie's new era was the colorful Concord stage, manufactured by Abbott and Downing of New Hampshire. The vehicle could accommodate nine first-class passengers inside and an equal number on the roof, plus up to 1500 pounds of cargo and luggage. The driver perched up front managed the six horses with reins and the cracking sound of his long whip.

The run to Custer City from Cheyenne was 180 miles, or 266 miles to Deadwood after that fabled gulch became the main attraction. The route from Cheyenne to Fort Laramie followed the Chugwater and Laramie Rivers where there was a series of road ranches. The stop just below the fort was Three Mile Ranch, just off the military reservation, which doubled as a place of entertainment, completed with assorted belles, for off-duty soldiers. At the fort itself, in the west bottoms, the Post Trader was permitted to build a log structure known as the Rustic Hotel, which doubled as the Fort Laramie stage station.

A large part of our inherited imagery of "the Wild West" stems from the epidemic of crime along the Cheyenne-Deadwood Trail. Those who preyed on Black Hills travellers included unreconstructed Indians from the agencies, but most criminal activity was the work of white outlaws. Sometimes there was no way to tell whether a given atrocity was the handiwork of red man or white. While Indian strays killed mainly for revenge, the outlaws were bent on plain stealing, with their killings of company employees and passengers incidental to that main objective. The fine art of highway robbery reached a new peak in their assaults on armored stage-coaches with treasure-boxes of gold heading for Cheyenne. Fort Laramie cavalry patrols were frequently assigned to guard danger spots or track down criminals. Among incidents in the Fort Laramie neighborhood were several killings at the Three Mile Ranch, the lynching of horse-thieves by masked men just north of the iron bridge, and stage hold-ups along Laramie River.

The majority of stage passengers got through intact, as did the gold shipments which sometimes had a value of \$30,000. Among notable patrons were Generals Sherman, Sheridan and Crook, Chiefs Red Cloud and Spotted Tail, and the notorious Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane. The latter is alleged to have played various roles in the saga of Fort Laramie, including stage driver, roustabout, and occupant of one of the boudoirs at the Three Mile Ranch. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was another celebrated visitor of the period, as scout for the Fifth Cavalry.

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter XIV: DECLINE AND ABANDONMENT

Fort Laramie in the 1880s was in marked contrast to the small post that in 1849-1850 had sprouted around the new parade ground adjoining the adobe trading post. As dictated by military exigencies and spasmodic Congressional appropriations the fort structural complex had gradually evolved into a sprawling assemblage of adobe, stone, frame and lime-grout buildings. In an inventory of 1888 about 70 Army buildings and civilian appendages are identified, being the most recent or the most durable of a total of over 180 buildings constructed here between 1849 and 1885.

In its fourth decade as a military post Fort Laramie had assumed the size and somewhat the appearance of a respectable town. Indeed it was a stabilizing influence, resembling a county seat, in a region which was shifting rapidly from its wild frontier character to the beginnings of permanent settlement. Range cattle and cowboys were replacing buffalo and Indians. Mines and ranches became the nuclei of communities sinking roots into the land. Stage lines faded away as new railroads, trunk lines and branches, advanced. But Fort Laramie, guardian of the trails and the precursor of civilization for a vast wilderness, was doomed when that civilization was assured. Even as the fort seemed to grow and achieve its greatest glory as a structural complex, the seeds of its destruction were planted.

During this decade the post, under the successive commands of Colonels Wesley Merritt of the Fifth Cavalry, and John Gibbon and Henry C. Merriam of the Seventh Infantry, had a regular command of of six companies with an average complement of 350 men. However, except for occasional assistance to civil authorities in upholding law and order, field exercises, maneuvers, and target practice, military activity was at low ebb, while grand balls, celebrations, dress parades, theatricals, picnics, pink lemonade, and tree-planting became the dominant preoccupations. This is not the stuff of which epic history is made. Fort Laramie's star, which had shone so brilliantly in the western sky, was on the wane.

In 1886 General J. M. Schofield of the Adjutant-General's Office, noted that the Elkhorn Valley (later the Chicago, Northwestern) Railroad would reach Fort Robinson, but would bypass Fort Laramie. That same year Colonel Merriam acknowledged that, "this post has lost its significance as a military location," and therefore further expenditures for construction and repairs of buildings would not be justified. It appears that the top-level decision to abandon was deferred for three more years because of influence exerted by

Wyoming officials who were reluctant to part with the benefits, both economic and protective, that accrued from the presence of this post in Eastern Wyoming. The inevitable came to pass on August 31, 1889 when General Schofield announced that, "the garrisons of Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory; Fort Hays, Kansas; and Fort Lyon, Colorado will be withdrawn, and the several military posts will be abandoned."

The actual demise of Fort Laramie was spread over a period of one year. From May 1889 to March 1890 various units of the Seventh Infantry were transferred to Fort Logan, Colorado. A detachment from Fort Robinson stripped buildings of doors, windows, fixtures, and accessories. On April 9 Lieutenant C. W. Taylor presided over a public auction of buildings and furniture rejects. On June 10 the War Department issued its final order when it transferred to the Secretary of the Interior the military reservation, and the wood and timber reservation at Laramie Peak, "the same being no longer required for military purposes."

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PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter XV: EVOLUTION OF THE MILITARY POST

There is irony in the fact that Fort Laramie reached its zenith as a structural complex just before being abandoned to its fate. About 65 Army buildings and civilian appendages are accounted for in 1888, the last official inventory of record. An official panoramic photograph of 1889 shows an installation truly impressive in its scope, the size of a respectable town. This sprawling cantonment was a random assemblage of adobe, stone, frame, and concrete buildings, either the most recent or the most durable of a total of over 180 buildings constructed here between 1849 and 1885. Fort Laramie as a three-dimensional historical entity cannot be understood as a static phenomenon of 1889 or any other date. It was a 40-year process of structural evolution.

The best way to visualize the fort in its expanding kaleidoscopic form is by examination of a series of official ground plans and unofficial panoramic pictures, both sketches and photographs, made by various talented visitors to or inhabitants of the fort, that have been collected by research historians. However, some verbal impressions may help also to see Fort Laramie as the stage or rather series of stages where "the pageant of the West" was enacted. Throughout this architectural story there are two common denominators: there was a perpetual shortage of shelter for men and animals, with chronic overcrowding; and what shelter there was seemed to deteriorate rapidly, forever requiring repairs or replacements for which there were never enough funds. Although it inspires us in retrospect because of its illustrious history, Fort Laramie was not a model of military architecture, nor was it ever, by modern standards, a comfortable place to live.

Fort John, the adobe quadrangle bought in 1849 from the fur traders, melted away within a few years but it was around long enough to serve two purposes. Despite its crumbling condition it housed troops the first winter, and saw some service as stable and hospital. Also, its chance northeast-southwest orientation governed that of the new parade ground, around which the main Army structures subsequently clustered. By 1857 when only one wall of this relic remained, the new "military station," wrote Captain Gove, "consists of two or three two-story wooden buildings and about 20 one-story adobe structures, also one or two store-houses, all of which have been built irregularly in every and any direction. There is a large open square for drill and parade purposes." We recognize here the unique and imposing Old Bedlam, a two-company infantry barracks, and several small adobe officers quarters. In his official report of that same year Lieutenant J.G. Kelton also identified frame stables and slabside mud-roofed Quartermaster buildings, all

near collapse.

Ten years later, in the lull between Indian wars, Major E. B. Grimes identified 44 buildings, including 6 officers quarters, 5 soldier barracks with kitchens, 3 cavalry stables. He classified the buildings all the way from good through serviceable, unserviceable and very bad to utterly worthless. In the last category are hovels assigned to laundresses, the band, and the post chaplain, which says something about frontier Army sociology. By this time a sizeable adobe hospital had appeared, and a masonry guardhouse had replaced the primitive frame jail of 1851, the latter being so decrepit that prisoners could easily escape "by means of a hole."

In August 1866 General W. T. Sherman inspected the post and observed that there was "a mixture of all sorts of houses of every conceivable pattern and promise scattered about." The two principal buildings of two stories each (Bedlam and the old Barracks) were so damaged and so rickety in a high wind that the occupants sometimes escaped them to sleep on the open parade. Low buildings of adobe with good roofs, and not too large, were economical and well adapted to the climate but admittedly dark, dusty and ridden with vermin. Adobe or sun-dried brick were made by contract; lime was burned 12 miles off; a saw-mill was erected 50 miles off; and timber was cut and hauled by the soldiers.

A priceless description of the place a year later is afforded by M. Simonin, a French observer with the Indian peace commission: "Seen from the route we followed the fort resembled more a Spanish-American village than a military post of the United States. The barracks, the warehouse, the offices, the officers' quarters are all constructed of stone [sic] and whitewashed with lime." He compares Old Bedlam with a Panama hotel and the traders' new dwelling with a Swiss chalet. Brown's Hotel across the river, made of adobe and logs, was used as an officers mess. He also refers to a "large circular ditch near the Fort."

Other travellers noted this ditch, which had been constructed in 1865 by the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry to connect battery redoubts thrown up as insurance against Indian attack while Colonel Collins was absent with his command on the relief of Mud Springs Station. Evidently the temporary fortification was strung along the plateau and bottoms to the north of the fort, which would have been the section most vulnerable to surprise attack. A more permanent fortification was built by regular troops of the Second Cavalry in 1866, also in the bottoms to the north. This was a roughly quadrangular enclosure of about 2 acres consisting of adobe walls 8 feet high and 3 feet thick. It had two flanking hexagonal blockhouses or bastions, with gun embrasures, and was surrounded by a ditch. When the threat of Indian frontal attack on the fort faded, this structure was used as a corral for the Quartermaster's horses and mules, while the bastions served as teamsters' quarters. Evidence of the frequent wholesale turnover of personnel at the fort is attested to by the fact that in later years some fort residents entertained the belief that this 1866 structure was the 1849 trading post!

Captain Luhn's report of 1870 military structures is valuable because it gives dimensions, number and kinds of rooms, date of construction, material of construction, and present condition. As of that date 4 buildings survived from 1849-1850: Bedlam, the magazine or arsenal, a rough board bakehouse with stone oven, and an adobe post office. (The civilian-operated sutler's store is of course not included in this inventory.) Of the remaining buildings 22 were constructed between 1854 and 1860, and 23 after 1865. The most important buildings in the newest category were two sets of single-story infantry barracks of frame construction, and a two-story frame officers quarters, welcome additions to the parade ground complex.

The Quartermaster Report of 1882 reflects an extensive reconstruction program during the preceding decade, and the disappearance of many obsolete structures. This lists a total of 50 structures of which 23 were frame or rough boards, 10 of concrete, 10 of adobe, 3 of adobe and frame, and 4 of logs, sod or stone. Conditions at this time must have been above average, with 21 buildings reported in good repair, and 15 in fair condition. The most significant new buildings were those of lime-concrete or "grout," that is, massive crude masonry walls poured in successive layers in wooden forms. In this group, constructed during the early and mid-seventies, were the new hospital on the hill overlooking the fort, a double set of quarters north of Bedlam, a new guardhouse, and cavalry barracks.

The last spasm of construction activity at Fort Laramie, 1883-1885, brought forth another batch of lime-concrete structures, notably a set of non-commissioned officers quarters near the hospital, a new bakehouse, a large commissary storehouse, two double sets and one single set of officers quarters attached to original adobes south of Old Bedlam, a new kitchen wing on Bedlam itself, a single set of officers quarters south of the sutler's store, and a handsome Administration building, the final construction job on the premises. It is not surprising that the bulk of the fort structures that have survived consist of these durable lime-concrete models, either intact or in ruins.

A few special situations may be noted to point up the evolutionary nature of Fort Laramie buildings. Among Army structures a classic example is that of the post guardhouse. There were three of these in succession, of frame, stone, and concrete respectively, each in a supposedly different location except that the third version was by pure coincidence and possibly even without the knowledge of the builder, placed almost directly over the foundation stones of the extinct 1851 guardhouse. The 1873 hospital was built right over the original post cemetery, which was also the original fur traders' cemetery, with no re-burials beforehand. Similarly, at least two officers quarters at the south end of the parade ground overlapped the 1849 trading post site. As an example of the evolution of function, the Commanding Officers quarters migrated from place to place, being in Bedlam in the mid-sixties but also in various adobe, frame and concrete buildings. The post bakery was in at least 4 different locations over the years, while the post office seems to have been shuttled back and forth between the sutler's store and various other odd buildings.

The most unique civilian structure on the post was, of course, the Sutler's Store or Post Traders'. It was probably the most heavily used building of any. It existed from 1849 right on through, never migrating, but undergoing constant accretions and redesigns; yet it is veiled in mystery because most of the business records have been lost, and the building was never accounted for in the Quartermaster's annual inspections.

Among other non-military structures we have noted the Rustic Hotel, Brown's Hotel, and the sutler's residence. In addition there were, on the fringes of the fort, an assortment of shanties, dugouts and hovels of civilian employees and contractors, all disappeared. Certain trading posts are indicated on the east side of the Laramie in 1854, but these were quite temporary affairs permitted within the post reservation only briefly, during the Indian scare.

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Park History, 1834-1977



PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter XVI:

FORT LARAMIE AS COUNTRY VILLAGE AND HISTORIC RUIN

From 1890 when the Army hauled down the flag for the last time until 1938 when the Federal Government reclaimed the place as a National Monument, a span of almost a half-century, Fort Laramie slept in the sun, dreaming of faded glory. Although a few perceptive individuals recognized its lingering historic value, and many visited it out of curiosity, its status during this period was that of a country village, not altogether deserted but looking rather forlorn, like a tornado-ravaged community which never bothered to rebuild.

The desolation was the result of the wholesale demolition of buildings that occurred in 1890 and the decade following. This is not to condemn those responsible because in the 1890s there was a scarcity of local lumber for construction and there was no thought, in or out of Government, of reserving Fort Laramie for future park purposes. Indeed, it would be 25 years before anyone of record would suggest publicly that the few buildings remaining should be preserved for posterity.

The auction of 1890 was poorly attended because of inclement weather and muddy roads. The total proceeds realized by the Government was less than \$2,500. John Hunton, who had the advantage of living on the premises as the last post sutler, 1888-1890, was one of the few bidders. He paid less than \$400. for a dozen buildings, including the Hospital and Non-Commissioned Officers Quarters on the hill, and the eight buildings which comprised Officers' Row. Since he already owned the Sutler's Store, this gave him control of the line of intact buildings which are today the crown jewels in the collection of surviving Fort Laramie buildings Old Bedlam, the Store, the Magazine, and two Officers Quarters. He filed for a homestead on a quarter section that included these buildings.

Another successful bidder at the auction was one Joe Wilde, who also homesteaded part of the fort grounds, including the Old Bakery, the Commissary Storehouse and the Cavalry Barracks. He converted the latter into a combination hotel, store, dance hall, and saloon. The south end of the parade ground, site of the adobe trading post, was homesteaded by the widow of Thomas Sandercock, a civilian engineer at the fort, who made her home in the frame officers quarters of 1870. Her use of the 1866 Guardhouse for farming purposes also forestalled its disappearance.

Counting two small buildings, a frame out-house behind Officers Quarters F and the masonry shed behind Officers Quarters B, a total of 12 Fort Laramie buildings survived more or less intact to the modern period. Including the 9 ruins that remain with standing walls, that means over 50 buildings were demolished, moved elsewhere, or dismantled for lumber. Thus the old fort was reincarnated, so to speak, in many a homestead shack, ranch house or barn.

Although the fort itself was diminished, fortunately its setting was left largely unimpaired. The nearest modern community, the town of Fort Laramie, is three miles distant, and the Burlington Railroad of which it is a station follows the north side of the Platte. Thanks to an unobtrusive irrigation system in the valley, the Laramie River has tended to stabilize, restoring timber growth along its banks. A cottonwood grove planted by Wilde is a living reminder of Fort Laramie as country village.

John Hunton died September, 1925, at the venerable age of 88, but the spirit that he embodied caught fire in others. Local newspaper editors expressed dismay at evidence of deterioration and desecration of the fort, the result of absentee landlords, indifferent renters, and stray visitors who felt free to make off with any relics they could lay their hands on. At the first meeting of the new Wyoming Historical Landmarks Commission in 1927, other patriotic citizens voiced their concern about the fate of the old fort. The Commission, with the support of local communities, made repeated efforts to acquire it. Although it was thwarted by unwilling land-owners its efforts focussed public attention on the issue. Symptomatic of growing public interest in preservation was a giant celebration held on the premises in 1930, in cooperation with the Oregon Trail Memorial Association, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first wagons up the Platte route.

During early years of the Depression hope for saving the fort dwindled, but the turning point came in 1936 when National Park Service representatives first visited the site and, impressed with what they saw, expressed to Wyoming Governor Leslie Miller interest in preserving it. This led to a successful effort by the Governor to persuade the Wyoming legislature to buy and land-owners to sell 214 acres in 1937. The State thereupon tendered a deed to the United States, which was accepted by the Secretary of the Interior. By Presidential Proclamation of July 16, 1938, this became Fort Laramie National Monument. (In 1960, when the area was enlarged by Congress to 571 acres, it was re-designated a National Historic Site.)

Once more the flag of the United States would fly over the old parade ground. And now the strange assortment of ruins and ancient buildings, shattered, sagging, collapsing, some the abode of cattle, hogs and chickens, would awake from their long slumber.

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Fort Laramie

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PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE

PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE

The epic history of Fort Laramie from 1834, the heyday of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, to 1890, the end of the Indian wars, is well known. After the Army auctioned off its abandoned buildings in April, 1890 the Fort soon took on the appearance of a quaint country village, with a few dwellings of remarkable architecture which were the adopted homes of civilians left over from Army days, surrounded by a number of impressive ruins. The principal residents were ex-sutler and rancher John Hunton and his wife Blanche, who owned the ancient Sutler's Store and Officers' Row, including the famous Old Bedlam; Mary and Joe Wilde, owners of the Commissary Storehouse and the Cavalry Barracks which became hotel, saloon, and dance-hall; and Harriet Sandercock, widow of Thomas Sandercock, and their descendants, who controlled a corner of the parade ground area, including an officer's quarters, guard-house, and the site of the 1849 trading post, Fort John. These are the individuals to whom posterity must be grateful for their effective, albeit haphazard, preservation of those buildings that did survive. [1]

We are concerned here with neither the epic history of the military post nor the small local happenings there after its abandonment. We are concerned here with a story never before told in any comprehensive way, yet it is a story of interest to all Americans who appreciate the historic shrines that remind them of their unique heritage of freedom. It is the story of a few dedicated men who, against great odds, succeeded in saving for posterity the priceless physical remains of the once great Fort which Hunton, Wilde, and the Sandercocks had retained for whatever personal reasons.

The "odds against" were the steady deterioration of these buildings with the inexorable passage of time, the successive land-owners' reluctance to sell, and the unavoidable but heart-breaking delays by the State of Wyoming in finding a formula for acquisition. The "odds in favor" were a gradual awareness of Fort Laramie's significance by the public and corresponding interest in its preservation, coupled with persistent efforts by a handful of Fort Laramie champions who recognized that the Fort could be saved only if it could be acquired by some kind of philanthropic foundation or a Government agency with the capability of restoring and preserving it. Another plus was the fact that the buildings that did manage to survive all hazards for almost half a century—stripping for salvage, neglect, misuse, fire, vandalism—until such an agency did arrive, providentially, on the scene, were among the most important, historically.

When the Army abandoned Fort Laramie, and for two and a half decades thereafter, there is not the slightest evidence of thinking on the part of anyone that a mistake had been made, that Fort Laramie should not be abandoned, but preserved as a historic shrine. Newspapers and other known and accessible sources have been searched in vain for such evidence prior to 1915. On the contrary, by 1915 most of the Fort building had disappeared because of a deliberate policy by Hunton and Wilde to raise cash by selling off such buildings for their salvage value, and there is no evidence of any public or private outcry at this exploitation of buildings deemed otherwise worthless. The lumber-hungry homesteaders who bought them managed to remove almost all the frame buildings and strip most of the lime-concrete buildings. In 1915 there were only 22 pre-1890 structures still standing, compared to over 60 identified on the last official Fort ground plan. Of these 22, there were 14 relatively intact, and 8 consisting of lime-concrete ruins. Of the intact 14, it is evident that 12 were thus preserved because they served the utilitarian purposes of their owners. Of only 2 Old Bedlam and the Sutler's Store can it be said that they were preserved, by John Hunton, for reasons of personal sentiment alone. [2]

This is not to condemn Hunton or anyone else for not coming up with the radical idea of preservation by a public agency. The hard frontier times precluded the possibility that any state or local agency could achieve such a purpose, and the United States Government had not yet begun to evolve a philosophy of historic site preservation. Nevertheless, it is of interest to ascertain just when the germ of the idea of actual physical preservation of the Fort in perpetuity first appeared, in contrast to mere sentimentality and memorialization. Exactly when was the fatalistic acceptance of Fort Laramie's eventual extinction reversed in favor of an active campaign to preserve and restore it?

The pivotal moment seems to have been on June 17, 1915 when dedication services were held near the Sutler's Store for a large concrete obelisk marker with an imbedded marble plate inscription which reads: FORT LARAMIE A MILITARY POST ON THE OREGON TRAIL, JUNE 16, 1849 - MARCH 2, 1890. THIS MONUMENT IS ERECTED BY THE STATE OF WYOMING AND A FEW INTERESTED RESIDENTS. [3] The historic occasion is recorded for posterity in the Torrington Telegram dated Thursday, June 17, 1915:

BIG OUTING DAY THUR

Thursday of this week was a history making epoch in this valley and it will long be remembered because of granite markers dotting the course of the Oregon Trail, that were publicly unveiled that day, with music by the Torrington band, and addresses by Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, the state regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Ex-Governor Joseph M. Carey, Hon. Ed. L. Patrick, and Mr. Bartlette, of Cheyenne.

. . . There was a large crowd at Fort Laramie for the opening exercises, and the place was an ideal one for the program.

This was the principal marker among the three that were to be unveiled that day, and the principal addresses were delivered at that point. . .

Dr. Hebard is a talented lady, and because of her interest in Old Fort Laramie had a paper

touching on the importance of Fort Laramie on the Oregon Trail. . .

Ex-Governor Carey spoke on the "Pioneer" and because of his acquaintance with the men who wrested these broad acres from the Indians, he gave us an account of the men and the work of those early days that was beyond anything ever written. . .

The flag was drawn from the marker by Mrs. Hunton who is a daughter of the American Revolution. . .

There were twenty or more cars at Fort Laramie by the time the speaking began, and the program lasted well up to the dinner hour. The shady quarters about the Joe Wilde home, and the running streams of water were too inducive of comfort for the voyageurs to leave before dinner. . . and those who did not have dinner baskets were fed at the Wilde table. [4]

On that memorable day who came up with the preservation idea? Not John Hunton, whose lengthy correspondence betrays no concern how the buildings would be protected beyond his own time. [5] On the contrary, his evident co-sponsorship of the marker bespoke awareness that in the course of time all the buildings would disintegrate and vanish. Not Dr. Hebard who, while speaking of the Fort's history in glowing terms, did not even hint at the desirability of preservation. [6] Nor was it the Honorable Joseph Carey, the impassioned orator. No, the revolutionary idea was born in the head of a member of the audience that day, one James Johnston, editor of the Torrington Telegram who went straight to his desk to pen the earliest documentable record of an outright plea for the preservation of Fort Laramie. This was an editorial which appeared in the same issue reporting the dedication:

A NOTABLE PLEASURE RESORT

Few people realize the importance of Fort Laramie as a historic spot in Wyoming, and to think that the site of the first fort in the State lies within the borders of our county ought to arouse the patriotism of the present generation to restore the works and make it into a beautiful summer resort.

There are a dozen or more buildings intact, and can be put in shape for use at very little cost. The hospital commands a beautiful sight of the valley, and the dormitory for the privates is now the beautiful home of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Wilde. . .

. . . The Oregon Trail marker [of 1915] is by far the the best one put up on the trail. . . Close to this is the old trading post the very building where the white man obtained his supplies, and the Indian bartered his wares.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. John Hunton is in the row of buildings bordering on the Laramie River front, the end of which now terminates with the Bedlam house made famous by the writings of Captain Charles King.

. . . This is the ideal spot for a summer home, or for a picnicking place during the summer months. It is a convenient distance from Torrington, Guernsey and Wheatland and because of the fame of Old Fort Laramie it would be a popular place for gatherings and chautauquas as well.

Because it was inconceivable in pre-World War I times that any government federal, state, or local would undertake to preserve an old fort solely as a historical park, for its own sake, all early clarion calls for preservation of Fort Laramie, like Johnston's, revolved around various possibilities of pragmatic or utilitarian uses of the Fort structures, with their preservation only incidental. Even though such uses, had they been adopted, would have seriously impaired the authentic character of the military post, we accept these earnest proposals as evidence of a genuine desire to save the Fort, by whatever means. Johnston's notion was a nebulous one which of course bore no fruit, and we can smile today at the naivete of "restoring the works at very little cost." Nevertheless an inspired idea was born and would be echoed thereafter with increasing insistence until the dream would become a reality.

Another idea for preservation was voiced the following year in the Guernsey Gazette by editor George Houser. This time preservation was to be achieved by "setting aside the Old Fort as a training school for American soldiers," a thought springing from the spirit of preparedness engendered by the ominous gathering clouds of World War I. On July 4, 1916 there was a patriotic picnic at the site, "not only to give old-timers a chance to meet, but to talk over the possibility of getting the Government to establish a military school at the Old Fort." There was baseball and wrestling matches, but the main event was speech-making: "Two Mighty Good Addresses." Judge Winter of Converse County, "one of the brainy orators of the State," presented to "a vast audience" masterly arguments for Government ownership of Fort Laramie. The remarks of ex-Governor Carey were also full of "words of burning patriotism." In reporting the event the editor remarked that, "every available effort is being made for the purchase and preservation of the Old Fort, with everything pointing to success." [7] Just who was making what kind of an effort is not revealed. Though we suspect that Wyoming Congressmen approached the War Department with this proposal, it obviously fell on deaf ears. Its merit lay not in its practicality but in its publicity, nurturing the more mature concept of Fort preservation by a U. S. Government agency of some kind, compared to the Torrington editor's thought of a local recreational facility.

While the imaginative and energetic Houser himself was evidently the prime promoter of the military school idea as well as the historic picnic, he reveals that the originator of the military school concept was Will M. Maupin, then editor of the Midwest Magazine published at York, Nebraska. Houser confessed that Maupin's idea "is so sensible and contains so much in favor of practical preparedness that we give it in full to our readers":

When Uncle Sam decided to abandon Old Fort Laramie he committed a grave blunder. When he permitted that historic old post to be sold and its many splendid buildings to go to wrack and ruin, he committed a crime.

There is just one way for Uncle Sam to rectify that blunder and atone for that crime re-purchase the old reservation and there, in the very heart of the republic, establish a great military school, a second West Point. Scores of reasons could be brought forward. . .

Physically there is a splendid stream of pure water flowing through the old reservation. . . all ready to furnish the power that could generate enough electricity to supply a great Commonwealth. . . The vast stretch of country adjacent would afford ample training for young soldiers. . .

In case this republic should go to war. . . it would be the great middle west that would supply the most and best men. . . And here in the great middle west is the place to establish a great military training school. . . The first step is to re-purchase the old reservation and make it a government park. After the old buildings have been restored as nearly as possible, the work of building the military school should begin. . . [8]

Maupin's concept of keeping a restored Fort separate from any new buildings is unique among early vocal Fort Laramie preservationists. In a 1945 interview by the writer, Mr. Maupin claimed some credit for the establishment of Fort Laramie National Monument for, he asserted, he was "always editorializing" in favor of the preservation of that place. He visited the Fort frequently, the first time in 1914 to attend a dance at Wilde's place. It is of interest to note that Maupin became the first Custodian of neighboring Scotts Bluff National Monument when that area was established in 1919. This was his reward for recommending the establishment of that Oregon Trail landmark as a National Park. [9]

Another Nebraskan, A. E. Sheldon, Superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society for many years, claims to have plumped for the preservation of the Fort even earlier than Maupin did. In a letter of 1935 to the Historical Landmarks Commission of Wyoming he states: ". . . 25 years ago I wrote and spoke in favor of acquiring and holding this notable historical site where I have camped many times, sometimes for two or three weeks." That would seem to cast him in the role of preservation advocate as early as 1910, but this writer has been unable to verify this claim in any publications or in the Sheldon correspondence in the Society collection in Lincoln. [10]

During this period another notion of what to do with Fort Laramie was born in the head of the Right Reverend Nathaniel S. Thomas, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Wyoming. This was to be a church-sponsored school "where boys could live in a church atmosphere" which would somehow be provided by "this former Post, the most historic in the United States." The proposal, which preoccupied the Bishop from 1915 to 1919, involved an estimated cost of \$130,000 for the purchase of the Fort and adjacent agricultural lands, and "remodeling of the Fort buildings." The discloser of the Thomas proposal writes: "To the Bishop's credit, I believe, he planned to restore Old Fort Laramie. He had a sense of history and his vision was an early one concerning what could and ought to be done with the then ramshackle buildings." We concede the Bishop's awe of Fort Laramie, "with all its history and romance," but we cannot discern evidence that he had meaningful restoration in mind, as distinct from conversion to alien purposes. In any event his dream was not revealed publicly at the time so could have had no impact on public thinking. [11]

A development proposal of a more practical nature that did receive full publicity is revealed in the Guernsey Gazette for August 31, 1917:

Old Fort Laramie, where the soldiers were stationed in the old Indian days of the long ago, is to become a mecca for tourists. Mr. Joseph Wilde has disposed of a half-interest in the old fort

to Mr. Carlson, a contractor who put in the big tunnel on the Government ditch, and the new firm are contemplating many improvements on the buildings and grounds. They will put in a store and a hotel and will be equipped to take care of the trade in good shape.

As the tourist travel increases in the state the old fort has become a mecca for tourists and Mr. Wilde has been bothered considerable in trying to provide accommodations to the visitor. . .

A few of the contemplated improvements are: an auto road through the grounds, general merchandise store, gas station, new foundations and concrete floor on the old Cavalry Barracks porch, the old dance hall will be repaired and redecorated, and many other improvements made.

The ruins of the old frontier fort is well advertised all over the United States from its historical importance and will become a popular place for Eastern tourists. The new firm is bound to be successful in their new venture.

While the Carlson project to develop tourist facilities scarcely constituted historic preservation, it did mean that somebody intended to make an effort to keep certain buildings in good useable condition, in this case primarily the Barracks and the Commissary Storehouse, the main buildings in the Wilde plot. That the venture fizzled may be deduced from the fact that in 1919 Carlson sold to Paul McDonald who fronted for H. S. Clarke, an Omaha banker, who was more interested in playing the role of gentleman rancher than he was in catering to tourists. He made certain changes in the Barracks but apparently for his own benefit and that of his tenants, not the public. Thus, the actual extent of an early tourist boom at this "mecca", if there really was one, cannot be determined from this or any other known sources. [12]

Despite the scarcity of eye-witness accounts, there is little doubt that after World War I there were numerous impromptu visits to the Fort by first-generation automobile tourists who braved the bad roads of the period to behold its faded glory, and then doubtless to push on with their primitive gas-buggies to admire the rumored wonders of Yellowstone Park. Though Wyoming's tourist industry was then but a fragile bud, it was being nurtured by Nebraska and Wyoming communities who were not averse to an influx of Eastern dollars. In 1920 disjointed segments of roads north of the North Platte, rather inaccurately dubbed "the North Platte Valley Highway," was designated a state road, eligible to receive federal aid, and there is the first known reference to the idea of capitalizing on the Old Oregon Trail by affixing its name to "a national highway." To promote it the "North Platte Valley Highway Association" came into being in 1922. [13]

Ezra Meeker, the apostle of Oregon Trail monuments and markers, who had made his first covered wagon memorial trek in 1906, turned up again in his old prairie schooner in 1920 to reawaken interest in the old Trail. Due in part to his influence Nebraska could now number over 50 such granite monuments, and the Nebraska Highway Department was giving the North Platte Valley Highway high priority. Talk of new or improved road construction was in the Wyoming air also, and Fort Laramie and Yellowstone Park were conspicuous among visible attractions that helped to initiate a vigorous road improvement program. [14] Because of the decrepit condition of the Fort there was growing awareness that something would have to be done, sooner or later, if this promising tourist attraction was not to be lost.

Stock in Old Fort Laramie perked up perceptibly in 1923 when two dynamic promoters appeared on the scene, a newspaperman who would strongly reinforce George Houser's long lone campaign, and a developer who for the first time would attempt direct action as well as talk. For some years the Lingle Guide-Review had recognized the interest of the town of Fort Laramie with a "Fort Laramie Department" and the editor of this weekly did his bit to come out foursquare for history, admonishing once in a banner headline that "Fort Laramie People Should See to It that the Old Fort is Preserved as a Historic Spot." However, journalistic tub-thumping on behalf of the Old Fort would reach its crescendo in the short-lived Fort Laramie Scout, inaugurated in late 1923 and combined with the Goshen County News at Torrington in 1927. The proprietor of this free-wheeling periodical was L. G. (Pat) Flannery, who had occupied the old officer's quarters adjacent to the "Hunton House" at the Fort in 1919, becoming a confidante of the old man. This was the origin of Flannery's perennial agitation for preservation, which at times took on the aspect of a one-man crusade. [15]

The developer in question was Thomas Waters of Omaha, district freight representative of the Pennsylvania Railroad. In September of 1923 the Guide-Review had come up with a new suggestion, that "Fort Laramie is ideally suited for a dude ranch, which would attract many tourists on account of its historic appeal." The same article referred to "Harry Clark," also of Omaha, as the owner of the fort, but as we have seen what this party had an interest in was that portion of the Fort that had been held first by Wilde, the Cavalry Barracks area, not the more famous Officers Row of the parade ground, featuring the Sutler's Store and Old Bedlam. [16] It was Waters who acquired an interest in this most significant and crucial section of the Fort from John Hunton in 1920, though Hunton continued to live on the premises until 1923, when he moved to Torrington. [17] Although this absentee landlord conducted a ranch, of sorts, on adjoining land, his true objective was first revealed in the Gering Midwest, quoted in the Guernsey Gazette for October 26, 1923:

Thomas Waters, well known in western railroad circles, has an ambitious plan that contemplates making the site of old Fort Laramie one of the greatest summer resorts in the West. . . He has purchased a considerable portion of the old reservation together with the buildings thereon, and is now organizing a stock company for the purpose of improving the grounds, adding thereto and making a summer resort that will have a special appeal to our tourists, especially those who are interested in historic events and spots.

He plans the erection of a number of summer cottages, the establishment of a hotel and cafe big enough to take care of a big transient patronage, and the construction of a golf links that will be a big drawing card.

Mr. Waters was quoted further to the effect that "all these things will take time and money, but the plans are well formulated and some progress has already been made." Whatever one may think of the Waters plan to convert Fort Laramie into a pleasure resort, complete with lost golf balls, one must give him credit for his pre-vision of future U. S. Highway 26: "What we should be doing is turning the tide of tourist traffic through Gering, Scottsbluff and Mitchell, into old Fort Laramie with all its associations and memories, and thence on into Yellowstone Park." [18]

Evidently Waters was notable to sell enough shares in his Fort Laramie enterprise to put his plans into effect right away, and there was a lull on the old Fort front in 1924 when attention was focussed on the Guernsey

Dam project. In 1925 a scheme of a different sort was concocted. In February of that year Houser called attention to a bill before the U. S. Congress offered by the Hon. Addison Smith of Idaho (House Joint Resolution 328) to designate as "The Old Oregon Trail" a system of federal highways between Council Bluffs, Iowa and Independence, Missouri to Seaside, Oregon and Olympia, Washington. Houser admonished "all Oregon Trail enthusiasts along the route to join in furthering the project." In a later issue he reported that, "a movement is on foot in which a number of Wyoming towns are interested in having a portion of old Fort Laramie set aside as a national monument for future generations. This movement is the result of a stir to have the old Oregon Trail made into a national highway." [19]

Houser's plea is the first recorded instance of Fort Laramie being associated with the magical term, "national monument," the official designation of "objects of historic and scientific interest" set aside by Presidential Proclamation by authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906. However, this term was not employed by the Wyoming State Legislature when it attempted to beef up prospects for the Smith bill with a petition to Congress, inspired by resolutions received from the Travis Post No. 5 of the American Legion, Department of Wyoming, and the Lions Club, both of Torrington. The language of the twin resolutions reveals for the first time an impressive depth of pro-preservation sentiment valley-wide, going well beyond the immediate vicinity of Guernsey and Fort Laramie:

WHEREAS, Old Fort Laramie is, from a historical stand point, one of the most important points in the West, and

WHEREAS, this property is now in private ownership and the buildings are rapidly falling into decay and will be in a state of ruin beyond repair, and

WHEREAS, the North Platte Valley Highway which passes this fort is the most direct route from the East to the Yellowstone National Park and is used by thousands of tourists each year, and

WHEREAS, numerous civic and patriotic organizations have joined in a request urging the Federal Government to re-purchase this property with the view of re-establishing, restoring, preserving and perpetuating to posterity this historical monument of pioneer days and making it accessible to visitors,

NOW THEREFORE, Be it Resolved, etc.

House Joint Memorial No. 4 was introduced by the Uinta and Goshen County delegations, with an amendment adding Fort Bridger for consideration, and referred to the Committee on Memorials. After some jockeying over fine distinctions of terminology, and debates about adding other sites to the list, the final bill, "Memorializing the Congress of the United States to set aside Old Fort Laramie and Old Fort Bridger and Independence Rock as Historic Reserves," was passed and approved February 25, 1925. [20]

Representative Addison Smith's final version of his bill, for the designation of an Oregon Trail Highway from Kansas City, Kansas to Vancouver, Washington, "which shall follow the Trail as closely as economic and topographic conditions permit," got nowhere in Congress for reasons which are abundantly evident in a

fascinating printed report on hearings before the Committee on Roads. It is fascinating because of the wealth of emigrant journals that are quoted at length to prove just which side of the Platte this or that emigrant party travelled, and the florid oratory of Congressional champions. (Willis Hawley, representative from Oregon whose parents were covered wagon emigrants, speaks of the Trail, "as a living thing, breathing of heroic self-sacrifice and devotion to duty. It is the trail which leads to the rainbow's end, the trail of all trails, your trail and mine.") However, discord prevailed among witnesses, not only as to the exact route of the Trail, but also just exactly what did constitute "the Oregon Trail," and whether to recognize such variants as the Mormon Trail and Pike's Peak Trail, not to mention the far more heavily travelled emigrant road to California, and the overarching question of the constitutionality of Congress getting into the business of interpreting fine points of American history. Though Fort Laramie was frequently mentioned in the hearings as one of the crown jewels of the Oregon and all other trails, there appears to have been no discussion of its preservation. [21]

While State and Federal legislators and learned historians eulogized the distant Fort in abstract terms, the Fort itself was in mortal jeopardy. An article in the Guernsey Gazette for April 3, 1925 reveals that at that time the Fort narrowly escaped destruction from fire, at the same time dramatically demonstrating the dedication of local citizens in going to the rescue:

Mr. Cummings, dragline operator, discovered a blaze as he was returning from work, about 11:30 P.M., and roused the Latta Bros., who live on the place. The fire, of unknown origin, supposedly started in a pile of hay. A strong northwest wind was blowing and swept the flames through the corrals, burning fences, feedlots and everything in its path until it reached what is said to have been the old bakery, the extreme southeastern building of the group, which has been used for many years as a stable and blacksmith shop. There was barely time to save the livestock sheltered there. Roof, windows, woodwork and everything inflammable was destroyed, leaving only the stark, lime-concrete walls of the ancient structure.

The alarm was spread, and throughout the night men from town worked with the ranchers to save the other buildings. Lines of men carried water from the river to wet the walls and ground about surrounding structures, and the ceaseless guard against sparks continued until daylight. Mrs. Latta kept the watchers supplied with sandwiches and coffee.

Had the wind changed all the old Fort buildings would have been in great danger. [22]

While the immediate neighbors of Old Fort Laramie were obviously sold on the idea of saving it, there was a need to bring its desperate plight to the attention of a wider audience. The year 1926 must be viewed as a climax year in the process of focussing state-wide public opinion on the dire need to save Fort Laramie soon, if it was to be saved at all, and there is reason to believe that it was this Fort Laramie campaign which was the primary factor in the creation of the Historical Landmarks Commission of Wyoming the following year. Editors Flannery of the Scout and Houser of the Gazette were movers and shakers as well as reporters of events, and it was at this time that they enlisted other potent allies in the cause.

Early that year, following the fiasco of the Oregon Trail Highway proposal, Wyoming's then House Representative, Charles E. Winter, made an effort "to get favorable action for preservation of two forts as

national monuments that were the gateway to the West Laramie and Bridger." Judge Winter, the same fiery Fort Laramie orator of 1916, was also known as "the Bard of Wyoming," and a western novelist of some repute, as well as a jurist. In his efforts he enlisted the aid of General Charles King, famous novelist of western garrison life, then 85 and a military instructor at a college at Ripon, Wisconsin. But it appears that Winter lacked either the savvy or the clout to sell fellow Congressmen on the salvation of abandoned Wyoming forts. Information on the precise nature of his legislative proposal is lacking it evidently never reached any Committee for a hearing but his efforts were diluted by a project that appears to have had higher priority with him, a bill to provide for the erection of a monument to Sacajawea of Lewis and Clark fame, on the Fort Washakie Reservation near Lander, "in the 6th judicial district where Mr. Winter served as judge for seven years." [23]

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE

PART II: FOOTNOTES

1 - The Fort Laramie Military Reservation was turned over by the Army to the Interior Department, which supervised its break up into homesteads. The immediate Fort area, where surviving buildings are clustered, was divided among three private owners because of the arbitrary section lines resulting from General Land Office Surveys which ignored the integrity of the Fort. It so happens that Sections 20, 21, 28 and 29 of Township 26 North, Range 64 West, of the 6th Principal Meridian intersect at a point about half way between the Cavalry Barracks and the ruins of the Post Hospital. Thus Officers' Row and most of the parade ground (Hunton) are in NE 1/2, NE 1/2, Sec. 29. The south quadrant of the parade ground (Sandercock) is in SE 1/2, NE 1/2, Sec. 29; and the Cavalry Barracks and its neighbors (Wilde) are in NW 1/2, NW 1/2, Sec. 28. While ownerships shifted over the years, these three arbitrary divisions remained until consolidation by the State in 1937.

The picture is further confused by the fact that the parade ground axis is not oriented with standard compass bearings; it actually runs from SW to NE, or at about a 45 degree angle with township and section lines. (See map)

2 - Plan of Post, 1888, Cartographic Division, National Archives. Evidence of salvage transactions is indicated in the somewhat illegible John Hunton Letterbooks at the University of Wyoming Library, Special Collections. Sentiment re: Old Bedlam and the Sutler's Store may be assumed since there is no evidence that Hunton used these particular buildings for any discernible purpose.

The 14 intact structures of 1915 were: Old Army Bridge, Cavalry Barracks, Commissary Storehouse, New Bakery, Old Bakery, Old Guardhouse, Sutler's Store, Old Bedlam, Officers Quarters A, E and F, Magazine, Chicken House, and Privy. The 8 ruins were those of Sawmill, Administration Building, New Guardhouse, Hospital, Non-Com Quarters, and Officers Quarters B, C and D.

3 - The date 1913 appears at the end of the inscription. Since the context of the newspaper report clearly indicates that this was the marker dedicated in 1915, the discrepancy in dates doubtless results from the simple fact that the dedication was not held until 2 years after the inscription was carved. Possibly there was

a delay in erecting the marker until John Hunton or other sponsors could scrape together sufficient funds. Although they are not credited on the marker, it seems probable from the context of the newspaper story that the D.A.R. rather than the State of Wyoming was the principal sponsor. The 12-foot marker survives today (1978) in good condition.

4 - The other two markers dedicated that day were at Lingle, Wyoming and Henry, Nebraska.

5 - Hunton Letterbooks, *op. cit.*

6 - The Hebard speech is given verbatim in the Torrington Telegram, June 24, 1915.

7 - Guernsey Gazette, June 2, June 22, July 7, August 11, 1916.

8 - No copies of the indicated issue of the Midwest Magazine seem to have survived, either at the York Public Library or the Nebraska State Historical Society at Lincoln. Copies of later issues, however, are preserved by that Society.

9 - Merrill J. Mattes, Memorandum for the Files, July 10, 1945, Scotts Bluff National Monument. Mr. Maupin's visit to the Oregon Trail Museum there occurred on July 3, at his age 82. He had a checkered career as a Nebraska newspaperman and politician, See Who's Who in Nebraska, Nebraska Press Association, 1940, page 719.

Of his first Fort Laramie visit, Maupin "well remembers the Cavalry Barracks when it was still the hostelry of Joe Wilde. The night of his visit a dance was scheduled on the second floor, but not many people put in an appearance as the wind was blowing about 60 miles per hour."

Equally interesting is his Scotts Bluff adventure. "When he was the editor of a weekly paper in Gering, he relates that he conceived the idea of establishing a national park at Scotts Bluff to commemorate the Oregon Trail. U. S. Senator Hitchcock advised him to get in touch with U. S. Representative Moses Kinkaid. Kinkaid agreed that it should be a national park, but advised Maupin that it would be easier to make it a national monument since this involved only presidential proclamation, and such a proclamation automatically carried with it regular annual appropriation. The proclamation went through as planned in 1919 and Maupin was made custodian. However, "he thinks we was misinformed about the automatic appropriation since \$12, per year is all he ever received."

10 - Letter of January 23, 1935, A. E. Sheldon to the Historical Landmarks Commission of Wyoming (HLCW), files HLCW, Wyoming State Archives. collections, Nebraska State Historical Society.

11 - Howard Lee Wilson, "The Bishop who Bid for Fort Laramie," Annals of Wyoming, Vol. 34, No. 2 (October 1962) 163-174.

12 - In 1926 James W. Auld bought the place by Sheriff's sale. In 1933 he deeded it to his wife Jessica. Goshen County Land Records.

The upper half of the Cavalry Barracks Hotel was divided in half, between guest rooms and dance-hall. The latter section, once a soldiers dormitory, was the only part of the building left in 1937 that still resembled the historic interior. The main floor was scrambled by adaptive uses, both before and after that date, a puzzle to restorationists. See Manuscript "Historic Structure Report I, 1874 Cavalry Barracks," John D. McDermott and James Sheire, National Park Service, 1970.

13 - Guernsey Gazette, April 9, 1920; May 19, 1922.

14 - Ibid. July 20, 1906; September 10, 1920; September 24, 1920. Meeker's visit to Fort Laramie in 1906 is recorded also in Howard Driggs and Ezra Meeker, Covered Wagon Centennial and Ox-Team Days (New York, 1932) 247-249. Even at that early date, says Meeker, "the old place is crumbling away, slowly disappearing with the memories of the past." If he actually visited the fort in 1920, such visit is not documented, but he did "follow the Trail" again that year.

15 - Lingle Guide-Review, January 1, 1923. This paper seems to have had a wobbly title, being sometimes called the Family News Review. Regarding the Flannery-Hunton relationship, see "This Old Gentleman John Hunton," being a transcript of a tape recording with L. G. Flannery by Pierre La Bonte, Jr. in 1963. Flannery (1894-1964) edited and published the John Hunton diaries to 1889. (Vols. I to V published by Flannery himself, Vol. VI by A. H. Clark, Glendale, California) Unpublished diaries after that date are in the possession of Mrs. L. G. Flannery of Cheyenne. "It is her policy that the diaries remain locked up for the time being." Letter of April 15, 1977, Billie (Flannery) Griske to Merrill Mattes.

16 - Lingle Guide-Review, September 13, 1923. Brothers Harry and Tom Latta and families were long term tenants of the Cavalry Barracks and the Commissary, originally engaged by Clarke but continuing there into the 1930s. McDermott and Sheire, op. cit.

17 - Hunton mortgaged a portion of his property to Thomas Waters for \$14,000, October 18, 1920. Final settlement, with deed to Thomas Waters, was in December, 1925. Goshen County Records. Mattes interview with Curtiss Root, Torrington, Nov. 1, 1977.

18 - Guernsey Gazette, October 26, 1923.

19 - Ibid., February 6, 1925; March 6, 1925.

20 - Session Laws of Wyoming (1925) 270-271; House Journal of 18th State Legislature of Wyoming (1925) 169; 213; 373; 409; 413; 571; 586; 591.

21 - The Old Oregon Trail: Hearings Before the Committee on Roads. House of Representatives, 68 Congress, 2nd Session, on House Joint Resolution 232, House Joint Resolution 328, Senate Resolution 2053 (Government Printing office, 1925).

22 - This fire changed the score on surviving structures as follows: 13 buildings intact, and 9 standing ruins.

23 - Guernsey Gazette, February 19, 1926

24 - Ibid., March 12, 1926; Driggs and Meeker, op. cit., 10-26.

25 - Guernsey Gazette, June 14, 1926

26 - Ibid., July 9, 1926.

27 - Ibid., September 10, 1926.

28 - Ibid., July 23, 1926

29 - Fort Laramie Scout, July 29, 1926.

30 - Ibid., April 22, 1926.

31 - Ibid., September 2, 1926.

32 - William H. Jackson (1843-1942), nearly a centenarian, was one of the last Civil War veterans. In 1930 he became Research Secretary for the Oregon Trail Memorial Association. In 1936 he helped to dedicate the Oregon Trail Museum at Scotts Bluff. In 1943 he in turn was memorialized by the dedication of new Jackson wing of that museum, which houses his original pencil sketches of 1866 as well as later water colors. See W.H.J., Time Exposure, New York, 1940; LeRoy R. Hafen, editor, The Diaries of William H. Jackson, Glendale, 1959.

Robert S. Ellison was a doer, not a writer, though he authored two booklets of note: Independence Rock (Natrona County Historical Society, 1930), and Fort Bridger (Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming, 1931). He Became a Regional Director of the OTMA. Driggs and Meeker, op. cit., 65.

Ellison footed the bill for Jackson's seasonal treks westward, since the famous artist-photographer had only a veteran's pension. Their travels set a precedent for the OTMA treks which became annual events beginning in 1930. Theirs was a historic friendship.

33 - The National Park Service was created by a Congressional Act of 1916, at the instigation of Stephen H. Mather and Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane. Mather was the first Director.

34 - Guernsey Gazette, August 27, 1926.

35 - Martin S. Hartman's name appears at intervals in Goshen County land records, in association with Waters, beginning on February 18, 1927, and ending on May 7, 1931. The exact nature of the brief partnership eludes inquiry. Joseph G. Masters, Regional Director for the OTMA in Omaha, confided to Joseph Weppner, HLCW, that, "I think Hartman is rather more active in the whole affair." Letter of October 17, 1929, HLCW files.

36 - No blueprints for the Waters-Hartman restoration project, if they ever existed outside of these gentlemen's heads, can be found. The flooring in the adobe portion of the Sutler's Store, allegedly restored, was missing in 1937. Presumably it was removed by unidentified parties searching for coins.

37 - HLCW, First Bicentennial Report (1927-1928).

38 - Ibid., HLCW, Minute Books, 1927-1929, Wyoming State Archives.

39 - Guernsey Gazette, August 15, 1928; Session Laws of Wyoming (1929) 259-60.

40 - HLCW Minute Books.

41 - Ibid.,

42 - Fort Laramie Scout, March 27, 1930.

43 - Fort Laramie Scout, August 21, 1930; Driggs and Meeker, op. cit. 73-74; HLCW, Second Biennial Report (1929-1930), 12-13.

44 - "The owners of old Fort Laramie, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Waters, and their daughter, of Omaha; J. W. Auld of Red Cloud, Nebraska; and Mr. and Mrs. George Sandercock of Fort Laramie were all present for the Covered Wagon Centennial and Pioneers Reunion last Friday, and showed the committee every courtesy. Mrs. Sandercock prepared a special dinner in her home for the guests of honor." Fort Laramie Scout, August 21, 1930.

As a fund raising venture the Fort Laramie Historical Society seems to have had a short life. However, it was still in existence, at least nominally, as late as 1937. This original organization is not to be confused with the present Fort Laramie Historical Association.

45 - Fort Laramie Scout, September 11, 1930; HLCW, Second Biennial Report, 14.

46 - Fort Laramie Scout, July 16, 1931.

47 - HLCW Minutes of meeting, June 7, 1931 at Fort Laramie; HLCW Third Biennial Report (1931-1932), 9-10; Session Laws of Wyoming (1931), Chapter 138. House Bill 153. General Appropriation Act for two years ending March 31, 1933. Section 21. At this time the legislature appropriated \$25,000 but this was arbitrarily reduced to \$15,000 by Governor Clarke.

48 - Ibid.; Fort Laramie Scout, July 16, 1931.

49 - HLCW Minutes, meeting of November 29, 1931.

50 - Fort Laramie Scout, March 10, 1932; Letter March 11, 1932, Joseph Weppner, HLCW, to Robert

Ellison, files HLCW,

51 - Fort Laramie Scout, April 21, 1932; May 19, 1932.

52 - Ibid., March 10, 1932.

53 - HLCW, Minutes, meeting of December 22, 1933.

54 - HLCW, Fourth Biennial Report (1933-1934), 11-12.

55 - Letter of October 14, 1936, Bryant B. Brooks to Warren Richardson, files, HLCW.

56 - Fort Laramie Scout, October 6, 1933. The next public celebration at the Fort was held on August 15, 1935 to observe the 75th anniversary ("Diamond Jubilee") of the Pony Express. According to the Scout for August 8, 1935, "more than 1,000 persons gathered. . . to witness the re-ride of the Pony Express. The Boy Scout rider eluded Indian pursuers to deliver the mail sack to the speaker's stand." Dr. L. C. Hunt, Secretary of State for Wyoming, delivered the principal address. The ubiquitous William H. Jackson was present, and Mrs. Sandercock served another of her famous veranda dinners to special guests - turkey this time, instead of chicken.

57 - Fort Laramie Scout, September 15, 1932. In his report Flannery expressed concern about the cost of such a far-flung development, including Fort Laramie restoration. This is the only recorded instance where his normal enthusiasm for Fort Laramie was tempered by second thoughts: "It is a fatuous form of self-deception to imagine that we can expand the activities of our government without very high taxes." These misgivings seem quaint in an age when the Federal debt approaches \$1,000,000,000,000., and the annual operating cost of Fort Laramie National Historic Site alone now exceeds \$300,000.

58 - Fort Laramie Scout, July 6, 1933.

59 - Files, Scotts Bluff National Monument. Harold Cook (1887-1962) subsequently became Superintendent of the CCC Camp and interim Custodian of that monument, vice A. N. Mather. He was relieved of that post after an altercation with Secretary Ickes over political appointments to the CCC foreman personnel roster.

60 - The National Park Service proposal, motivated by instructions from the White House to develop projects to generate jobs during the Depression, is reflected in news stories appearing in Scottsbluff, Cheyenne, and Torrington papers. The concept bobbed up for the 4th or 5th time in the form of a Bill for a "Trails West National Park", extending from Ash Hollow to Fort Laramie, introduced by Representatives Virginia Smith of Nebraska and Teno Roncalio of Wyoming in 1976.

61 - Fort Laramie Scout, February 8, March 15, and March 22, 1934 quoted in the Torrington Telegram for February 22, 1973.

62 - Fort Laramie Scout, February 14 and May 30, 1935. Flannery correspondence File, Fort Laramie National Historic Site, February 6 to February 15, 1935.

63 - Flannery file, Greever to L. G. Flannery, March 26, 1935. Flannery to O'Mahoney March 22, 1935. Ellison to Weppner, July 18, 1935, HLCW files.

64 - Mattes was stationed at Scotts Bluff National Monument until 1946, when he was transferred to Omaha to become first, Historian, Missouri River Basin Surveys and, in 1950, Regional Historian, a post he held for 17 years. From November, 1936 to April, 1938 Engineer Charles E. Randels became "Acting Custodian" and CCC Camp Director while Mattes as Historian devoted full time to developing research and public service programs. In 1938 Mattes resumed full-time custodianship of Scotts Bluff, at the same time becoming "Acting Custodian" for new Fort Laramie National Monument. He continued in that capacity until October 1938. While in Omaha Mattes became the principal regional coordinator of Fort Laramie restoration projects.

65 - Over 40 years of collaboration between Mattes and Henderson is reflected in the book, Great Platte River Road (Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969) which includes two chapters on Fort Laramie. See also Mattes and Henderson, "The Pony Express from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie," Nebraska History, Vol. 41, No. 2, (June, 1960) 83-122.

66 - Files, Scotts Bluff National Monument. Mattes to Flannery, December 12, 1935; Flannery to Mattes, January 4, 1936; Mattes to Flannery, January 14, 1936. Prior to the creation of Fort Laramie National Monument no historical report was requested, although voluminous data was supplied to the Regional Office, reflected in SBNM files. Following the acquisition of the site by the State, Mattes was assigned to initiate a formal Fort Laramie research program. In 1941 he was designated Historian for Fort Laramie, while continuing to serve as Scotts Bluff Custodian. (The title "Custodian" for those in charge of national monuments was converted to "Superintendent" in 1949.)

67 - "Proposal prepared by R. L. Spurlock, Project Manager, Resettlement Administration, Land Utilization Division," Douglas, Wyoming, October, 1935. Flannery file: LGF to Will G. Metz, August 15, 1935; LGF to O'Mahoney, July 15, 1936.

68 - Flannery file: Demaray to Greever, August 11, 1936; R. M. Davis to L. G. Flannery, August 4, 1936.

69 - Flannery file: L. G. Flannery to Mattes, January 18, 1936; O'Mahoney to Flannery, January 20, 1936; Greever to Flannery, January 25, 1936.

70 - Because of discontent by some Wyoming citizens with the Presidential Proclamation re: Jackson Hole National Monument, which erupted into a court case at Sheridan, Wyoming in 1944 (State of Wyoming vs. Paul R. Franke, Superintendent), the Congressional settlement re: Grand Teton National Park in 1950 provided that there would be no further national monuments created in Wyoming except with Congressional sanction thus, in effect, amending the Antiquities Act of 1906. See Robert W. Righter, "The Brief, Hectic Life of Jackson Hole National Monument," The American West, Vol. XIII, No. 6 (November-December, 1976)

71 - This fact is "strange" because normal NPS procedure, at least subsequently, is that any area proposed

for the National Park System is subject to rather thorough inspection by specialists, with one or more comprehensive printed reports for perusal by the Director, the Secretary of the Interior, Congressional Committees, the Bureau of the Budget, and the NPS Advisory Board. Albright in 1932 and Bryant in 1933 probably visited the Fort, but if so we find no record of their impressions. Such visits would have been only incidental to their respective grand tours of North Platte Valley historic sites.

72 - Files, Scotts Bluff National Monument, including Historian Mattes' monthly report for September, 1936; also, Mattes' personal recollections.

73 - Memorandum, April 27, 1948, Coordinating Superintendent David H. Canfield, Rocky Mountain National Park, to the Regional Director, Region Two, Omaha. Files, Fort Laramie National Historic Site.

74 - Wyoming State Tribune, September 17, 1936.

75 - Correspondence files, HLCW, Wyoming State Archives.

76 - R. J. Rymill (1891-1976), long-term resident and businessman of Fort Laramie town, was in the Fort Laramie acquisition picture beginning in 1929 when he became a member of one of the two appraisal teams in that initial effort. He later became the first official custodian of Fort Laramie after the area was acquired by the State, before its relinquishment to the United States. Mr. Rymill also played a prominent role in Fort Laramie commemorative affairs, notably in 1930, 1937, and 1949. Mattes interview with Anne (Rymill) Pomeroy 10/28/77.

77 - Correspondence files, HLCW: Brooks to Richardson, October 14, 1936; Weppner to Richardson, October 16, 1936; Richardson to Weppner, October 16 and December 11, 1936.

78 - L. G. Flannery file, FLNHS: Miller to Flannery, November 13, 1936; Flannery to Miller, November 17, 1936; Miller to Rymill, November 19, 1936.

R. J. Rymill files, FLNHS: Rymill to Miller, December 10, 1936; Rymill to Cather, December 9; Cather to Rymill, December 18; Rymill to Thomas Waters, December 19.

Mollie Sandercock was the widow of George, son of Harriet, "the widow Sandercock" who bought in at the 1890 auction. Mattes interview with Ada Mary Melonuk at Fort Laramie 11/1/77.

R. C. Cather and Jessica Auld, both of whom claim Red Cloud, Nebraska as their home town, were related to the famous novelist, Willa Cather, according to Dave Hieb, Fort Laramie Superintendent, 1947-1958, who was classmate of son Tommy Auld at Doane College, Nebraska, in 1929. Mattes interview with Hieb at Littleton, Colorado, August, 1977.

79 - The Rymill correspondence was presented in two parts. The bulk of the significant correspondence was included in that presented to the park by the widow, Nancy Rymill, now of Laramie, Wyoming. The map was among items presented by his daughter, Mrs. Pomeroy, to Mattes, at Fort Laramie, November 3, 1977.

80 - Merrill J. Mattes, recollection of conversation with Don Alexander, Omaha, 1945.

81 - R. J. Rymill to Governor Miller, January 14, 1937.

82 - HLCW Minute Book II.

83 - Session Laws of Wyoming (1937), 110, 459, 461, 565, 611. House Journal of the 24th State Legislature of Wyoming (1937), 5, 31, 160, 284, 297, 340, 457.

84 - Fort Laramie Scout, March 11 and 25, 1937, quoted in the Torrington Telegram, February 23, 1973.

85 - "Fort Laramie was discussed at the March 25-26, 1937 meeting of the Advisory Board. This particular session, focussed on the preservation of historic and archeologic sites. Fort Laramie was listed as one of the many locations recommended for acceptance. . . as part of the Historic Sites Survey; however, there was no detailed discussion of Fort Laramie per se." Letter of May 4, 1977 from Richard C. Crawford, Natural Resources Branch, Civil Archives Division, National Archives, to Merrill J. Mattes. It appears that there was never an official NPS report on Fort Laramie as the basis for decision. Instead, there was a compilation of data sent by Dan Greenburg for the HLCW. Letter of January 18, 1936, Greenburg to Mattes, and exchanges of December, 1936 between Mattes and Association Historian Hagen of the Regional Office confirm this. Scotts Bluff NM files.

86 - HLCW Minute Book II. This breaks down into 58.91 acres for Waters, 76.80 for Auld, and 78.70 for Sandercock. The 213.69 total given in the Minute Book is a simple mathematical error.

87 - Fort Laramie Scout, July 8, 1937; Scottsbluff Star-Herald, July 6, 1937; Mattes, Scotts Bluff Historian's Report for July, 1937, files, Scotts Bluff National Monument.

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

1. Interim State Custodianship, 1937-1938

In April, 1937 R. J. Rymill of Fort Laramie town, who had played a key role in negotiations for the Old Fort property, was designated as custodian of the site by the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming (hereafter designated HLCW). Although this was a practical step in view of Rymill's residence just three miles distant from the Fort, it was also a gesture to honor a conscientious local citizen who had given vigorous and crucial support to the successful crusade to save Old Fort Laramie. Except for his chairmanship of the great public victory celebration of July 5, by way of dedicating the site to State ownership, the records are silent on any actions taken by him or the Commission at the site during his brief incumbency. [1]

At its annual meeting of July 31, 1937 in Cheyenne the HLCW passed a motion "that R. J. Rymill be assured of the appreciation of the Commission for acting in his temporary assignment without compensation." Such was now terminated and R. C. Hauf and his wife were designated "caretakers" effective August 1. Their reward for keeping an eye on things was their temporary use of the old Hunton residence, which the National Park Service would later designate Officers Quarters F. The Haufs had been engaged by Thomas Waters to farm his land and the Commission had evidence that both had "shown keen interest and diligence in the preservation of the property." [2] Presumably they had no maintenance obligations but were simply to keep intruders and vandals under surveillance. It is not known how well they discharged their function, or how long they remained on the premises. We find no further reference to them in State or Federal records, and so must assume that their role was brief.

The HLCW had indicated to the Governor the need for \$3,000 over and above the purchase price "to take care of Fort Laramie until such time when the Government took it over, as the fencing of the property would have to be taken care of immediately; also, the placing of a caretaker attended to." We know that neither Custodian Rymill nor Caretaker Hauf received compensation. Though confirmation is lacking, we assume that the State did survey the boundaries and provided the original fencing, since this was part of the justification for the \$3,000 on top of land acquisition needs. However, whatever fencing was provided must have been incomplete or otherwise inadequate since early Park Service records indicate further need for boundary fencing and fence repairs. [3]

Dan W. Greenburg, Director of the Wyoming State Planning Board and former Publicity Director for the HLCW, seems to have functioned as the principal liaison man with the National Park Service, keeping that agency posted on developments. [4] Presumably it was at his behest that on September 20, 1937 Director Arno B. Cammerer wrote C. E. Randels of Gering, Nebraska, Acting Custodian of Scotts Bluff National Monument, that he was to be the Service representative on Fort Laramie matters locally, since a plan to acquire the place was in the works. [5] Randels, an experienced engineer who had been put in charge of Scotts Bluff affairs during Civilian Conservation Corps operations there, served as Fort Laramie liaison man until June 1938 when the Scotts Bluff camp was disbanded, and he was transferred to Denver. Since the Fort remained technically under State ownership during this period it cannot be asserted correctly that C. E. Randels was the first "Acting Custodian" of Fort Laramie National Monument. Neither was it correct to state, as was sometimes done in his correspondence, that Fort Laramie had been placed under his "supervision", since there is no way one can legally supervise something not in legal custody.

It was this very technicality that made Randels' assignment so difficult. In effect, State of Wyoming officials had a hard time recognizing his limitation as a mere liaison man, and in the absence of a fully responsible functioning State Custodian on the premises, the State somehow expected him to provide actual custodial or protective services. Living in Gering, over 50 miles away, and having a CCC program there to supervise, he could get to Fort Laramie only occasionally, look over the situation, and write letters to the Director deploring evidence of continuing vandalism. During this awkward period, fortunately, the vandalism was relatively mild, and no buildings suffered drastically beyond their already forlorn state. This is remarkable since publicity concerning the Fort and its pending status as a National Monument brought out premature visitors who, in the absence of anyone to restrain them, occasionally broke into the decrepit buildings and helped themselves to souvenirs. Perhaps the most serious infraction during this period was the application of a cutting-torch to the door of the old safe imbedded in the Sutler's office, by parties unknown, in the vain hope of finding valuables. [6]

Although R. J. Rymill had supposedly been relieved of custodial responsibility, there is evidence that, possibly through the default of Caretaker Hauf, he got back into the picture, at least to the extent of remaining the local contact for the State's liaison man, Dan Greenburg. In any event the ever-helpful Rymill reappeared in March 1938 to assist Greenburg and Randels in the delicate matter of evicting certain unidentified parties, presumably tenant holdovers from the era of private ownership. Anticipating an early relinquishment to the United States, Greenburg advised Director Arno Cammerer that these tenants would move March 1, and that a Park Service representative should be on hand to prevent the simultaneous disappearance of "moveable historical relics." Although this would appear to have been a State responsibility at this point, Regional Director Tom Allen in Omaha directed Randels to proceed to the Fort at once. There he was joined by Rymill, to find the alleged relics intact but the "unsatisfactory" tenants in no hurry to vacate. When they final did, Randels and Rymill on their own initiative persuaded "a reliable farmer," Herman Harmeier, to occupy one of the Officers Quarters, assuming care-takership in exchange for free rent. [7]

The most significant happening during the Rymill-Randels interim was a Meeting held at the Fort in mid-November, 1937 "for the purpose of discussing the problem of the repair and reconditioning of the buildings." This was the first planning session ever held at the Fort by the National Park Service, anticipating National Monument status. Because of the importance of this kick-off meeting, it is appropriate

to call the roll of the principals present: R. S. Ellison, former chairman of the HLCW who had started the official state ball rolling in 1927; Dan Greenburg, the State's liaison man; R. J. Rymill and George Houser, local leaders in the Crusade; Landscape Architect Howard W. Baker and Architect Wilfred Hill of Omaha, representing the Regional Office; T. L. Green of Scottsbluff; C. E. Randels, NPS liaison officer, and Merrill J. Mattes, Scotts Bluff Historian. After a thorough inspection, agreement was reached that architectural research and design work should have highest priority for funding; meanwhile a project should be initiated for a complete set of measured drawings of all historic buildings. [8]

Although the Fort was not yet a National Monument, the measured drawings project could be undertaken as legitimate Government assistance to the State of Wyoming under the terms of the 1936 Park, Parkway and Recreational Study Act. Accordingly a project was set up under the technical direction of Wilfred Hill, assisted by E. L. Hoyt, Scotts Bluff CCC Camp foreman, and ten enrollees of the Lake Guernsey CCC Camp. The thirty day project for making a "Topographic and Building Survey of Fort Laramie" began November 29 and continued until Christmas, with the production of photos and preliminary drawings, and discovery of the fact that much mystery cloaked the architecture of the time-shattered historic buildings which could only be dispelled by intensive study. This was the initial impetus of a Fort Laramie research program of several years duration by Historian Mattes. It was launched on the site during a visit of early December there with Paul Henderson, Oregon Trail historian of Bridgeport, and given official blessing in a later December visit there by Mattes in company with Chief Historian Ronald F. Lee of Washington, D.C. and Regional Historian Edward Hummel of Omaha. [9]

On May 3, 1938 Dan Greenburg wrote the Director a fateful letter:

This is to advise you that on Monday, May 2, on behalf of the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming, the deed conveying the land of Old Fort Laramie, comprising 214.41 acres, to the U. S. Government, was placed on record with the County Clerk of Torrington, Wyoming, in Goshen County.

The opinion of the Solicitor, in which were pointed out slight defects in the title which you conveyed to us some time ago, has been perfected and the papers in connection thereto have been filed. . . All of the factors involved in the title matters have been cleared up.

In this connection I made a trip to Old Fort Laramie yesterday and asked Mr. Charles E. Randels. . . at Gering, Nebraska to meet me at Torrington and go with me and on that occasion we formally turned over to Mr. Randels possession of the property. . .

We feel confident that the National Park Service will use its every consistent effort to preserve and protect the property against vandalism and to make it a shrine worthy of the standards of the National Park Service.

No doubt you will take proper steps for the assignment of a ranger or official to live on the property. In this connection I wish to bring to your attention that already hundreds of tourists are visiting that area and thousands more will be there during the summer, and I find like any other place where it is not properly policed, the public is no respecter of the rights of

ownership and do not hesitate to damage property, etc. etc. [10]

Concurrently, Randels wrote to Regional Director Allen that Greenburg had emphasized that the State would take no more responsibility concerning the area, and that he would need some funds for the procurement of padlocks and lumber "to nail up some of the windows and doors so that relic hunters do not carry away the buildings." He likewise urged the assignment of a ranger in residence to patrol the area. Allen cautioned that Greenburg's action was "a little previous" since the Service had no authority to accept the property until final clearance of title by the Solicitor, acceptance by the Secretary of the Interior, and issuance of a Presidential Proclamation. Furthermore, he pointed out that the Director's request for \$2,640 to manage the anticipated Fort Laramie National Monument in Fiscal Year 1939 (the year beginning July 1, 1938) had been turned down by the Bureau of the Budget. Likewise rejected was a six-year program totalling \$70,000 which had been proposed to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, to make a start on "stabilization, restoration and repair." [11]

In effect, Randels was told to carry on, "keeping as close a watch on the area as is physically possible under present arrangements." The frustrated engineer did his best with a thankless job, reporting further deterioration and vandalism which he attempted to combat by "nailing up windows and doors with old discarded lumber from Scotts Bluff." Peering into the future, he suggested the wisdom of placing Fort Laramie under management of the Scotts Bluff National Monument Custodian, with a ranger to be stationed at the Fort. Mr. Cammerer concurred in this plan, with the result that the 1940 budget of \$2,610 (effective July 1, 1939) provided \$1,860. for a ranger at Fort Laramie. Later this organizational decision was quietly reversed, presumably upon protest by Dan Greenburg, who was mindful of the earlier uproar in Wyoming caused by the thought that Fort Laramie might become a mere satellite of Scotts Bluff National Monument. Although Scotts Bluff personnel would continue their technical involvement in Fort Laramie affairs for several more years, the Fort would be separately managed by its own Custodian as soon as it was on its own financial feet. [12]

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

2. Early Federal Custodianship, 1938-1939

On May 31, 1938 the Scotts Bluff CCC Camp was terminated, and on June 22 Randels received a telegram from Regional Director Allen instructing him to report to Rocky Mountain National Park for duty. He was also to relinquish the full custodianship of Scotts Bluff to the original appointee, Merrill J. Mattes, who had served as Historian during the CCC interim. Thus automatically Mattes also assumed the role of liaison officer for Fort Laramie and, when Fort Laramie National Monument was officially proclaimed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on July 16, 1938, he became the first official Custodian of that new park area, a fact confirmed by Associate Director A. E. Demaray's letter to him of August 12: "Mr. Randels' duties as Acting Custodian [of Scotts Bluff] included supervision of Fort Laramie, and as those duties have now been assigned to you, Fort Laramie National Monument has been placed under your supervision." [13]

Mattes' role as Acting Custodian for Fort Laramie was of limited duration, and it was secondary to his Scotts Bluff duties. Though now once more the full-fledged Custodian of Scotts Bluff, he was technically only interim or "Acting Custodian" of Fort Laramie. No full-fledged resident Custodian could be hired until funds would become available as of July 1, 1939. Nevertheless, Fort Laramie as a Federal civilian establishment began under his aegis, and it began auspiciously with an action program to initiate area improvements.

As of July 16, 1938 Old Fort Laramie had no where to go but up, for it had reached its nadir as a decrepit "ghost fort." Buildings, many of them in recent use as cow-barns, pig-pens, and chicken sheds, were a shambles, some seemingly on the verge of collapse from decades of weathering, rigged alterations, and vandalism. The historic picture was further blurred by the existence of extraneous sheds, fences, feed-troughs, windmills, piles of manure and layers of trash.

By Service agreement the Harmeier family remained in the Officers Quarters adjoining the Sutler's Store (the Hunton House), to provide some degree of on-site protection against vandals. [14] Mattes and Scotts Bluff rangers re-boarded windows and padlocked doors. Immediately after the Proclamation, E. A. Hummel joined him on an inspection tour and together they formulated a program for a CCC project, broken into three main parts: topographical survey, archeological reconnaissance, and "Landscaping, Undifferentiated," a fancy term for general clean-up and obliteration of non-historic features. [15]

On August 4 Hummel advised Mattes that the Bureau of Reclamation had approved a Fort Laramie work force of 20 enrollees from the Lake Guernsey CCC Camp, to operate for 60 days, beginning mid-August. Men and equipment would be transported daily from Lake Guernsey. Archeologist G. Hubert Smith was dispatched on assignment from Fort Ridgeley, Minnesota, to supervise archeological investigations and coordinate clean-up work to ensure against the accidental destruction of bona fide historic features. Engineer Foreman Allen was assigned from the Fort Casper CCC Camp to survey the boundaries, while Foreman Lundy of the Guernsey Camp ran work crews. The entire project was directed by Mattes who made frequent inspection trips from Scotts Bluff, following initial project review with the foremen.

Among results of the fortuitous CCC project were vastly improved appearance of the grounds, the first reliable site map to record accurately all identifiable historic features, and preliminary archeology which delineated hidden building sites and laid the groundwork for the area's unique collection of military period artifacts. Except for the removal of dung and debris, and the locking up or boarding up of doors and windows, no actual work on historic buildings themselves was undertaken at the time, in the absence of any funds for the purpose or any preservation priorities. A by-product of the archeological survey was confirmation of the fact that the Monument area excluded over one-half of the 1890 Fort grounds, primarily the Quartermaster and stabling area. [16]

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of having knowledgeable professionals in control of the clean-up operation. The salvaging of a historic site by amateurs, however enthusiastic, too often results in irreparable damage to or loss of valuable but unrecognized features. Mattes was uniquely qualified to oversee this sensitive operation because of his previous pioneering research work on Fort Laramie historic structures. Prior to Federal acquisition, from January to April, 1938 the Regional Office had arranged for him to be on special assignment, to gather all possible data in anticipation of Monument status. His travels to the National Archives in Washington, D.C. as well as libraries of the Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado Historical Societies resulted in an extensive card-file bibliography, and the first official Fort Laramie research report "A Preliminary Report on the Evolution of Public Buildings at Old Fort Laramie" which laid the foundation for all subsequent research on historic structures. [17]

On August 22 Dr. Howard R. Driggs, William H. Jackson and other notables of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association convened at the Oregon Trail Museum at Scotts Bluff, on one of their series of annual treks along western trails. This occasion was highlighted by Jackson's staking the site of his 1866 camp in Mitchell Pass as a boy bull-whacker. The following evening the group visited Fort Laramie and had a roaring campfire meeting in the grove west of the parade ground. On the 24th Tom Allen, Regional Director, visited the Fort with Mattes, the first high-level Park Service official to do so following its establishment. [18]

Mattes had been offered a Graduate Fellowship in Archeology at Yale University for the 1938-1939 academic year, which had the approval of the Director. Accordingly, on September 15 he departed for nine months on a leave-without-pay basis. He urged assignment of Charles E. Humberger, seasonal ranger, to interim management of Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie, Because of problems relating to Humberger's non-permanent status he was not given such authority until November 1, by which time both areas had been placed under the administrative coordination of David H. Canfield, Superintendent, Rocky Mountain National Park. During the September 15-October 31 interim David D. Condon, Naturalist of Yellowstone

Park was ordered on special assignment to Scotts Bluff, but without custodial designation. The records show Mattes as "Coordinating Custodian, Fort Laramie, July 16 to October 5, 1938," when Canfield was named "Coordinating Superintendent." [19]

During the autumn and winter of 1938-1939 Humberger kept on the run, supervising an Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) road project at Scotts Bluff and making periodic visits to the Fort. He helped wrap up the CCC clean-up operation there, installed a few signs, and made emergency repairs to the historic structures resulting from damage that winter by abnormally high winds. In February Ranger Bert Fraser of Rocky Mountain National Park took over from Humberger and became the first NPS official to be actually stationed at the Fort. Fraser, a park ranger on special assignment, styled himself "Acting Caretaker." Neither he nor Humberger bore the official "Acting Custodian" designation at Fort Laramie. The faithful Harmeiers, who received no pay or designation whatsoever, moved out when Fraser moved in. A registration book that they kept voluntarily showed 3,000 visitors to the embryonic National Monument since its inception.

It was fortunate that Bert was a bachelor, because living conditions at the Fort at this stage were atrocious. Utilizing help, materials, and furniture provided by Rocky Mountain (RMNP) he rigged up quarters of sorts in the old Cavalry Barracks. There were successive plagues of bats, rats, rattlers, and feral cats. During his four-month incumbency the temperature swung from 17 below to 107 above, golf-ball size hail shattered windows, and high dry winds further jeopardized the precious ruins. The approach road was one continuous wash-board and the "sanitation system" consisted of a primitive privy in close proximity to the meager water supply.

On his own initiative the undaunted Fraser accomplished quite a bit. He placated visitors, put up boundary markers, kept a good photographic record, and did a creditable job of public relations by supervising the installation of museum exhibits in the Lake Guernsey Museum, made by the NPS Museum Laboratory, in Berkeley, California. He interviewed old-timers and tracked down artifacts, notably one of the oak-and-iron doors missing from the Old Guardhouse. He set up the area's first museum exhibit, in the building later identified as Officers Quarters E, and made valuable notes on authentic Fort Laramie artifacts and documents located in private homes in the vicinity. In effect, he started an unbroken 40-year tradition of enthusiastic, energetic, and imaginative Fort Laramie resident Custodians (later to be designated Superintendents) even though he never bore that title.

Fraser also had general supervision of two emergency work crews that the Regional Office in Omaha had promoted. The ERA provided forty men to clean out several miles of irrigation ditches that served the Fort area but had long been unused, and to make other improvements, such as a temporary parking area near the Cavalry Barracks. Among other notable accomplishments were fumigation of old stable and pen areas, emergency stabilization (propping-up) of Old Bedlam, boxing in of all the dangerously weakened brick chimneys, and the fabrication and erection of a flag-pole. On May 20 the American flag flew officially for the first time in 49 years. The ERA crew was phased out early, to be reassigned to help ranchers combat a grasshopper invasion of the Region, but in its stead another CCC crew from Lake Guernsey was launched. This consisted of 20 enrollees, five to work as guides to the increasing numbers of visitors, and 15 assigned to Archeologist G. Hubert Smith, now transferred from Fort Ridgeley to RMNP jurisdiction. [20]

Meanwhile, back in Washington, D.C., serious thought was being given to the Fort's future. At Tom Allen's

request of March 27, 1939, Chief Historian Lee and Acting Chief of Planning W. G. Carnes put together the first formal policy statement re: Fort Laramie development, "to serve as a guide to preservation and planning." Several of their pronouncements became gospel for program planners for the next 40 years: (1) The primary objective was to save the old buildings by the best preservation techniques. (2) Restoration would be undertaken cautiously, and only after thorough historical and architectural research. (3) There would be no reconstruction of vanished buildings. (4) The final injunction was that "the headquarters and museum development be located outside the area occupied by the Fort proper," to facilitate administrative control, prevent the confusion of new work and old, and avoid efforts to adapt the historic buildings to modern uses for which they were poorly suited. [21] (As of 1978 this last precept had not been fulfilled. For 40 years various historic buildings have been occupied as "temporary" headquarters, museum, quarters, workshops, garage, etc., and long-standing proposals to construct such facilities on the east or right bank of the Laramie, opposite the parade ground area, are still in contention.)

While Fraser was still on the premises Regional Architects Wilfred Hill and Leslie Wilkie resumed the long-range program for the preparation of measured drawings of all of the surviving Fort structures. This was to be done in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), and the original drawings, along with record photographs, were to be placed on permanent file with the Library of Congress. Over the decades since this survey was authorized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935 thousands of buildings in the United States have been so recorded. Fort Laramie was one of the first historic places west of the Mississippi River to benefit from this program.

Hill and Wilkie also initiated field studies and plans for "the restoration program we hope will be gotten underway in the future." Also, finishing touches were given to the boundary survey and area mapping by a Regional Office crew, and permanent survey markers were emplaced. [22]

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

3. Custodian Jess H. Lombard, 1939-1944

The first full-time residential Custodian of Fort Laramie National Monument was Jess H. Lombard, native of Cripple Creek and Forestry Graduate of Colorado State College at Fort Collins. He arrived on the scene June, 1939 and was transferred to Dinosaur National Monument in May, 1944. During his five year stint of area pioneering under the most adverse circumstances he managed, literally, to "hold the fort" intact until better times could permit his successors to initiate meaningful restoration programs. Lombard's problem, shared by all NPS managers during this period, was World War II and the virtual freeze on funds for improvements or area staffing. While American forces were paying the grievous toll for victory in Europe and the South Pacific, the Fort Laramie buildings, ancient and forlorn relics of the Indian Wars, had somehow to be preserved a few more years before their desperate case could be attended to. During this precarious period Lombard had the benefit of the direct material assistance of the Coordinating Superintendent's office at Rocky Mountain National Park; the planning assistance of the Regional Office in Omaha; and research assistance by neighboring Scotts Bluff personnel. But the biggest single factor in his success was Lombard's own native ingenuity, drive and selfless dedication reflected in 60 to 70 hour work weeks despite a measly area budget of around \$2,000. per annum, for starters, including the Custodian's salary! [23]

Lombard's only lapse in conscientiousness, of record, was in connection with a field planning conference set up by Assistant Superintendent John McLaughlin, in November 1939, when the underpaid Custodian announced that the meeting conflicted with his planned autumnal elk hunt, a sacred prerogative of all red-blooded Wyoming male citizens. Since the country phone line to the Fort was out of whack, as usual, the heated issue was resolved by a flurry of telegrams, with the dates of both meeting and elk hunt delicately adjusted. Lombard's argument that he needed meat to feed his family, to supplement the meager diet enforced by his pitifully small salary, carried the day. Later he developed an irrigated "Victory Garden" in back of the Cavalry Barracks, with bumper crops of vegetables, but especially corn. This not only further relieved the alleged hunger pains (the elk hunt was a grand success) but word got around about the succulent Fort Laramie sweet corn and, after years of benign neglect, official travel to the Fort from Estes Park, Omaha and Washington, D.C. enjoyed a notable upswing. Actually, feeding "visiting firemen" on a gratuitous basis, in the absence of a cafe in the neighboring town of Fort Laramie, became standard procedure for Jess and his good-natured wife Ila.

Not only were there frequent pilgrimages to the Fort by the Coordinating Superintendent and members of his staff. The Region and the Washington Office began to demonstrate renewed interest. The Regional people looked upon Fort Laramie as a great planning challenge and, in addition, it was right on the road to the more glamorous Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. Associate Director Hillory Tolson, whose visit to the site with Mattes in 1936 led directly to state and federal ownership, was the first high level Washington official to visit the new jewel in the Park Service crown, in 1941. Two years later it was visited by none other than Newton B. Drury, NPS Director vice Arno B. Cammerer, accompanied by Conrad L. Wirth, Chief of Lands, who himself would become Director in 1950. [24]

During the War years the Fort Laramie staff consisted of a grand total of one Lombard except for a temporary clerk loaned by Rocky Mountain, and an occasional laborer or carpenter when a dribble of funds could be wheedled out of the Regional Office. It was a lonely vigil, but there were a few bright spots that bolstered "staff" morale and gave the neophyte area a good official profile. In February 1941 there was a formal regional Federal conference at Rocky Mountain National Park to which were invited the Custodians of the four satellite areas under Canfield's coordination Fort Laramie, Scotts Bluff, Dinosaur, and Devil's Tower. [25] Also, the Rocky Mountain and Regional Offices held a series of planning conferences at the Fort to attempt to shape the future while stymied in the present. Best of all, funds and manpower were scrounged up to provide the first effective program of "emergency stabilization" of the old wrecks that once constituted the pride of the grand Army post, an achievement that was highlighted by formal and well-publicized ceremonies in 1940 recognizing the rescue and preliminary rehabilitation of the most famous of all Fort Laramie structures Old Bedlam.

Before anything could be done with the physical remains it was necessary for all offices to agree on some kind of standard identification for them so that managers and technicians could communicate intelligibly. Such identification was now possible inasmuch as historical research of old military records and ground-plans had progressed sufficiently to comprehend the original military character of most of the surviving structures, the dates of original construction, and the dates of major pre-1890 modifications. Now it was possible to give a proper working label to each of the 22 structures still standing, either intact or in ruins (the same number known to have survived as of 1915 at the beginning of "The Crusade"). Twelve of these were readily identifiable and could be labelled without ambiguity: Old Bedlam, the Old Guardhouse, the New Guardhouse, the Old Bakery, the New Bakery, Cavalry Barracks, Administration Building, Sawmill, Non-Commissioned Officers Quarters, Hospital, Commissary Storehouse, and Old Army Bridge. [26]

The six Officers Quarters presented only a problem of labelling. Since none of the military occupants were known in 1939 Mattes devised an alphabetical system Officers Quarters A, B, C, D, E, and F going clockwise around the parade ground beginning with the handsome frame "Sandercock House" that sat on top of old Fort John. ("F" was known to be the post-1890 John Hunton residence.)

The Sutler's Store label was used from the start and then after research was retained despite the fact that in the last two decades of military occupation it was known rather as the "Post Traders." Although the biggest part of the surviving structure represented additions and alterations of 1883, it was the original 1849-1850 adobe store itself, built and occupied by the "Sutler", that gave this unique civilian-managed establishment its special glamor. The 1850 Magazine was at first obscured as a chicken-shed appendage to the fragmentary remains of a lime-concrete addition to an extinct adobe officers quarters, so it took more research to clarify

its origins. What was later identified by an old-timer as the Commanding Officer's Chicken House was in 1939 thought to be "The Colonel's Stable," presumably for his favorite horse, and it was some time before the architects came to the conclusion that the frame Privy behind Officers Quarters F was of authentic pre-1890 vintage.

With the historic structure identity problem more or less solved, it became necessary to give highest priority to "first aid" to these aging and decrepit relics. This was made possible by the revival of the ERA project at the Fort from late 1939 through June, 1942, on the scale of a 21-man crew and gross expenditures in the neighborhood of \$40,000. This was under Lombard's direction except for architectural and engineering advice by Rocky Mountain and Regional Office staffs. Among accomplishments in this department were the stabilization of the creaky, toppling old Sutler's Store by the application of cables, turnbuckles, and shoring timbers; reinforcement of footings of the Administration Building ruins; re-roofing, and repairing chimneys of Officers Quarters A, E and F; putting Officers Quarters F in useable interior condition; and "defensive" repairs on the exteriors of all intact structures.

During this period an effective "construction proposal" form was devised, to ensure that all work undertaken had proper technical review and approval. At Canfield's suggestion, Mattes and Lombard attempted to standardize terminology for the various types and degrees of preservation work stabilization, repair, restoration, reconstruction, substitution, etc. Also, in accordance with approved restoration technology of the period, a method of using stamped metal markers was used to identify and date all new structural members, to differentiate from original workmanship. In addition, Lombard was prevailed upon to make a detailed written record of all maintenance, repair, or other work on all historic structures, to be kept in chronological sequence in a 5 x 8 card file. Meanwhile, by late 1940 the Regional Office had completed the set of measured drawings by Architects Hill and Wilkie of all structures, with photo albums, for future reference.

[27]

Most of the available funds and manpower were expended on "Old Bedlam," the famous old bachelor officers quarters and onetime Commanding Officers headquarters, which had been received from the State in alarming condition gutted internally, its once-graceful verandas hanging in shreds, the main building block creaking and shuddering in every high wind. After shoring up the 90-year old veteran with timber bracing to prevent collapse, Hummel, Canfield and Lombard met in September, 1939 and agreed to give first priority to what they called "restoration" of Old Bedlam, but which consisted actually of some first class rehabilitation which would keep the structure in a respectable upright position until a genuine full-blown restoration could be achieved. The principal elements of the Canfield-Lombard treatment of Bedlam was as follows: jacking up the entire structure to level the walls and pour new footings; re-roofing, after the reduction of rotten brick chimneys; re-building of the double veranda with retention of still viable original members; and replacement of original weatherboards missing or curled out of shape. [28]

On August 15, 1940 over 4,000 people assembled to attend ceremonies for which the rejuvenated porch of Old Bedlam served as speaking platform. The affair was for the primary purpose of recognizing what Coordinating Superintendent Canfield as Master of Ceremonies called "the first restoration project," which was also an appropriate moment to publicly dedicate the new National Monument. It so happened that 1940 was also the 50th anniversary of Wyoming's statehood, as well as the abandonment of the military post. Suitable recognition of these coincidental facts took the form of dedication of a bronze plaque to John

"Portugee" Phillips, described by guest speaker Robert S. Ellison of Tulsa (first chairman of the Historical Landmark Commission) as "the Paul Revere of the Plains" because of his heroic ride from Fort Phil Kearny to Fort Laramie to report the Fetterman Massacre of December, 1866. Since legend has it that Phillips' exhausted horse dropped dead on the parade ground, and that the haggard frozen Scout then burst upon a startled assemblage of officers and their ladies celebrating Christmas in Old Bedlam, the plaque was erected directly in front of that venerable structure. Other notables present on that auspicious occasion were George Houser, Guernsey editor, old Fort Laramie champion, and now Secretary of the State Department of Commerce and Industry; Howard R. Driggs, William H. Jackson, Mae Reed Porter and other notables of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association; and the then current HLCW trio, Warren Richardson, Joseph Weppner, and John Charles Thompson. Following the formalities, which included a lively brass band and a beef barbecue, a historical pageant, "Wyoming Speaks," was staged on the grounds by the Goshen and Platte Counties Golden Anniversary Committees. [29]

There were other less glamorous accomplishments with ERA and reserve funds under Lombard's auspices, more in the nature of maintenance or temporary improvements." The final phase of area cleanup saw the removal of the last of the non-historic or post-1890 grounds debris and the restoration of native grasses, an accomplishment enhanced by abundant rainfall in the early 1940s following drought years. This promoted weed growth also, of course, primarily bindweed which was combatted by a poisoning project. Restoration of the Fort Laramie irrigation ditch facilitated watering of the greenery, including saplings planted around the parade ground in a well-intentioned but dubious effort to restore the trees evident in 1880s photographs. A late-period "race-track" on the plateau north of the Non-Commissioned Officers Quarters was obliterated. Among other unheralded achievements were the completion of boundary fencing, installation of boundary markers, and a few directional and interpretive signs.

More significant was the construction of a temporary equipment shed, a "temporary" parking area, and "temporary" pit toilets adjacent to the Cavalry Barracks, all "temporary" facilities that were destined to expand and dominate the scene for the next 40 years, or until the date of this writing (1978). All of these were in the immediate vicinity of the Barracks, the parade ground end of which now became a combination Custodian's office and living quarters. Despite all efforts to make these quarters liveable for the next 25 years, the character of the superannuated structure was such that adequate heating was a perennial problem, a fact stressed on one sub-zero occasion when a hot-water bottle which fell from bed to floor was discovered to be frozen solid in the morning. After skunks, mice, and other creatures beneath the floor were eradicated, unsavory odors wafted down from the ceiling – pigeon droppings and bat guano in quantities on the unused second floor – which left olfactory impressions long after the stuff was shoveled up and trucked away. [30]

A minor triumph of the Lombard period in the historic preservation department was the refurbishing – for appearances only – of an authentic pit privy or out-house behind Officers Quarters F, the smallest of the military structures surviving more or less intact. Being an interesting fixture of the 1880s, a prime conversation piece, it was with some validity that Lombard referred proudly to this as a "Victorian bathroom" or "Gay Nineties Latrine." Since visitors also required "working latrines," Lombard had two functional privies of similar antique design built behind the ruins of Officers Quarters B, C and D (which are still in place, as of 1978, but no longer functional). [31]

A major concern in the historic preservation area, not resolved in the Lombard era and never since resolved

to universal satisfaction, was the treatment of historic standing ruins, consisting mainly of the stark walls of grout or lime-concrete Army structures erected 1873-1886, denuded of lumber after 1890 by parties who paid private owners John Hunton and Joe Wilde for the salvage. These are identified as the Administration Building, Officers Quarters B, C, and D, the Sawmill, the Hospital, the Non-Com Quarters, the New Bakery, and the New Guardhouse. While these have the appearance of solidity, the grout deteriorates from weathering, principally alternate freezing and thawing of moisture, and the ruins are particularly vulnerable at foundation plate levels and apertures. In time holes and cracks appear, eventually causing the walls to crumble, tilt and if nothing is done collapse, as happened since 1937 to portions of the Hospital. From the beginning of NPS involvement, even though other intact structures received preference, thought was given to ways and means of "ruins stabilization." During the War there was a series of unhelpful technical reports by Charles Randels, Wilfred Hill and others on the problem of doing something about footings, cappings, and wall surface preservation. The problem was challenging enough to give rise in June 1941 to a conference at the Fort attended by Omaha and Washington, D.C. engineers, fortified by the latest data on masonry preservation techniques. From this, definitive solutions were supposed to emerge but the intractable nature of the ponderous grout walls, coupled with the rather helpless infancy of masonry preservation science, resulted in no bona fide solutions at that time. For the next three decades different managers and technicians would try different solutions, experimentally, with questionable long-term results. [32]

In a trip report of August 1940 Regional Historian Hummel cautioned against "make work" with ERA crews that might unthinkingly damage historical evidence, and stressed the need for more historical and archeological research on Fort Laramie structures their chronology, original plans, and uses before valid preservation proposals could be formulated. Pursuant to his concern and that of Acting Coordinating Superintendent Doerr, in October 1941 Custodian Mattes of Scotts Bluff received a handsome promotion (from \$2,000 p.a. to \$2,600 p.a.) for performing extra duty as official research historian or "historical technician" for Fort Laramie. He was to research and prepare technical reports beyond those prior accomplishments when he was only on a volunteer or special assignment basis.

Mattes was able to contribute significantly in several ways, despite his residency at Scotts Bluff, partly because he had a permanent ranger and clerk, plus ample maintenance funds, to back him up at that area during his absences, partly because of his technical skills, and partly because of an enthusiasm for Fort Laramie dating back to 1935 when he first visited that area and became one of its vocal advocates. Among his more significant accomplishments during the Lombard period was the completion of an encyclopedic compendium of archival and library source references entitled "Surviving Army Structures at Fort Laramie," which became a basic guide for future architects, planners and interpreters. Another major contribution was a report entitled, "Research Checklist of Contemporary Plans and Pictures," which over the decades has been frequently updated as new pictorial records have been discovered. Fort Laramie buildings, scenes, and personalities seems to have been surprisingly well recorded by artists and photographers over the years, and as their graphic evidence began to accumulate as a valuable source of primary evidence, the collection and cataloguing of such items became imperative.

In addition to these basic studies by Mattes, Custodian Lombard conducted interviews with old-timers who had personal ties with the pre-1890 Fort. Some of these people had remained as Wyoming residents. Others were outstate visitors who "returned to the scene of the crime," upon hearing of its new park status, and made themselves known. Prominent in the former group was Alice Fields Sampson, daughter of the Fields who was appointed as Interior Department Custodian in 1890. Two valuable informants were Meade

Sandercock and his sister Mamie Robertson whose childhood recollections of the Sutler's Store provided the first clear record of the precise 1880s uses of the various sections of that building. Among venerable visitors from outstate were General G. W. McIver (ret.), who had been involved in the dismantling of the Fort in 1890, and Jack S. Collins, nephew of James S. and Gilbert Collins who held the post tradership in the 1870s. There were other research windfalls, such as the Custodian's discovery of a large batch of papers and ledgers in a hidden cranny of the Sutler's Store belonging to Post Trader John London of the 1880s. Another example was a bit of tantalizing research on the Hog Ranch Saloon when that one-time hangout for enlisted men, just west of the Military Reservation, was levelled by private owners unsympathetic to the cause of historic preservation. [33]

Mattes made frequent visits to the Fort to consult with Lombard on project planning and execution. He assisted in the preparation of interpretive tour maps and historical resumes used in both area Master Plans and information leaflets for visitors. He also conjured up the first "Preliminary Museum Plan" for the area. Since no permanent museum or Visitor Center materialized during the first 40 years of the park's existence, no use has been made of this or any other of the several versions of a Fort museum plan. Instead, each Superintendent beginning with Lombard improvised his own "temporary museum," using artifacts, illustrations and improvised labels, to give visitors insight into Fort Laramie history and sociology. Lombard's "museum" was the front two rooms of Officers Quarters E, plus a rough "laboratory" and storage place in the rear. This latter was the beginning of an effort to formalize, catalog, and accession historical objects or "relics" that had accumulated by donation or "surface archeology" under Mattes, Fraser and Lombard, and the artifacts unearthed by the initial archeological programs.

G. Hubert Smith, who had worked with Mattes in the initial 1938 clean-up operation, was on hand also for three summers thereafter to direct CCC crews in solving archeological puzzles. In 1939 he excavated the two vanished Officers Quarters sites between Old Bedlam and Officers Quarters E, in the process discovering that a standing stone remnant of one of the sites was in fact the walls of the original Post Magazine of 1850. That same summer he also excavated the foundations of the extinct Infantry Barracks and kitchens at the north end of the parade ground. The cleaning, labelling, boxing and storage of over 60 cartons of artifacts then accumulated, under Smith's direction, entitles him to recognition as the area's first professional, though temporary, museum curator. His manuscript write-ups on these "digs", though never published, also constitute the first scientific reports on Fort Laramie archeology. [34]

In 1940-1941 help on the artifact collection was made available through the National Youth Administration (NYA) under the direction of Jerome Hendron, another CCC veteran. Smith and Hendron next excavated the levelled kitchen area of Officers Quarters D, and then tackled the cellar of the adobe wing of the Sutler's Store, which had always been the main retail store, coming up with an impressive collection of artifacts that earlier amateur diggers had missed, primarily coins dating back to 1835. The original floor was missing, but Hendron was able to plot the existence of a storage area and sub-floor. Hendron's enduring contribution was a report entitled, "Introduction to the Archeology of Fort Laramie," which surveyed all work up to that point. (Hendron later moved to Arizona. After a stint with the Minnesota Historical Society, Smith became a historical archeologist with the Missouri River Basin Surveys of the Smithsonian Institution at Lincoln, Nebraska.)

Before Lombard's departure for Utah, the temporary museum was moved to the office lobby in the Cavalry

Barracks, while the cartons and catalog which constituted the museum laboratory were installed in another section of that building. Other steps taken for the benefit of visitors included the installation of informational signs and markers at the building sites, the free distribution of an information bulletin or area guide, the first official printed publication for the area. Also published during this period, in Annals of Wyoming, official quarterly of the Wyoming Historical Department, was Mattes' documented research report on "The Sutler's Store at Fort Laramie" and Lombard's sentimental essay on "Old Bedlam." [35]

Though there was still not much to see beside the drab exteriors of the old buildings, a portent of things to come was the upsurge of visitors, from 4,000 in 1937 to over 10,000 in 1940, the year Old Bedlam was given cosmetic treatment and made the focus of dedication ceremonies. (Considering war-time exigencies, such as gas rationing, it is not surprising that attendance slipped below 2,500 annually from 1942 through 1944.) Another statistic was an operating budget of over \$6,000. for Fiscal Year 1944, an inflationary three-fold increase over the \$1,950. for starters in Fiscal Year 1939. Much of the increase went for equipment and maintenance. Despite an administrative increase in the Custodian's salary (from \$1,920 to \$2,100 p.a.) the Fort Laramie custodianship was still no sinecure. [36]

Although physical improvements were severely limited by war-time budgets, there was no ceiling on long-range Master Planning of Fort Laramie's future by concerned officials at all levels. Anticipating expansive post-war budgets, there was some heavy concentration during this period on the subject, which is worth surveying briefly as a record of the cerebral energy expended, and an example of the planning process for a new Park Service area. (The process, which consists basically of exploring all alternatives along with the accumulation of maximum data, seems not to have changed radically between 1939 and 1978.) Details of which conference was held where and by whom may be omitted except to note that the principals involved in this maiden planning effort, besides Canfield and Lombard, were Howard Baker, Associate Regional Director, and Edward A. Hummel, Regional Historian, of the Regional Office, and Merrill Mattes of Scotts Bluff.

The first Fort Laramie Master Plan, dated June 1939, predicated a future headquarters area on the bottoms west of the parade ground area. It was promptly criticized as being too close to the historic buildings and subject to flooding. Accordingly, a second plan attempted to site a headquarters development in the Southeast corner of the area, on the far or South side of the Laramie River, and west of Deer Creek. This would require a new access road from the west and, of course, a new bridge across the Laramie, but all within the given Monument boundary. While well screened from the parade ground by river bottom trees and undergrowth, this was a kind of dismal swamp which bode ill for employee's health, was also subject to flooding, and it offered little control of public access to the Fort proper. Despite their flaws, both these initial plans had the merit of managing to remain within the given arbitrary and rather cramped boundaries of the 214 acre Monument.

A third version, proposed by Canfield in 1940, would put the headquarters, utilities and residential areas in the same general Southeast corner, but this time on the right bank of Deer Creek, above flood level and with sight control of the Fort. The catch here was that road access to the park might require an extension of the south and east boundaries to provide right-of-way along the south side of the Laramie, and adequate elbow room for new buildings properly screened at a discreet distance from the historic area. Canfield's idea was that the separate old and new building groups would be connected by a foot-bridge, extending from a low-

profile Visitor Center to the west bank, at a point somewhere between Officers Quarters A and the Administration Building ruins, that is, the vicinity of the original adobe-walled Fort John, which would make an admirable interpretive point of departure. This bold concept, coupled with awareness now that almost half of the 1880s Fort complex had been omitted from the State purchase, led to a growing conviction that it would be necessary to seek additional land through Congressional enactment. So almost from the very beginnings of the National Monument we find increasing reference in reports and correspondence to the need for extension of boundaries, and this is reflected similarly in periodic Master Plan revisions. [37]

Neither Canfield nor any one else would have been able to guess in 1940 that over 25 years would elapse before the exact acreage required would be agreed upon, legislation enacted, and the lands purchased. Neither could he have imagined that after the lapse of 38 years there would still be no new museum-headquarters complex at the site he envisioned, or any where else that, in fact, the Fort offices and Visitor Center would still be "temporarily" in one of the historic buildings.

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<http://www.nps.gov/foia/history/part3-3.htm>
Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

4. Thor Borreson, Custodian, 1944-1946

During the three months custodial gap between Jess Lombard's departure and Thor Borreson's arrival the vacuum was filled by Canfield's assignment of Jack Moomaw "to hold the fort." Moomaw, a colorful grizzled veteran of the Rocky Mountain Park ranger force, had previously sustained a heart attack, but the Superintendent thought he was capable of coping with random visitors. Being from a well-forested National Park, Moomaw couldn't stand the sight of the barren parade ground with its pathetic scraggly saplings. His principal concern, therefore, was nursing along the quadrangular perimeter of anemic cottonwoods and green ash, setting new plantings, and utilizing lengths of condemned Rocky Mountain Park fire hose and an old condemned asthmatic pump to tap the Laramie River for irrigation. He also declared war on rattlers, which still infested the ruins, started a botanical list for the area, and augmented the park museum collection by industrious scabbling for surface artifacts and twisting the arms of visiting neighbors to part with their alleged Fort Laramie relics. Jack, who had some reputation as a minor poet of the Rockies, also found time to write historical poetry for the Goshen County News, including this specimen pertaining to imaginary lovers at an emigrant camp at Register Cliff:

. . . Yet they carved their names and made their vows, and kissed and loitered here,

For their love was stronger than weariness, or poverty or fear. . .

Equally poetic were his monthly reports, one of which included this gem:

.. the whispering of wind in the grass and the call of a meadow-lark has long replaced the tramp of marching feet. . . Instead of the bugle's call there is only the sad-sweet moan of a turtle-dove. [38]

The sentimental ranger returned to his beloved Rocky Mountains when Borreson arrived on the scene August 9, 1944. Borreson had actually accepted the custodianship vice Lombard in March, 1943, but war-time manpower regulations prevented his release at that time from a job as ship carpenter with the Todd Shipyard, Dry Dock, and Refitting Company, Erie Basin, Brooklyn, New York. So Lombard lingered on, and Borreson could not pry himself loose from his patriotic shipping business for a whole year. [39]

Borreson was a self-educated Norwegian emigrant who had the finely honed practical skills of a true craftsman. He developed a reputation as a historical restoration specialist at the Fort Niagara State Park in western New York, and in 1938-1940 he had been the principal technician in extensive earthwork and redoubt restoration at Yorktown Battlefield, Colonial National Historical Park, Virginia. In theory he was a splendid choice for a Fort Laramie Custodian, with his orientation in military architecture and ordnance, and his restoration skills. In practice his remarkable talents were somewhat wasted, in part because the remains there bore little resemblance to the European-style military complexes he was familiar with, but mainly because of war-time restrictions which prevented any meaningful restoration work. The bitter irony of Borreson's brief regime was that, despite the emphasis by his superiors in planning for the anticipated post-war boom, Borreson had to contend with existing war-time realities. He got bogged down in caretaker duties, and he suffered a succession of misfortunes, both personal and official, climaxed by his own most untimely death in December, 1946.

Thor had no sooner settled his sizeable family into the Cavalry Barracks makeshift quarters, complete with dry-hole unheated privy in the rear, than he was visited by Chief Historian Herbert E. Kahler, in company with Mattes and new Coordinating Superintendent John Doerr, successor to Dave Canfield who had got himself a commission in the Navy. Before 1944 was out he was also honored by the visits of Regional Director Lawrence C. Merriam, Regional Engineer W. E. Robertson, and Regional Architect Halsey Davidson, all full of ideas on the Fort's future, and prodding Borreson to apply his genius to restoration plans. They also urged him to devote more time to visitors, devising ways and means of making them happy. Assistant Superintendent George Miller and fellow Custodian (and Fort Laramie Historian) Merrill J. Mattes, being closer to the mundane realities of the here-and-now, protested that Borreson, all by himself at the area, had to contend with monstrous difficulties in the way of area maintenance and protection, that the conscientious Custodian was overstretched to the point of exhaustion, and that it was unfair to expect him also to perform planning miracles or to give each and every chance visitor the full personalized tour. [40]

Conditions at the Fort in 1944-1945 were aggravated by severe weather conditions, with an excess of rain, making the county approach road "a first-class example of a corduroy road." The incidence of leakage of historic roofs was on a sharp upcurve, and the weeds ran amok. Thor plaintively inquired of Doerr in a September 9, 1944 memorandum if he should think of himself as an administrator, a historical technician, or a laborer. "So far we have no choice but to be an out-and-out laborer. The quickest way to develop hay fever is to move to Fort Laramie. We need to have this weed patch looking like a National Monument." Thor waited for over a year for the delivery of a Jari power scythe and other equipment; meanwhile he had to combat the situation with hand tools and his own muscle power. Everything, it seems, grew wild except the parade ground trees which, despite the ample rain to reinforce the pump, somehow seemed to wither and die, no matter what!

Meanwhile the Goshen County Commissioners, with problems of their own, turned a deaf ear to the Custodian's plea to grade the county approach road. The shallow well next to the Cavalry Barracks, with a wheezy electric pump, served as the post water system despite misgivings about its bacteria count by the State Inspector. Then, in 1945, occurred a series of natural disasters. The Borreson family was hard-put to find ways and means, somehow, to survive, and plans for the glorious future somehow became irrelevant.

In early April there were "ruinous blizzards" and Borreson had to add to his repertoire of manual chores the

shoveling of tons of the lovely white flakes by hand, in the complete absence of any mechanical equipment, in order to enable his vehicle to reach the plowed county road. Then things got worse. Apologetically, he wrote on April 14 to the Superintendent: "I am sorry but this is going to be a bad news memo," and he proceeded to describe "a real Wyoming blizzard," with drifts shoulder-high, power- and telephone lines down, and railroads and highways up and down the Valley all blockaded. Through the generosity and cooperation of neighboring ranchers, the beleaguered Custodian managed to break a track into town where he was able to borrow lanterns and water buckets. Since his electric pump was knocked out, Thor resorted to another old well, the one behind Officers Row, and installed a hand-pump at his own expense, to carry water through the drifts in the manner of old country peasants. "We have certainly gone back to pioneer days," he wrote, not omitting the fact that the water had to be boiled to prevent typhoid or other dread diseases, while all manner of little creatures flapped and scurried around in the Cavalry Barracks attic, a haven from the blizzard.

Things were finally put back into shape, at the Fort and in town, thanks mainly to "Gleason at Guernsey," the Bureau of Reclamation manager who called the shots on local power distribution, and some token emergency funds from Washington, D.C. [\[41\]](#)

On July 30, 1945, Thor had to report "a second unfortunate incident to the Fort Laramie power line." On the 29th a violent windstorm snapped a tree, forcing the 33,000 volt Bureau of Reclamation line into contact with the Park's 2300 volt line, blowing out wiring and appliances in the Cavalry Barracks to the accompaniment of a spectacular series of flashes and outpourings of black smoke. Providentially no one was injured and the Barracks did not go up in flames, but it was a close call. "Sparks from the overhead wires set the grass afire," according to Borreson's report, and it is not clear why with all that wind to fan the sparks it didn't do likewise to the ancient and highly combustible roof. (One is inclined to credit the Providence that had preserved this and other Fort Laramie structures for over 50 years, despite all hazards, human and natural.) Again the "water system" was knocked out, and again Thor had to put the old historic well back of Officers Quarters E into service. Then the hand pump itself went out of commission, and what happened next is worth quoting from his memorandum of August 1:

Evidently it was not sufficient damage to put all electrical appliances out of commission, but on Sunday evening when we started to use the hand pump over behind the Officers Quarters, this too refused to work. . .

Since labor is scarce in this part of the country, a welcome sight appeared on the horizon at 9:30 AM in the person of Mr. Merrill Mattes. Having no time to confer on historical matters, he and I joined in a good day's work. Between two amateur well and pump workers, we succeeded in removing the pump and cylinder and installed a new valve and leather pump shoe by 5 PM. The Borreson family could drink water once more (previously Merrill and I had only beer). . .

Mr. Mattes returned home that evening happy in knowing that he had done his good deed for the day, and with the Custodian's praise and hearty appreciation ringing in his ears. . . The cost of the parts was \$3.10.

Thor failed to collect for this expense or others incurred in the April and July electrical breakdowns. Chief Clerk Hodson at Rocky Mountain took the position that permission to incur such obligations had not been obtained in advance. The fact that telephone connections were also as usual kaput and there was no way to obtain such authorization failed to sway the regulation-minded guardian of Fort Laramie's meager funds. [42]

Despite all the hardships and preoccupation with bare survival, Thor was able to make one important contribution to the Fort Laramie planning process, but it is first necessary to give the background of this. Before his leave of absence to help win the War, Dave Canfield had championed a Master Plan which would place all new facilities on the right bank of Laramie River, near Deer Creek, to be approached by a road on that side requiring an extension of Monument boundaries, the new complex to be connected with the historic parade ground area by a pedestrian bridge. Despite the fact that this plan was in harmony with basic principles laid down in 1939 by Washington officials Lee and Carnes, there were misgivings now about the plan by others in the Director's Office. [43] While the esthetic idealism of the Canfield Plan was recognized, its practical aspects were questioned, partly because of war-inspired cost consciousness, and partly because of a feeling that compatible uses of the historic buildings themselves should be seriously explored. The first expression of this approach is a memorandum of March 3, 1944 from Mattes to the Coordinating Superintendent. During most of Borreson's custodianship Mattes continued to do double duty as both Custodian of Scotts Bluff and "Historical Technician for Fort Laramie." (As a matter of fact he did triple duty, since during the War Regional Director Merriam designated him as "Acting Regional Historian" and had him come into Omaha frequently.) In February 1944 Mattes did a stretch in the Director's Office, and in his memorandum he set forth the collective thinking at that time of Carl Russell and Ned Burns of the Branch of Natural History, and Herb Kahler and Dr. Charles Porter of the Branch of History, relating to the location of a headquarters arrangement for Fort Laramie. This is summarized because it demonstrates that efforts to think through all "viable alternatives" go back over 30 years time:

1. The "historic approach" to Fort Laramie from across Laramie River would be nullified by the presence of modern headquarters buildings; conversely, the presence of these buildings would spoil the view to the east from the Fort area which view is now essentially unspoiled.
2. If there is merit in separating the Fort buildings from modern buildings, why not go further and eliminate modern buildings altogether by adaptive use of Fort buildings?
3. Maintenance cost of historic buildings will be heavy. Utilization of the Cavalry Barracks as museum and headquarters and the Commissary as equipment shed, for example, would cut the cost of Fort Laramie upkeep tremendously.
4. There was some thought that Officers Quarters A, E and F could be used as residences, but most felt that the historic integrity of the historic parade ground sector should be preserved inside and out.
5. Acquisition of the Foote land on the Fort side of the river (a) to include lands which were integral parts of the historic building picture and which might yield priceless archeological results; (b) to allow for a decent margin or buffer strip; and (c) to allow for possible building of one or two residences in the vicinity of the Cavalry Barracks. Such residences might

simulate restoration in situ of certain extinct fort buildings.

6. External historical appearance of the Cavalry Barracks need not be disturbed by incorporation of a modern museum and office. In fact, if used, the chances are it would be much better preserved. Utilization of this building for our purposes would not preclude restoring a portion of the interior as Cavalry Barracks.

7. Development of modern improvements in the Cavalry Barracks and the Commissary building would not hinge on land acquisition. We would be in a position to start the museum-headquarters alterations at any time funds were available.

8. The permanent approach road to the Fort would be direct from the county road which adjoins the area to the north, probably through the Foote land when it is acquired. This approach would eliminate the present roundabout approach from the west and ensure a pleasant first view of the parade ground sector. [44]

Subsequently, in his completed report on "Historic Approaches to Fort Laramie", by documentation and mapping Mattes demonstrated the chronological sequence of emigrant and Army trail approaches to the Fort. Broadly speaking, emigrant approaches were either from the north, by crossing of the North Platte via the Mormon Trail or Council Bluffs Road, or from the east-northeast by various crossings of the Laramie, via the main Oregon-California Trail. Earlier fords and ferries were replaced by bridges across the Laramie in the 1850s, and across the North Platte, 1875-1876. The late-period Army approach, following the Cheyenne-Black Hills Trail, was on the north-south axis. From these research findings it was possible to see merit in the Canfield Plan as one that capitalized on the historic "Oregon Trail approach." On the other hand the alternative of coming in from the north would be more valid from a late-period military viewpoint, which would be the viewpoint consistent with the surviving buildings, themselves predominantly of the 1873-1890 period.

On this basis "the Oregon Trail approach" could still be viewed in relatively unspoiled condition while looking eastward from the parade ground area, and actual Oregon Trail remains on the east bank could be made accessible for viewing on guided interpretive tours. A grand approach to the late-period remains by an early-period route seemed illogical as well as far more costly. (Such at least was the prevailing thought among Service historians in 1944.)

In a June 1944 memorandum Chief Historian Kahler reinforced the above view by urging that "using historic structures would help preserve them and obviate the need for modern buildings which would be intrusions." He thought that visitors could better visualize the Oregon Trail approach without the aid of a modern highway. By way of consolidating the Washington position Acting Director Tolson suggested to the Region, on June 8, four cardinal principles:

1. That the Cavalry Barracks be used for museum and headquarters, which would aid in its preservation.
2. That some of the remaining structures be utilized for living quarters or other purposes,

provided there were no alteration in their outward appearances.

3. That lands be acquired east of the present boundary and west of the Laramie River for the possible location of all living quarters and utility buildings, the structures to be built in harmony with older structures that once occupied the site.

4. That consideration be given to approaches to the Fort from west and north, as well as east. Travellers approaching from the east would not see the Fort as it was in Oregon Trail days; likewise, if he were to look back over the eastern approach, he would see modern structures in the foreground. [45]

Borreson's Master Plan comments of January 20, 1945 are of interest because of his historical perceptions as well as the fact that his independent conclusions happened pretty much to coincide with the concepts then prevalent in the Director's Office. These were his salient points:

1. Development across the river would be prohibitively expensive because of new construction of roads, bridges, buildings and utilities. It would also be impractical because of seepage from the big canal plus Laramie River overflows.

2. The three Oregon Trail branches approaching the Fort from the east identified by Mattes-Borreson research, should not be intruded upon by modern development. "Fort Laramie sits within a natural bowl of sandhills" that have remained unspoiled except for the well-camouflaged canal. "It should be our effort to retain them at that same stage," wherever the approach of emigrant and military trains could be envisioned. Modern buildings, roads, parking area and a swarm of automobiles on the east bank would spoil the interpretive illusion.

3. The Commissary Storehouse should be used as utility and storage, the Cavalry Barracks as museum, library and administrative office. Both would be restored first externally. The several buildings around the parade ground would be fully restored, inside and out.

4. The modern approach should be from the north or northwest, along the edge of the second bench, or else across the first bench to a parking area north of the two converted buildings. Borreson questioned that reconstruction of vanished buildings in the extinct Quartermaster area, except as museum or trailside exhibits, would ever be justified. However, complete archeology of this section would be required.

5. In Borreson's view, preservation of trail remains, and the visitors view toward the eastern trail approaches, was at least equal in importance to the restoration of the historic buildings themselves. In fact he felt that there were only two buildings Old Bedlam and the Sutler's Store that offered "any special notice of antiquity or [distinctive] architectural features. It is only their associations that make them valuable."

Not everyone would agree with all of Borreson's views. Master Plan thinking has since veered back to the idea of placing all or most modern facilities across the river from the historic complex. But no Master Plan

or Environmental Plan thinking, now or in the future, should ignore Borreson's most valid emphasis upon the need to have proper understanding and respect for the Fort's historic setting as well as its buildings. Over the decades the persistent efforts to plant parade ground trees which never existed during the "period of maximum importance," and to defend the post-1890 cottonwood grove along the river from any historical vista clearing, as well as general support of the Canfield Plan involving construction work opposite the Fort, suggest that Park Service planners and managers have never been overly concerned with the sanctity of the historical setting. [46]

In 1945 an alternate Master Plan, agreeable to the Kahler-Mattes-Borreson concept, was prepared by Associate Director Howard Baker and Regional Architect Halsey Davidson. Since the full flowering of either plan required additional land both north and east, Borreson was elated when Lee Foote offered to sell to the Park Service his 200 acres, downriver from the Fort, for \$10,000. In an urgent memorandum of November 27, 1945 he pointed out that this would include all the historic Quartermaster area, the site of the original telegraph line and station, the late-period military road, the old Army dump, and other archeological riches. It was his opinion that it could all be had for a mere \$7,500. The proposal was vigorously seconded by Mattes and Canfield but, of course, nothing came of it because the Washington Office had no land acquisition funds, boundaries had not yet been settled upon, and in any event Congress would have to pass a new bill authorizing any additions. While the Park Service debated for the next 15 years about the precise ideal development and boundary extension needed, the price of land would rise dramatically and, when authorization was finally given in 1960, and purchase subsequently consummated, only a portion of Foote's original 200 acres was bought for around \$50,000. Now (as of 1978) the Park Service would like to have all of the land between the river and the county road, which present owners have no interest in selling at any price. "For the want of a horse-shoe nail the battle was lost." An opportunity to buy all or most of this historic ground for a trifle, in 1945, using National Park Foundation or other philanthropic funds, was passed by in favor of keeping up a running argument about fine points of the Master Plan. [47]

When Canfield returned from his Navy stint he was upset by the preoccupation of the Omaha and Washington offices with the alternate plan, to make modern use of historic buildings and an approach road from the north. He demanded another field conference, to which Mr. Merriam acceded, and in May 1946 there was another grand get-together at the Fort, with more debate about the merits of the respective plans. In addition to Canfield and Borreson, the Regional Office was represented by Regional Historian Hagen and Regional Landscape Architect Jerry Miller. It was Merriam's idea that the eminent scholar and Fort Laramie historian, Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen, might be able to supply words of wisdom as a consultant, so he too joined the conference, coming up from Denver where he served as Director of the State Historical Society of Colorado. As it turned out, Hafen was simply bewildered by all the arguments about putting the headquarters here, there, or some other place. The only thing he was interested in was something the Park Service hadn't ever proposed the reconstruction of Fort John, the adobe trading post of 1849, and no amount of explanation could dissuade him from this highly impractical suggestion. In fact it was downright unthinkable in view of the long-standing opposition of the Park Service to conjectural re-constructions. Aside from that, such reconstruction would require the demolition of Officers Quarters A on the site, the 5th oldest building on the premises, not to mention the creation of a monstrous anachronism, with a resurrected adobe fur trade structure which had disappeared in the 1850s standing in awkward proximity to buildings and ruins of the 1880s. [48]

As might be anticipated the NPS conferees split down the middle between the two plan alternatives, with Miller supporting the Canfield plan and Hagen supporting Mattes and Borreson. And there the Master Plan stood, in a schizophrenic state, for a decade. It turned out to be all academic anyhow, since the only important money that turned up during the ensuing 30 years all went into the preservation of historic structures. The Park Service could afford the luxury of indecision about permanent modern arrangements because it was saddled with a moral obligation to first preserve and restore the historic buildings, no matter how long it took.

In March, 1946 Merrill Mattes was transferred, first to the temporary Chicago headquarters of the National Park Service, then in July to Omaha as Missouri River Basin Survey Historian. Before going he transferred to Omaha for safekeeping extensive Fort Laramie research files. During his incumbency as Fort Laramie Historian, 1942-1946, he completed three major works: a card file Fort Laramie bibliography of over 2,000 entries, later typed up in bound report form; the final draft of the Mattes-Borreson report on "Historic Approaches to Fort Laramie; and (with the help of Secretary Louise Ridge of Scotts Bluff) several volumes of transcriptions of "Fort Laramie Journals", consisting of overland journals from the Newberry Library in Chicago, which he had extensively researched in 1944. Among other research chores, some in concert with Borreson, were interviews with Johnny O'Brien, foreman for the Rutherford sisters, who was a Fort Laramie original, having witnessed construction of the 1876 iron bridge; extensive correspondence with G. O. Reid of High River, Alberta, Canada, onetime civilian wagonmaster (which correspondence was reprinted in Annals of Wyoming); and securing a promise from L. G. (Pat) Flannery to turn over to the NPS the John Hunton diaries, a promise never fulfilled. [49]

Another stab in the right direction was a plan initiated by Borreson to identify and hopefully to acquire furnishings and furniture in the possession of former Fort residents or their descendants and friends living in the vicinity or elsewhere, all looking toward that happy day when the restored buildings could be made historically liveable as well. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Borreson's plan here was the germ of the idea to furnish the historic buildings, a project which would not find fulfillment for another 15 or 20 years. [50]

In 1946 things seemed for a while to be looking up for Thor Borreson. The County Commissioners finally got around to grading the approach road, and the battle to batten down the buildings and eliminate obnoxious weeds seemed to go favorably for a change, with the employment of Art Darnall as part-time Laborer for the area. But then everything went bad. Rampaging winds racked the buildings, blowing off the carefully constructed chimney covers, and raising dust clouds that afflicted the Borreson family with lung trouble. On a trip to Rocky Mountain for supplies, the "hard luck Custodian" was caught with other autoists in a record blizzard between Fort Collins and Cheyenne, and had to be dug out of his pick-up with frost-bite and a mild case of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The litany of Borreson's troubles reads like the book of Job, who was sorely tested by the Lord, but Job survived and Borreson did not. The family horse died from rattler venom and, while in Scottsbluff, his boy, Thor James, was struck by a Texaco oil tanker and hospitalized for weeks, with some permanent impairment of his leg. Then on December 4 Thor Borreson himself died suddenly from a coronary occlusion, plunging the Fort Laramie and concerned Park Service communities, as well as the family, into deepest sorrow. Dave Canfield, Chief Ranger Herschler, and Custodian Budlong of Scotts Bluff did what they could to ease things

for the family, and arrange for Mrs. Borreson's departure with Thor's remains and the children to her parent's home in Niagara Falls, New York. [51] Between trains in Omaha they stayed overnight with the Mattes family. This tragedy was undoubtedly a record low in the fortunes of any and all Park Service families associated with Fort Laramie.

Thor Borreson was not a large man, but he was rugged, muscular, and apparently healthy. The writer believes that his extreme conscientiousness, coupled with an impossible physical workload, and a series of worrisome incidents, contributed to his premature death.

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

5. David L. Hieb, Custodian/Superintendent, 1947-1949

Dave Hieb was Custodian/Superintendent of Fort Laramie National Monument for eleven full years, from May 1, 1947 to May 31, 1958. He had been Park Ranger at Scotts Bluff National Monument, so it was a short trip to his new assignment. The Hieb family occupied quarters in the Cavalry Barracks throughout their tenure, this being the longest on-site residency of the Old Fort by any one family after the pre-park John Hunton period. Dave left the Fort to become Regional Chief of Boundary Studies in Omaha, and later served as Superintendent of George Washington Carver and Wilson's Creek Battlefield, in Missouri, and Herbert Hoover Birthplace in Iowa, before retiring to live at Estes Park, Colorado, scene of his earlier employment, beginning in 1930, as a Rocky Mountain National Park ranger. [52]

On January 1, 1949 the title "Custodian", as applied to the manager of a "national monument" created by Presidential Proclamation under authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906, was changed throughout the National Park system to that of "Superintendent." The duties were the same as always, but the new title conferred a degree of respect that did not always go with the ambiguous "Custodian", a term more commonly applied by the general public to those with merely caretaker or janitorial functions. Whereas "Superintendents" were formerly only those in charge of big scenic national parks, now everyone in charge of any kind of an area in the National Park system parks, monuments, historic sites, memorials, battlefields, whatever was suddenly a "Superintendent."

It was during the Hieb incumbency that Fort Laramie finally blossomed out with an effective rehabilitation! restoration program that made the public sit up and take notice. This success, of course, was primarily the result of a general loosening of Government purse strings, but the Service could not have picked a man more ideally suited to implement the Fort Laramie rehabilitation program. Dave Hieb was the model of a conscientious, energetic, and skillful project manager. He was a well-informed and alert historian, a highly competent master of many building crafts, an effective leader of work crews, and a talented and tireless writer of essential memoranda and valuable technical reports. During a period of intensive construction activity, the results of which brought uniformly high praise from his associates and superiors, Dave also found time or made time to make many significant contributions to historical research, long-range planning, and community public relations. He was a Superintendent, construction supervisor, and research man all wrapped up in one package, actually doing three jobs for the price of one.

There were two phases of maximum intensive rehabilitation/restoration at Fort Laramie, one under Dave Hieb and the other under Charlie Sharp. During the Hieb period, 1947-1958 rehabilitation or restoration work was done in some degree on all Government-owned historic structures and ruins including Old Bedlam, and Dave made important contributions to research and planning for that project, completed later by others. To fully understand and appreciate this period it must be treated as a chronological unit or continuum. Therefore we must first look at Hieb's period of orientation and preparation, 1947-1949. This period was characterized by administrative innovations, intensified maintenance of buildings and grounds, new break-throughs in research, and efforts to firm up long-range planning.

Art Darnall of Fort Laramie town, who was "Acting Custodian" for the few months in 1947 before Hieb's arrival, continued on as a "6-months laborer," and there was a succession of part-time clerk-typists, so the personnel situation began to improve under Hieb, however so slightly. [53] Despite an upswelling of attendance from a war time low of 1,300 in 1943 to 12,000 in 1946 and 19,000 in 1949, there were yet no rangers, historians, or technicians, either permanent or temporary, to assist Hieb in handling visitors. Although he was always available to answer questions, visitors were pretty much on their own with a rudimentary self-guided tour aided by a leaflet and markers. Of course no historic buildings interiors were yet open except for the small lobby of the Cavalry Barracks, with token exhibits.

When Hieb arrived, conditions were still on a primitive level. Gradual improvements were made to the liveability of the quarters and administrative facilities in the Barracks, even to the extent of bringing in television from Cheyenne and Scottsbluff, but these quarters at their peak of improvement could never be described as luxurious. The thick walls ensured cool conditions in the warm summertime, but there was no way to insulate against penetrating cold, particularly during frequent high winds. While the weather at Fort Laramie can be balmy at times, when it gets rough it seems to focus all of its fury on that spot. In June, 1947 occurred "the wettest June" on record. In June, 1948 came "the worst hail in 40 years," shattering over a hundred window panes. And January, 1949 was the time of the "Great Blizzard," which isolated towns and paralysed highway and railway traffic throughout the Northern Great Plains. As to its impact on the Fort, Hieb reported on January 6 to the Coordinating Superintendent at Rocky Mountain:

Fort Laramie and its equipment and personnel seem to have survived with only minor discomfort and damage. An alarming quantity of fuel oil was burned in a not too successful effort to keep warm as evidenced by the fact that on Monday night pipes froze in our bathroom in spite of a warm fire going in the living room. . .

All the government vehicles are safely barricaded in the garage with a five foot drift of snow outside the doors and a two foot one inside. However, we managed to dig out our personal car yesterday and after four hours of shoveling made it to town. . .

Art Darnall made it out to work this morning after more shoveling and we are engaged in clearing snow out of the buildings where it was driven in at every crack by the high winds. . . Drifts around the buildings are from 4 to 8 feet in height and very solid. Just south of our entrance gate a drift 10 feet high blocks the road, but a detour through the fields can be made around it.

Shortly after his occupancy of the Barracks, in May, 1947, Hieb was treated to the same fireworks that afflicted Borreson, when a heavy wet snow broke down the Monument power line, bringing it into contact again with the Bureau of Reclamation's 33,000 volt line. However, this time the Regional Office agreed that drastic correction of the dangerous set-up, with wires on the same poles "so susceptible to entanglement", was needed to safeguard the historic property as well as life and limb. Funds were conjured up from somewhere and by December 1947 there was a changeover to a new and safer R.E.A. powerline. Another change for the better was the 1948 installation of a new casing for the well at the south end of the Barracks which restored running water for domestic purposes after intermittent use of an old pitcher pump which froze up regularly in the winter. While the new system was being installed the Hiebs went into the pioneer routine, being obliged to obtain their water from the historic well back of Officers Row, which they carried in buckets. Yet another giant step forward, so to speak, was the incorporation into the quarters of a modern bathroom, complete with tub and flush toilet (for which Hieb, for lack of help, had personally to install the sewer tile). Previously the occupants had to rely on the "outdoor plumbing" of a screened satellite privy, an inconvenient and unsanitary as well as uncomfortable arrangement, particularly under conditions when the chill factor fell below zero. [\[54\]](#)

In 1947 there were extensive repairs by the County on the Old Army "bow bridge" across the Platte, involving new braces, tie rods, stringers, and planking. The ancient structure had been in such condition that Fort personnel, as well as visitors and neighboring ranchers, rumbled across it at their peril. During these repairs it was necessary to close the bridge to traffic and, since there was no other bridge in that vicinity, traffic was routed across the river by means of an improvised ford. This was possible during the summer months because the channel flow was at low ebb and could be diverted through a series of parallel culverts heaped over with bulldozed gravel and dirt. This, too, enhanced the pioneer experience of visitors that year, as did the rough dusty approach road to the Fort which now resembled "one long sand dune." A promise by the County to grade and oil the road went unfulfilled when bids submitted for the project were too high. Finally, in 1948, for the first time, the road was graded and oiled. [\[55\]](#)

Before Dave Hieb assumed office, in February 1947 Canfield visited the Omaha office in an effort to resolve the Master Plan in favor of his preference for a separate south side modern facility, with a pedestrian bridge to the Old Fort. In his April 7 summary of the office conference, Howard Baker stated that "the approaches to the Monument from either the North or the South side of the Laramie River seemed to have about equal value from the historical point of view." He then indicated that both alternate plans would be drawn up in detail, including all development costs and, in both cases, "minimum and maximum boundaries." By memo of April 10 Canfield expressed indignation that the proposal for a northside approach, with its adaptation of historic buildings, was still being given equal treatment. "It was my impression," he wrote, "that everyone at the conference with the exception of Mr. Merriam was pretty well of a mind that the approach south of the Laramie River was the preferable one." He denied that there had been a consensus to continue serious study of the northside approach. He protested that, "the consensus as presented in the summary from your office reads mighty lukewarm to me." In his reply of April 23 Merriam explained that, though the Master Plan "was pretty well crystallized back in 1941-1942," certain questions had been subsequently raised by officials of the Washington Office. "In view of the support which the alternate scheme has had," he wrote, "I do not feel that we are in a position to disregard it or cast it aside until the analysis is complete."

In February 1948, after Dave Hieb had a chance to get his feet wet, there was another heavy planning session in the Omaha office, with both Canfield and Hieb present. The weighty conclusions of the Regional

planners are summarized by Regional Historian Olaf T. Hagen in a March "Memorandum to the Files." First of all, it was the consensus that preservation must have priority over any development, and that it would take at least five years and \$100,000 to perform the essential preservation work, before any plans for modern development could be implemented. (Little did Hagen or any one else realize that 30 years after 1948 they still wouldn't have been implemented in any visible way!) Nevertheless, in rehashing Scheme A (the south approach) versus Scheme B (the north approach) he reported that "the conferees were unanimous in preferring Scheme A." This was a moral victory for Dave Canfield, thanks in large part to Hieb's thoughtful agreement in principle with Scheme A. The engineers calculated that both development schemes would cost about the same, \$350,000, since the careful adaptation of the historic buildings would cost about as much as brand new ones. It was the conclusion of the conferees that historical significance or orientation was not a deciding factor either, partly because of the scrambled cultural topography over the last century, and partly also because of the preponderant survival of late-period buildings. However, Scheme A offered the superior advantage of interpretation of the historic buildings unsullied by modern alterations and segregated from modern roads and buildings. Finally, Hagen proclaimed that it was also the group's concern that "the object of stabilization and restoration should be to hold to the general appearance of the Fort as nearly as possible to that presented at the time of its abandonment, when all the surviving structures existed contemporaneously." However, he fuzzed up this basic principle by stating a further principle that, "Restoration of structures to an earlier period might be justified in special cases," without offering guidelines as to what would constitute a special case. [56]

Boundary status reports on file for 1947 and 1948 reflect consideration of both development schemes, each of which required boundary extensions of 300 to 400 acres which roughly coincided. Subsequently A. E. Demaray, Associate Director, expressed himself force fully against Scheme A on the grounds that visitors would have too far to walk, and as late as November 1949 Mattes was objecting to Jerry Millers deletion of Scheme B as an alternate on the Master Plan, on the grounds that a decision had been made that neither plan would be finally settled upon for a period of five years. [57] In 1953 the debate would be revived, although it would remain academic throughout Hieb's incumbency in the absence of funds for new development.

Far more pertinent for the moment was the interim treatment of the old buildings until sizeable funds were appropriated for some meaningful and enduring restoration work. In June 1947 Hieb played host to a delegation consisting of Canfield, Hagen and Mattes, plus Landscape Architect Chuck Krueger and Architect Halsey Davidson of Omaha, and Chief Architect Dick Sutton of the Washington Office. This group was convened not to dream about long-range plans but to make recommendations as to just how to spend a pitiful \$4,500. available in Fiscal Year 1948 for buildings and grounds. It was difficult to choose priorities in view of the generally "sad state of maintenance" inherited by Hieb. In addition to the bare essential improvements to provide creature comforts for the Custodian and family, the delegation gave highest priority to repairs to the boundary fence, replacement of Old Bedlam siding, "repairs to the repairs" of the Old Bedlam porch, and re-glazing or shuttering of cracked and missing windows generally. As to the Sutler's Store, pessimism prevailed among the architects that anything could be done to the original structure in view of its advanced state of decay, so nothing was recommended other than keeping it shored up for the time being. (Sutton flatly predicted that it would be necessary to dismantle the ancient building, saving what few pieces were worth saving, and then constructing a replica of the original). [58]

Another small chunk of around \$5,000 was included in the 1949 budget. With these modest sums Hieb was

able to undertake a few rock-bottom repairs to the most precarious of the historic structures, in addition to the fixing up needed to make his office and quarters more habitable.

The most urgent and most important repair work was performed on Old Bedlam, pertaining to exterior siding and front double porch or verandas. The perennial problem of upkeep on the vulnerable Fort Laramie structures is pointed up by the fact that within eight years, 1940-1948, the Canfield-Lombard treatment of the Bedlam verandas, including most new wooden components, was itself now askew and rotting, so that levelling, re-setting and selective replacement of specially milled and dimensioned lumber was required. In 1939-1940 it was felt that the original lapped siding or weatherboards of pine on the structural block, even though dried and curled, was too preciously original to be tampered with, so few boards were replaced, and it was mostly a case of re-nailing and application of preservative. By 1948, however, the boards had disintegrated so hopelessly that there was no choice but to remove them and replace them with new siding boards of equivalent special cut. White lead paint was applied liberally to the new work. The supposedly precious old siding was stored in dead space in the Cavalry Barracks. Finally, despite the new foundations installed by Lombard, Old Bedlam developed an alarming tilt, due presumably to deterioration of interior structural framework and the pressure thereon of prevailing winds from north and west. Thus it was necessary to rig up timbers as bracing for the southeast (or right hand side, facing front) wall to ensure against the distinct possibility of total collapse in the next violent wind. [59]

Other repairs undertaken during 1948-1949 included replacing late-period board siding on Officers Quarters A dormers with correct contemporary horizontal lapped pine siding, and some elementary repairs to and replacement of rotted joists under Officers Quarters E. In the absence of a basement to this building it was necessary to excavate a temporary specially designed crawlway for access. Also, the rear wings, porches and entries of both Officers Quarters E and F were re-levelled and re-shingled, and missing elements substituted.

In March, 1949, Hieb reported that the Old Bakery, a roofed structure of hybrid brick and lime-concrete, was near collapse, and that all he could do was to fence the building off to prevent injury to stray visitors. In May, after abnormally heavy rains which brought the Laramie River to flood stage, the lime-concrete section of the Old Bakery did suffer partial collapse. In 1948 Hieb, Hagen, and Mattes had evolved a working formula or schedule for the rehabilitation/restoration of Fort Laramie historic structures (as distinct from mere repairs or emergency stabilization) which had as its highest priority the restoration of the Old Bakery walls and roof. While this was by no means the most important surviving building on the post, this priority was assigned in part because it seemed to be in the most precarious condition of all, but mainly because the hard practical experience acquired in its restoration, including any technical trial and error, would increase the chances of doing the best possible job of restoring the high-priority Sutler's Store. (Notwithstanding the pessimism about this building prevailing among Omaha and Washington, D.C. architects, Hieb and the historians had no intention of doing anything but to restore the building intact, if that was humanly possible.)

Accordingly, the Old Bakery was set up as the prime target for the 1950 Fiscal Year (which began July 1, 1949), the most important project in a respectable budget of around \$8,000. At the same time, in the absence of specific guidelines from Washington on techniques of historic restoration, it was agreed that Hieb would prepare an "Orientation Report, Treatment and Use of Surviving Structures" for each building hereafter tackled, beginning with the Old Bakery. Accordingly, in June 1949 Hieb submitted the first formal technical report for any Fort Laramie building which prescribed the proposed treatment, and which could first be

reviewed beforehand by all offices. Upon approval of the report by the Region actual work on the project, called "Stabilization of the Old Bakery", began in October, 1949 with the removal of fallen and unstable concrete wall sections, and the manufacture of experimental lime-concrete to determine the best formula for material replacement.

In the process of removing the old footings evidence of human artifacts were found which pre-dated the structure of known 1876 vintage. Accordingly all work was suspended and Regional Archeologist Paul Beaubien was called in to examine the site. While the artifacts in question were not too diagnostic, he did uncover two pre-1876 trash pits beneath the corner of the wall. The existence of these voids of unknown origin accounted at least in part for the collapse of the walls. No further work was done on this building in 1949 but the partial restoration of the Old Bakery the following year would be the beginning of Fort Laramie's first big Restoration era.

During the 1947-1949 period of getting squared away there was much to occupy the indefatigable Hieb beside work on historic buildings, though that was assuredly his No. 1 concern. Actually he plowed new ground in several other directions, pioneering and setting trends in many departments of area management. For example, he recognized that fire was the biggest threat to the old buildings, so he cajoled the Region and the Coordinating Superintendent into supplying a pumper fire truck antiquated but workable and 1700 feet of fire-hose. In the Laramie River he had an inexhaustible supply of water, and the truck and hose could be maneuvered anywhere in a hurry. Except for Art Darnall, who lived in town three miles away, Hieb himself constituted the entire protection force, except that Hieb had the promise of neighbors and the Fort Laramie town volunteer fire department to help if they could get notice of a conflagration over the undependable country phone line, and if they could get to the Monument before everything was consumed. Anyhow, during this undermanned period "Fort Laramie Luck" held and, except for a small grass fire or two, the apparatus remained on standby.

The fire-truck, dump truck, and passenger cars were housed in a 5-stall shed constructed during the 1939-40 ERA period. The only other extraneous building north of the Cavalry Barracks at this time was a masonry chicken-shed of the Joe Wilde post-1890 period which was converted to use as an oil storage facility. West of this cluster was the garden which had been used by Lombard, and which Hieb continued to use for several years.

One trend that Dave tried to buck was the Lombard program to plant and nurture parade ground trees. Since most of these dubious saplings were now dead or dying, despite ample rains, Dave removed them and, being of the Mattes-Borreson school of thought that such trees were unhistoric (except for the unimportant late 1880s) he was happy to leave it that way. Also, contrary to his predecessors he did not become alarmed by the incursion of dam-building beaver population along the Laramie, figuring that (a) they were legitimate reminders of the early fur trade era and (b) they helped to thin out the cottonwoods that were not there in the peak military period.

A positive step that Dave did take in the landscaping department was to set up a volunteer project to root out the prickly pear cactus which infested the parade ground, and were definitely unhistoric. Another threat was the invasion of the area by grazing sheep, through the inadequately designed and constructed State boundary fence. Dave remedied this by extensive mending and reinforcing with hog wire. [60]

It was Hieb who finally settled the old controversy as to the extent of the Government's share in the Fort Laramie Ditch Company. This irrigation ditch serving about 200 acres altogether had been developed around 1894 when the Fort was split up among several owners. When the NPS assumed responsibility in 1938 it was aware that it had water rights but since it was not primarily in the irrigation business (except for the watering of the temporary vegetable garden behind the Barracks, and some irrigation of the parade ground area) it did not fully exercise these rights. Although there had been annual meetings with other stockholders, the extent of the NPS interest was not resolved concretely until the meeting in January, 1948 when Hieb settled for 43 shares in the corporation and paid for five years of water assessments. He later took on the job of Secretary-Treasurer of the company to insure that the government interests were better protected.

In April 1948 Fort Laramie was offered the benefit of joining the Rocky Mountain Nature Association. This was a non-profit cooperative of the type authorized by Congress which made it possible legally to sell interpretive items to the public. The device was to set up an association with a largely non-official membership (mainly citizens of a nearby community) but its executive officer was usually a park official, such as the Park Naturalist or Historian. Books were kept and annual meetings were held to elect officers. Profits were to be applied to park research and interpretive projects. Since the Rocky Mountain Nature Association was already set up, all that was necessary was to bring the Fort under its umbrella on a pro rata basis. One of the first sales projects was Fort Laramie postcards, with some first class pictures taken by Ray Littler of Torrington. Another project was the fabrication of small frames from the discarded lumber of Old Bedlam, with a photograph of the building enclosed, which were sold as souvenirs. [\[61\]](#)

An important public relations move on Hieb's part was to take an active role in the North Platte Valley Associated Chambers of Commerce and an offshoot, the U. S. Highway 26 Association. Both of these organizations were keenly interested in boosting tourist traffic up the Valley, with emphasis on those Easterners heading toward Grand Teton or Yellowstone, with historic features along the Oregon Trail as the inducement. While Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie National Monuments were the stellar attractions, there were many other intriguing landmarks, such as Courthouse Rock, Chimney Rock and Register Cliff. The organization met monthly, often at Torrington or Guernsey. Dave Hieb, as an officer of the Fort Laramie Community Club, was an active member.

As early as 1947 Hieb, Hagen, and Mattes were acutely mindful of the fact that 1949 would be the Centennial year of Fort Laramie's establishment as a military post. Jointly they evolved the idea of a three-point program: a Fort Laramie Centennial postage stamp; a commemorative historical publication; and a celebration of some kind at the Fort itself. The stamp idea did not jell despite the urgings of Hieb, community officials, and state representatives to the U.S. Post Office to come out with a Fort Laramie stamp in 1849. After all, this was a full-blown national monument, not some frowzy little local shrine. With commemorative stamps issued for so many other imaginable reasons, including poultry raisers and butterfly collectors, it is difficult to comprehend why historic Fort Laramie wasn't deemed worthy. One feels that those who make the selections simply didn't get the message that this was the Centennial of the Number 1 historic site on the western frontier.

The commemorative history that emerged was a booklet entitled Fort Laramie and the Forty-Niners, researched and written by Historian Merrill J. Mattes, voluntarily, on his personal time, its production paid

for by the Rocky Mountain Nature Association. It focussed on the year 1849 when, in the middle of the great Gold Rush of that year, the Army bought out the American Fur Company, occupied the old adobe trading post, laid out a new parade ground, and started some new buildings of their own, notably the Sutler's Store and Old Bedlam, which still survive from that fabulous year. It made use of quotations from emigrant journals as well as military records from the National Archives. The booklet sold at the Fort through the mechanism of the Rocky Mountain Nature Association for \$1.; the supply was sold out within three years. (Copies that still exist today are worth \$10. or more on the collectors' market.) [\[62\]](#)

Centennial recognition also took the form of a Fort Laramie pageant sponsored by the Fort Laramie Community Club of which Hieb was President at that time, and the Lion's Club of Lingle, on August 9. It was decided that grounds near the town of Fort Laramie were more suitable than those at the Fort itself, so the pageant took place in an open field immediately west of town. There were 150 performers, all enthusiastic local volunteers, and countless horses, cattle and dogs. The pageant consisted of ten historical episodes in the history of the Fort, from the slaying of Jacques Laramie by Indians to the abandonment of the military post, about seven decades of thrills, spills, and the wild discharge of firearms. Despite drizzly weather, a crowd of 3,000 turned out to applaud the spectacle. Among those present were the Director of the National Park Service, Newton B. Drury, Regional Director Lawrence C. Merriam, and Howard R. Driggs, President of the American Pioneer Trails Association. [\[63\]](#)

Another significant Centennial had been observed in 1947 with the Re-enactment of the first Mormon trek from the Missouri River to the Great Salt Lake, sponsored by the Sons of Utah Pioneers. In 1847 the original group of 148 was led by Brigham Young from Winter Quarters near Council Bluffs westward in search of the Promised Land. The company of self-styled "Saints" had appeared on the north bank of the North Platte, crossed in a collapsible boat brought for the purpose, and proceeded to explore and measure the ruins of Fort Platte and the still active Fort John. They then continued westward along the south side of the North Platte to find one of the most famous of western American settlements. The 148 trekkers of 1947, all descendants of early immigrants to Utah, arrived at the Fort on July 17 in a caravan of 72 cars tricked out like covered wagons. The occasion is recounted in the official record of the expedition:

Ft. Laramie looked as though it might have been a set from a Hollywood epic which was left standing after the movie company had pulled out. The old buildings, with crumbling walls and sagging roofs, looked as if they were the workmanship of some Hollywood artisan. It was almost beyond imagination that this peaceful, grassy spot, bordered by the Laramie river, was once the scene of much frontier turbulence, and one of the busiest places in western America.

The circle was formed in a lowland area west of the main fort buildings, which was large enough for a complete circle with no cramping. David Hieb, the park custodian, had obligingly arranged to have the high grass cut in the area where the cars parked so as to eliminate as many mosquitoes as possible. . .

The Sons of Utah Pioneers quartet sang, "An Angel From on High," following Elder Kimball's address. . .

Mosquito repellent was used in abundance that night by the trekkers, for they knew they were

in the land of the "Mohawk", a nickname given to the formidable Wyoming mosquito.

In token of their appreciation, the caravaneers presented Custodian Hieb with an exact replica of the official hand-crafted odometer used by the 1847 company to make the first accurate record of distances up the Platte River Road. (Hieb in turn donated the replica to the National Monument collection.) Another donation to the Monument at this time was a blue spruce planted in the Laramie River bottoms near the campfire site. Subsequently Hieb replanted this behind the Cavalry Barracks where today (1978), thanks to irrigation, it has grown to impressive height. [64]

In 1948 the Fort was visited by Dr. Howard Driggs and other dignitaries of the American Pioneer Trails Association and the National Park Service following their participation in services at Scotts Bluff National Monument dedicating the new William H. Jackson Memorial wing. Jackson, famed pioneer photographer and water colorist of the Old West, had been a frequent visitor to Fort Laramie beginning in the 1920s with Bob Ellison and others; his last visit to the Fort was in 1940 at the Old Bedlam dedication. He had long been one of the foremost advocates of preservation of the Fort under Federal auspices. His sketch of Fort John (after Fremont) and his own photographs of the military post in its heyday are among the most vivid of Fort Laramie pictorial records. Clarence S. Jackson, his son, was present at the Scotts Bluff services and the Fort Laramie visit in 1948. [65]

Other visitors of unusual interest during 1947-1949 were the novelist A. B. Guthrie, Jr., who dramatized the Fort Laramie trading post in his best-selling novel, The Way West; Mary Jackson English, daughter of Major English of the 7th Infantry, who lived as a girl in Officers Quarters A and E; Emil Bordeaux of White River, South Dakota, son of James Bordeaux who had been the bourgeois or manager of the trading post in 1846 when Francis Parkman visited there; and Charles Sitting Bull, grandson of the Sitting Bull of Little Bighorn fame who was killed by Indian police at Standing Rock, North Dakota in 1890. Mr. Sitting Bull complained to Dave Hieb about "the white man's theft of his valley", a somewhat irrational accusation since there is no evidence that the Hunkpapas, the northern Sioux band to which his grandfather belonged, were ever in the Fort Laramie neighborhood.

There were a few visitors who not only had colorful connections with the Fort but who were able to contribute valuable historical data and photographs which Hieb incorporated into the files. Prominent among them were Henry C. Bretney (1947) of Jacksonville, Florida, son of Captain H. C. Bretney of the 11th Ohio Cavalry who figured in several historical episodes; Colonel Louis Brechemin, Jr. (1948) of Deer Harbor, Washington, son of Captain Brechemin, Post Surgeon of 1885-1889, who proved to be a veritable mine of information; and May Nolan Morrison of Torrington, daughter of a post Sergeant of the 1880s who also came up with valuable photographs and recollections. Meade Sandercock of Fort Laramie, whose mother had owned Officers Quarters A, continued to provide valued information.

While it would be pointless to attempt to identify here all relics of alleged Fort Laramie provenience which were brought in by visitors, a few of the more typical and conspicuous items may be mentioned. Harold Cook, rancher of Agate, Nebraska, donated an Army dump cart and other items collected by his father, the noted scout James H. Cook. Jake Gompert, a rancher of Mitchell, Nebraska who once bought some buildings from John Hunton, thoughtfully returned some old beat-up furniture to its place of origin. A Steinway square grand piano that once graced a Fort living room was returned from Platt, South Dakota by

Mayflower van. A set of engraved invitations to Fort Laramie social functions, dug up by one-time Fort owner Thomas Waters of Omaha, was returned to the museum collection. [66]

While there was no formal specially funded Fort Laramie research program during this period, certain topics were pursued voluntarily by Hieb and Mattes. The latter, who became Regional Historian in September, 1949 following the untimely death of Olaf T. Hagen, published two items of interest, in addition to the Centennial offering, Fort Laramie and the Forty-Niners. One was a piece entitled "Fort Laramie Centennial" which appeared in the Chicago Westerners Brand Book in 1948; and a documented article on "Robidoux's Trading Post at Scotts Bluffs and the California Gold Rush", published in June, 1949 in Nebraska History, the latter pertaining to the rival trading establishment about 50 miles east of the Fort. He worked with the Wisconsin Historical Society in an effort to identify an artist of 1849 who made some remarkable sketches of Fort Laramie and other Trail landmarks (since identified as James F. Wilkins). At the National Archives he found the Medical Records of the Fort written by Surgeon Schell and others, with original drawings. [67]

Dave Hieb corresponded with visitors, to follow up on the acquisition of photographs and documents pertinent to the Fort's history. O. M. Rasmusson of North Platte assisted in a project to identify the dead buried in the old post cemetery underneath the Hospital ruins. In a rare book, Glittering Gold by E. A. Curley, Chicago, 1876 Hieb discovered a wrongly labelled picture of the Fort Laramie Sutler's Store of that period, revealing architectural details long-vanished, pertaining to roofs, rear additions, and general atmosphere. However, the biggest research effort of this period, a search for Fort William, the "first Fort Laramie", proved inconclusive.

Serious scholarly effort by the National Park Service to determine the true location of Fort William began with a question posed to chief Historian Kahler by Bernard DeVoto who in 1945 was working on his book, Across the Wide Missouri (New York, 1947). Mattes advised him that it was thought to be on the west bank of the Laramie downriver about a mile from the parade ground, at the known earliest crossing of the Laramie, by fur traders. However, he conceded that the exact site hadn't been identified by conclusive historical or archeological proof. Soon thereafter, when the problem came up as to where to put the future park headquarters it became important to know the pattern of historic trails approaching the Fort. Before he left Scotts Bluff in March 1946 Mattes had taken on the project of researching and writing up a report on "Historic Approaches." Since the location of Fort William certainly must have had a bearing on earlier trails, Mattes addressed himself to the Fort William question. In his heavily documented report he concluded that Fort William was probably at the location previously hypothesized, that is, west of the Laramie and just upstream from the county road bridge (the same locale as the present new concrete bridge across the Laramie). We will refer to this as site FW (A).

After Dave Hieb had a chance to review the Mattes report in detail, in January 1948 he wrote to the Region criticizing some of its conclusions, but particularly the one about Fort William. He felt, on the contrary, that Fort William was right near the later Fort John, somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the Army parade ground. We will refer to this alternative as Site FW (B).

Mattes and Borreson had spent several days hiking every foot of wagon trails that still survived in the unbroken prairie, particularly the trails from the east, and Mattes was convinced from the topographic evidence that the earliest trails had come in along the Platte River bottoms, which would bring them right to

the lower crossing. In addition to photographs of remarkably well preserved trail remains, including evidence of places where wagon trains had descended from the stream margin to the fords, Mattes had copious references to journals which he believed in combination tended strongly to prove that Fort William was at FW (A), downstream from the later Army post, because there was evidence that this was also the earliest Laramie River crossing of pre-Oregon Trail days. He believed also that the Fort William sketches of A. J. Miller of 1837 tended to confirm his theory mainly because of topographical details swamp-like terrain in the foreground which had to be on bottomland, not on the benchland of the military parade ground. He placed much reliance on the reports of Assistant Surgeon Schell and Historian Coutant that the Fort William pickets were rotting, believing that such rot would be caused by the annual Laramie River overflow, dictating a new location on higher dry ground.

Mattes also believed that the sandhills in Miller's background bore uncanny resemblance to those seen today when viewing the same scene east to west. Hieb denied that Mattes' given documentary and pictorial evidence constituted valid proof of his thesis. He felt that it was rather a case of reaching a preferred conclusion and then organizing all possible evidence in that direction. Hieb simply believed that it would have been more logical for Fort William to be on the high ground near the later Fort John to start with probably right next to it. In addition he felt that the testimony of Reverend Samuel Parker in 1835 and F. A. Wislizenus in 1839, describing the stockade as on a slight elevation, about a mile from the Laramie River's mouth, strongly supported his theory.

Nobody had any archeological evidence for either theoretical site. FW (A) was bottomland which had been scoured out and re-silted or regravelled by frequent Laramie River overflows before artificial controls by canal and ditch builders. Also, it had been plowed and replowed by farmers. There wasn't the ghost of a tangible clue of any building sites above ground, and the feeling was that it would have been so vulnerable to floods that the probability of any deep remains was next to nil. As to FW (2) the parade ground area has been so used and adapted and scrambled by repeated grading and construction by the Army that the possibility of finding any fur trade evidence there seemed about as bad. Archeology seemed to hold out little hope, not only because of negative terrain factors, but because no one could even pinpoint where to begin. (Amateur archeologists who claim to have used mine detectors in the general area of FW (A) reported that all their efforts were negative.)

As it turned out, both Hieb and Mattes had scholarly allies. Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen, author of Fort Laramie (Glendale, 1938), was evidently as convinced as Hieb that FW (B) was the probable location, primarily because he never thought of it as being anywhere else. In support of the Mattes theory for FW (A) were Oregon Trail historians Tom Green of Scottsbluff and Paul Henderson of Bridgeport, Nebraska, Mae Reed Porter of the American Pioneer Trails Association, and collector of Miller drawings, and Bob Rymill of Fort Laramie town. Henderson alleged that FW (A) conformed to statements made to him by John Hunton, Fort Laramie resident from 1867 to 1923, and Ed Kelly, another pioneer whom he interviewed when he was a young railroader exploring the Fort on his own before 1920.

Because of the intensity of interest in the subject, and hoping to resolve the issue, the Regional Director authorized a meeting at Fort Laramie on October 25, 1948. Among those present were Hieb, Mattes, Green, Henderson, Canfield, and a small group of curious on lookers and reporters. The Miller drawings were examined in detail from every angle. Those who favored FW (A) remained convinced that these drawings constituted proof, while Hieb took the position that the drawings reflected artistic license and proved

nothing. Quotations from the Mattes report were cited but Hieb insisted that his citations were more conclusive. It was a stimulating but frustrating afternoon because nothing was settled. A few weeks later there was a land-levelling operation here by the owner, Herman Nolke, and the exposures were carefully observed by Hieb and Archeologist Beaubien. To the surprise of no one, nothing was found. The Fort William issue, like that of the Master Plan, remained unresolved. [68]

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

6. David L. Hieb, Superintendent/Restorationist, 1950-1958

Fort Laramie has been fortunate in the Custodians/Superintendents assigned to it over its first 40 years (1938-1977). All of them have exhibited, in high degree, the dedication and energy which proper management of a major historic site requires. However, Dave Hieb is the only one who has shouldered a long-range comprehensive restoration program while actually performing the heavy end of the work himself. That is to say, he originated the programming, planned in detail the work to be done, lined up materials, equipment and work crews, supervised the work on a daily basis, and reported in meticulous detail what was accomplished. His role in enduring restoration work at Fort Laramie was unique for he was the only Superintendent who undertook the equivalent of both full-time jobs at once – Superintendent with a very limited staff, and restoration project supervisor – and that for a period of over eight years (beyond substantial accomplishments also in the previous three years).

It would be misleading to give the impression that Hieb had the entire responsibility. In effect, he was a member of an informal programming and planning committee of three, the other two being Regional Historian Mattes and Regional Architect Frances Roberson, otherwise known as "Skipper." At the risk of belaboring the point unduly, Mattes was the man in the Omaha office who was the coordinator for all Fort Laramie matters, and there is a lengthy series of letters, memoranda and reports which attests to his continuing involvement in programming and planning, as well as research. Roberson was more immediately involved in reviewing actual details of architectural work to be accomplished and work in progress. Regional Director Baker (who succeeded Merriam in 1951) and others in Omaha had broad administrative control, and there was an occasional high official from Washington visiting the Fort, but it was basically Dave Hieb's personal restoration program, with the exception of the initial consultation in each case with Mattes and Roberson, and their intermittent review on frequent field trips. (It should be noted here that early in 1951 Fort Laramie was removed from the jurisdiction of the Coordinating Superintendent at Rocky Mountain National Park, and achieved independent status, so there was no further "review and approval" needed from that quarter.)

While this arrangement, by 1978 standards and procedures, seems in retrospect rather high-handed and free-wheeling, it was the only workable one available during the decade in question. It was unorthodox but it worked exceedingly well to judge from numerous compliments of record Dave received from time to time, from both the Region and the Director's Office. The restoration work performed during this period is also

judged today by architects and historians to be both historically accurate and architecturally sound. Inevitably, in the course of time some deterioration of Hieb's work has occurred and has had to be further rehabilitated or restored but Hieb's restorations, by and large, have endured because they were undertaken not only with skill in technical execution but with full regard for the same standards of research and restoration which apply today. Actually these standards have not changed over the years. Procedures have changed and funding has become more liberal, so that we can now afford to hire more people, at higher pay, to turn out more plans and reports, and we have more inspections and "supervisors of supervisors" of work projects. The same work program in 1978 would probably cost ten times as much in terms of programming, planning, re-planning, approvals, contracts, materials, labor, and supervision, but it is doubtful that it would be done much differently or any better as far as end results are concerned.

Of course the governing fact was that in 1950 the Fort Laramie historic structures were going rapidly downhill. If there had been a rigid insistence on orthodox procedures, with detailed plans on paper by professional architects, to be certified at all levels before construction work, such work to be performed by a qualified contractor with the lowest bid, and subject to all kinds of ifs, ands, and buts and if it had been necessary therefore to wait for the construction funds necessary to meet these requirements the buildings would have deteriorated disgracefully, despite indefinite bracing and patching, and everything that has been achieved since 1950 would have been delayed 10 or 20 years. The only intelligent course that it was possible to take in 1950 was to take advantage of the new Park Service program of "deferred maintenance" or "rehabilitation of physical facilities" or, more specifically in this case, "Maintenance and Rehabilitation of Historic Structures." During the stern economic conditions of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, when the 1978 level of Federal spending with a near-trillion dollar indebtedness was unthinkable, new construction funds were scarce. This was particularly true of an off-beat historic monument when Yellowstone Park and other glamorous scenic areas with high attendance box scores were in desperate need of new facilities. But Director Wirth had sold the Bureau of the Budget and Congressional sub-committees on the idea of concentrating on the repair and rehabilitation of existing facilities. So without any twinges of conscience whatever the Superintendent and the Region teamed up to apply for all the funds they could get to straighten up the Fort Laramie buildings. If it was necessary to indulge in a little sophistry and call the procedure "maintenance and repair" instead of "restoration" no one in Omaha or the Washington Office was going to quibble, and the Bureau and the Congress were not fussy either. So in effect the area's major restoration program was finally launched, though disguised on paper as something else. [69]

There were funds for materials and the low-cost labor of the day, but what made the whole thing click was the fact that the Superintendent happened also to be the equivalent of an experienced architectural technician, and he was perfectly happy at starting grade GS-6 at \$3,000. p.a., to take on this lonely and formidable project. As time went on he got four promotions up to GS-11 with progressively higher pay, but throughout his tenure the work was performed on a largely personal basis, with only the limited assistance and moral support indicated above. That is to say, after consultation with Mattes and Roberson in each case, Hieb would prepare a "Survey Report" or "Orientation Report" to indicate the problems and their solutions, with some narrative and photos. Since many of the architectural or structural problems could not be defined until the fabric was exposed, this left Hieb free to improvise as new findings dictated. There was no rigid confinement to detailed and formally approved plans, and no need to hold up work to obtain permission to revise plans. The "working drawings" in effect were in Hieb's head, subject only to occasional double-checking beforehand and ex-post-facto review by the Omaha officials. Since this was technically only "maintenance" and not "construction" neither the Washington Office or the Western Office of Design and

Construction (WODC) in San Francisco got into the act during the Hieb period. At or near the end of his incumbency the rules changed and WODC started to get involved, but that would be another story. (Actually, funding for Officers Quarters A, Hieb's final project, was via the construction rather than the maintenance funding route, but Hieb completed most of this building unmolested by outside experts.)

After the advance field session, the historical and archeological research, the investigation of fabric for clues (architectural research), and the informal preliminary reports to the Region, in each case Dave would prepare a Bill of Materials and when the funds were forthcoming he would buy what was needed glass, cement, iron work, millwork, lumber, and whatever, which often had to be special-ordered to conform to historic design. His small, competent and enthusiastic work crews, all local men, would work while weather permitted, without regard to season. Dave personally directed the work, spending as much time as possible on site. (Some supervisory authority was delegated occasionally to Maintenceman Jeffries, First Carpenter Charles Wells, or F. L. (Jack) Johnson.) Finally, upon project completion, Dave would prepare a fairly detailed narrative report, with excellent photographs of work progress, for the enlightenment of the Region and Washington Office. These informative and technically high-calibre Completion reports are now valuable library reference works for the benefit of future managers, maintenancemen, architects, and historians. [70]

The funds available for the program annually, over and above the small recurring appropriation for administration, protection and routine maintenance, ranged from \$7,000 to \$15,000. These appropriations were on a fiscal year basis beginning each July 1. Some projects took more than one calendar year, and sometimes work was going on simultaneously with two or more projects. Details of restoration work are contained in Hieb's final reports on the respective buildings. Following is a brief summary of the work performed during this first major restoration program, in approximate chronological order:

Old Bakery, 1950: West wall and northwest corner completely reconstructed of lime-concrete on new reinforced concrete footings. Restoration of west window, with iron grill; reconstruction of chimney, omitting flue; plastering to match original. Sectional concrete footings under outside of brick-and-stone wall. Brickwork repaired or repointed. Stone part of east wall rebuilt. Frame east gable restored. Roof structure repaired with some new rafters, joists, ties and sheeting. Ventilator reconstructed. Roof reshingled. Eaves and cornices restored. Doorway restored, with replacement of original door. Cost \$3,600. [71]

Sutler's Store, 1951-1954: This building is actually three buildings welded together: the adobe Sutler's Store erected in 1849-1850; the native stone addition of 1852; and the large lime-concrete addition of 1883. (The evolution of this structure, and aspects of its human history, is given in the Mattes article, "The Sutler's Store at Fort Laramie," Annals of Wyoming, 1946.) After intensive architectural analysis of the decrepit ruin, and conflicting advice from Skipper Roberson from Omaha and Gordon Vivian from the Southwest Region, Hieb's initial philosophy was, in effect, to "jack up the roof and put new walls under it," which if put into practice would have borne out Chief Architect Sutton's prediction that the old pile would have to be razed and rebuilt. On the contrary, when it came down to cases, Hieb managed to save, intact, about half of the wall area. In summary:

All exterior walls stabilized or restored on new concrete footings, with substitution of approximately 50% of lime-concrete, adobe, and masonry mud mortar. Interior concrete arches removed and central partition wall

(original 1850 exterior) reconstructed of adobe. All sash and doors and trim repaired or replaced. Extensive roof repair and reconstruction with new elements, including shingles, corrugated iron, gutter, and downspouts. Chimneys restored with brick replacement. Floors repaired with substitution of materials matched to original, including joists and planking. New floor complete in adobe store section. Interior trim repaired and refinished with matching paints and varnishes, some substitution of wainscoting, moulding, door casings. Safe restored on replacement masonry hearth. Fireplace in store restored with replacement hearth of old bricks. All walls refinished to match originals with mud or lime plaster, paint, or whitewash. Cost \$16,000. [72]

Cavalry Barracks, 1953-1954: Two-storied verandas, large portions missing, completely restored from substituted concrete foundations to shingled roof and upper deck railings, using moveable double-deck platform or scaffolding. Some original timbers and railing sections re-used. Primed with white and finished with gray paint. Plaster around all windows and doorways repaired, wall cracks pointed or filled with lime-plaster. Some doorways restored to original with some substitution of frames, casings, sills, sash. Windows restored with re-glazed old sash or new sash substituted. Repairs to exterior trim, all painted Venetian red. Cost \$12,000. [73]

Commissary Storehouse, 1952-1954: West endwall stabilized with concrete buttress footings. All post-historic doorways and other apertures filled with lime-concrete. Cracks pointed with lime mortar. Interior walls of office rooms repaired, with some substitution of lath and replastered to original. Interior walls of clothing storeroom restored, all new. Roof reshingled. Two chimneys restored, with all new brick. Floor in west warehouse section restored, all new T & G. Floors in balance of building patched. Some replacement of joist scabs. All windows restored. New sash and outside casings and trim required except two basement sash. All original doors repaired and rehung. One new interior door and some hardware replaced. Interior trim gray. Exterior gray for door and window trim. Venetian red for eaves trim. Loading docks reconstructed of treated native pine. Hoist in east warehouse restored. Cost \$4,000. [74]

Magazine, 1954: Complete restoration in accord with description in letter of September 25, 1855, Geo. T. Balch, Ordnance Corps to Major O. F. Winship. Recent window openings filled with masonry. Interior cracks repointed. Floor restored at deduced level on new concrete footing blocks of native plank on treated joists. Late shed roof removed. Historic roof reconstructed with heavy timber joists, double overlapping sheeting on slight curve and pitch with curb board to hold layer of earth, plus layer of brick and mortar. Heavy roll roofing layer over sheeting. Single door restored to pattern. New window sash and shutters. Cost \$1,200. [75]

Officers Quarters F, 1954-1955: General restoration to 1888. Front porch railings and lattice work reconstructed. Rear porch late floor removed, new floor on concrete foundations. Posts and trim repaired with some substitutions. Rear hall sills treated and levelled on concrete foundation. All windows and outside doorways repaired with some substitution of sills, sash, cord and stops. Repair and replacement of dormers and roof. Floors in main section lower floor replaced with substitution of concrete foundations, treated joists, native pine sub-floor and yellow pine flooring. Three coats Valoil. Interior walls replastered or old plaster repaired and painted white. Exterior plaster patched. Matching spindles substituted in stair rail and varnished. Other interior woodwork cleaned of old paint and given two coats of red mahogany varnish-stain, with red enamel. Exterior woodwork repainted Venetian red or lampblack gray. Cost \$5,000. [76]

Officers Quarters E, 1955-1957: Major external work on this duplex included repairing and resetting many door and window casings, with some substitution; patching and replastering with lime-concrete many sections of outside walls; re-pouring four lime-concrete chimneys from the roof up and repairing three others. Restoring the wooden flooring, posts, railing and lattices of the front porches and repainting all exterior woodwork to match original remnants. Interior work included raising, repairing and supporting with auxiliary footings many sections of flooring. Replastering of interior walls on cleaned and renailed lathe or patched lime-concrete. Removal of post-military paint from woodwork and refinishing to match remnants of original finishes. Refinishing all repaired floors with Valoil and matching paints or varnishes. Cost \$6,000 [77]

Officers Quarters A, 1956-1958: Removal of loose plaster, ceiling or other broken lath. Closets and original stairway restored to original form, as double-set quarters. Tin shingles inserted and repairs to ridge boards. Metal lath applied to original adobe-filled walls, and plastered. Replacement and renailed of wooden lath on ceilings and partitions. Period 1916 porch removed, concrete foundation blocks poured. Framing on five dormers repaired and strengthened. Original foundations of missing rear wing excavated for cellar, and this wing reconstructed with native pine. Plastering of main lower floor, lime white coated, over old work. Surviving floor sections of porch re-floored and west side porch restored. Double lean-to entry to rear between kitchen wings restored. Outside walls and eaves painted white. Reconstruction of stair railings and wooden dividing partitions, upper and lower halls. Newel post at foot of staircase restored. Floor repairs sealed with Valoil and refinished with floor varnish in English walnut. Lattice for porch patterned after Officers Quarters F. Eave troughs on porches and rear wings. Inside woodwork removed, then primed and repainted with white enamel tinted with burnt umber and lamp black. Stair railings finished with dark walnut varnish stain. Sand finished plastered walls painted with white water mix. Cost \$8,000. [78]

Old Guardhouse, 1955: General restoration to 1888. Floor of lower prison room restored with new native plank on joints on concrete footing blocks. One solitary cell restored and surviving original repaired with new planking, metal stripping and other hardware. Original door repaired. Altered doorway restored with some new brick, masonry, frame and new door. Window sash replaced. Upper southeast window frame and bars repaired. Ventilator shaft reconstructed, ceiling restored with new wainscoting and painted to match original fragment. Upper plank floor repaired with new elements. All inside plastering repaired, major patching and white-washing. Woodwork repainted or whitewashed. Upper doorway repaired. Original door of Magazine period rehung on new hinges. Outside stoop conjectural. Masonry-filled windows and doorway repaired. Drainage around building corrected. Cost \$1,200. [79]

Ruins stabilization, 1954-1956: General repair and reinforcing (buttressing) of lime-concrete walls of Administration Building, Officers Quarters B, C, and D, and Non-Com Officers Quarters, removing rotting wood joist inserts, filling cracks and voids. Clean-up of Hospital, New Bakery and Sawmill ruins. [80]

Old Bedlam, 1957: Completion of "Survey Report for Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historic Structures, Building No. 1, Old Bedlam" with historical data, structural analysis, and recommendations. Region recommended approval but this was withheld by Washington Office. Restoration deferred pending switch-over to construction responsibility by Western Office, Design and Construction. [81]

A wealth of new historical and archeological data was acquired during the 1950s through the efforts of Hieb, Mattes and Paul Beaubien. The latter, under the Regional Historian, conducted a series of archeological investigations, partly as salvage in connection with restoration jobs, partly in the quest for basic information on fragmented or lost historic structures.

Having reached a dead-end in the search for Fort William (the first Fort Laramie), curiosity mounted about the nature and extent of the actual remains of Fort John (the second Fort Laramie), known to be at the south end of the parade ground as shown on early military ground-plans and, in fact, determining by its alignment the orientation of the parade ground. Aware of the extensive construction of now vanished Army buildings on the site of the adobe ruins (in addition to existing Officers Quarters A), including land-levelling, cellars, outhouses and the resultant obliteration of fur trade period evidence, not much was expected of this investigation, and indeed not much was found. There was considerable evidence of trash from military adobe and frame officers quarters and outbuildings of the 1854-1870 period but almost nothing that was of the distinctive fur trade establishment of 1849. Trenches and squares dug on a sample basis across the hypothetical fur trade rectangle of 121 by 167 feet (as measured by the Mormons in 1847) failed to yield any recognizable structural features of Fort John. In the southeast corner of the area Beaubien found a few jumbled adobes unrelated to the military era, with trade beads, gunflints, bullets, brass ornaments, and a so-called snow snake or game piece, all judged to be of probable pre-1850 vintage. Altogether the prospects of finding much more than this, even if the entire site was peeled off, is now judged to be slight. [82]

Somewhat more productive was Beaubien's test excavation of the original pre-1867 post cemetery (probably also the site of the fur trade period cemetery), on which was superimposed the 1873 lime-concrete Hospital, with no evidence that the affected burials had been relocated, then or later. Four military graves were readily found, with remains intact. Since the assumption had been confirmed, the graves were back-filled. (Other human remains had been noted earlier when the irrigation ditch was pushed through a part of this cemetery, in 1892-1894.) [83]

In 1951 Beaubien worked four intermittent periods, April 16 to October 21, around the Sutler's Store, then the prime restoration target. The first objective was to sift an old storage cellar under the post-office and poolroom section, which was thereafter gravel-filled as it threatened the collapse of nearby mud mortar-masonry walls. Secondly, searches were made at the perimeter of those failed sections of adobe and lime-concrete walls which had to be reconstructed. Thirdly, the ground to the rear or west of the 1883 portion of the structure was carefully excavated for evidence of appended structures of the earlier periods which are indicated in successive military ground-plans. Positive evidence was found of log structures, of indeterminate elevation, of the 1867-1876 era, along with the abundant artifacts of that middle period. [84]

During 1954-1956 Paul Beaubien undertook brief precautionary searches for artifacts and hidden structural evidence associated with rehabilitation work in the ruins of Officers Quarters B, C and D, the restoration of the Magazine and Officers Quarters E, and the slope east of the Cavalry Barracks veranda which required grading to improve drainage. A volunteer project by Hieb himself, during an off-season, was a little "underwater archeology", to salvage a number of intriguing objects from the Laramie River, such as leg irons, broken sabre blades, and stove parts.

Artifacts from all these digs were incorporated into the growing Fort Laramie museum collection, which was

still without a museum curator. In his process of cleaning, numbering and accessioning these artifacts, Beaubien was the first person on the premises with professional capability in this area, beyond the limited contributions of Smith and Hendron. Occasionally Hieb was able to obtain limited inexperienced help with this early work on the collection. In 1952 Harry Wandrus was sent out from Harper's Ferry for a tour of duty at the Fort to do some preservative work on metal objects. That same year the storage collection was moved from Officers Quarters E to odd space in the Cavalry Barracks.

Again Hieb's research, aside from his probings of architectural fabric, was in the nature of extracting data from knowledgeable visitors and corresponding with them to help illuminate dark corners of Fort history. It is difficult to overestimate the value of this patient time-consuming work, which might have been lost altogether if a Superintendent less conscientious and motivated had been on the premises. The following checklist of some of the more fruitful contacts made by Hieb in this period is given to illustrate what was accomplished in this area, keeping in mind that there was usually only one opportunity to interview these people, most of them aged, with personal links to the pre-1890 Fort Laramie:

1950 Elizabeth Snow, Torrington, attended 4th grade at Fort school	1877
Jake Gompert of Mitchell, formerly of the Imperial German Light Cavalry, who purchased and dismantled Officers Quarters B	1890
Jake Tomamichael, Medora, North Dakota, son of Hospital steward, with photos and his father's uniform.	1880s
G. O. Reid, Alberta, Canada, son of Army contractor	1880s
1951 Col. F. W. Allison, Salem, Oregon, son of 2nd Lieutenant who saw and reported "the Laramie ghost."	1871
Mrs. W. V. McBeth, Oakland, California, with grandmother's diary	1864
1952 Mamie Sandercock Robertson, Florence Sandercock McCormick, Stella Sandercock Bright, daughters of civilian engineer whose widow stayed on in Quarters A	1880s
Sanford Beecher, New York City, re: original mantel from Old Bedlam, recovered by his father, Bishop Beecher of Nebraska. Donated to museum collection	
1953 Cornelius Knapp emigrant letter	1850
Kenneth Bordeaux, Kansas City, Mo., great-grandson of James Bordeaux, squaw-man in charge of Fort John	1846
Reis Tuttle, Des Moines Fort Laramie emigrant letters	1850
Mrs. John Olinger, Denver, "domestic" for Colonel Merriam, last post commander, data on floor plan for Officers Quarters B	1880s
Philip St. George Cooke, Grand Island, descendant of Colonel Cooke of the Dragoons under Colonel Kearny	1845
Gustave Paules, Boulder, Colorado, born at Fort Laramie	1886
Mett Shippee, Smithsonian Institution, J. W. Crane letter	1849
1954 James Nolan, Torrington, son of Sergeant, 7th Cavalry, born here	1882
Louis Wilde, Saratoga, Wyoming, son of Joe Wilde, owner of Cavalry Barracks and Commissary Warehouse. Details re: interior layouts and uses	1890-

Mr. O. R. Ivin, Crawford, Nebraska, daughter of J. Bogler, operator of the Rustic Hotel. Born here.	1882
Bruce McKinstry, Chicago, Illinois, descendant of overland emigrant who helped pioneer north side route west from Fort Laramie. Copy of journal.	1850
H. J. Bolin, Douglas, Wyoming, photos of Sutler's Store and house	1877
E. L. Quivey, Mitchell, Nebraska. Ledgers of Subsistence Store sales	1873
Corwith Wagner, St. Louis. Fort Laramie emigrant letters	1849-1852
Mrs. O. M. Rasmussen, Manville, Wyo., daughter of Private George McNulty, 9th Infantry - photographs	1870
1955 Waddell F. Smith, San Rafael, California, descendant of William E. Waddell, co-owner of the Pony Express. Donate S. E. Ward post trader tokens.	1860
1956 Dorothy Piez, Denver, William Dresser letter	1850
Mari Sandoz, New York City, dispute re: Charles King novels authenticity	1880
1957 John Hussey, Regional Historian, San Francisco, re: Tavernier painting of Sutler's Store interior at Oakland Museum	1867
W. Zander, Pittsburgh, Pa., Swiss emigrant J. Scheller diary	1850
General Reynolds J. Burt, Washington D.C. son of Andrew Sheridan Burt, officer stationed at Fort Laramie 1870s and 1880s. Valuable photos and heirlooms	

In addition to his personalized research based on "targets of opportunity" as indicated above, Dave Hieb demonstrated scholarly aptitude by authoring two articles which appeared in historical quarterlies: "An 1850 Gold Rush Letter from Fort Laramie by A. C. Sponsler, a Thayer County Pioneer," edited for Nebraska History, 1951; and "A Folsom Point from Southeastern Wyoming," in Southwestern Lore, 1950. The point was found by Louis Hieb, the Superintendent's son, on the terrace near the Old Hospital. [85]

While there have been many gratifying and even dramatic gains in the field of Fort Laramie historical research by the National Park Service, there was one very dramatic, or rather tragic, loss involving Superintendent Hieb, Regional Historian Mattes, and the National Archives which must be recorded here. From 1948 through 1952 Mattes visited the National Archives in Washington, D.C. frequently to research records of abandoned Army posts which were to be inundated in Missouri River Reservoir projects of the Corps of Engineers. While working in the Old Army Records Branch of the Archives, on one occasion, he digressed to examine record books pertaining to Old Fort Laramie. Although he was prohibited from entering the stacks where these records were kept, the archivist in charge wheeled in to the study area a heavy truck load of original Fort Laramie record books, in bound ledger form. All he had time to do was to sample some of the contents and make a rough checklist of the volumes for future reference. Preoccupied with the critical Missouri River Basin Survey and Salvage Program, Mattes had no opportunity or funds to follow up with arrangements for their transcription. Appeals for research assistance by the Branch of History, Washington Office, brought no result, presumably because that office was short handed rather than indifferent to Fort Laramie's needs. An effort to scrape up \$100. or so to pay the cost of microfilming these materials also came to nought. In that austere period money for such purposes was too scarce to permit this luxury.

Finally, in 1954, despite other heavy preoccupations, Dave Hieb felt a little more affluent and wrote a letter to the Region requesting the microfilm transcriptions of certain Post Records Mattes had listed. These included Orders, records of the Councils of Administration (which handled relationships with the Post Trader, such as setting prices and establishing regulations), Guard Reports, Morning Reports, Board of Survey, Clothing Books, Records of Deaths and Internments, Quartermaster and Subsistence Records, Passes and Furloughs, and letters and orders pertaining to the 6th Infantry, the 5th Cavalry, and the 1856 Sioux Expedition. The request was passed along by the Region to the History Branch, Washington, D.C. After a lengthy interval Roy Appleman of the History Branch wrote to advise that most of these records had been destroyed by the National Archives in one of its own little private records disposal programs, the kind that no one else ever knows anything about! It took Hieb and Mattes some time to get over their shock, to realize that one agency of the Government had thoughtlessly destroyed valuable historical records of another Federal agency. It was evident that the ivory-tower archivists were not aware of the existence of Fort Laramie and its research program. In fact, it developed that they had destroyed all such categories of records for all U.S. Military posts, many others of which were in or candidates for the National Park System!

The upshot of this dismal story is that when the Branch of History learned of the reaction back in the hinterlands, and the nature of the loss dawned on them, they contacted Dr. Wayne Grover, Director of the National Archives, and arranged a meeting in his office between him and his associates on the one hand, and Chief Historian Herbert Kahler, Dr. Charles Porter, and Regional Historian Mattes of the National Park Service. The meeting took place on a suitably gloomy winter day, January 24, 1956. There was tension between the two groups when the problem was discussed. Dr. Robert Bahmer, Assistant Director of the Archives, took the position that, "You can't save everything!" (We had naively thought that indeed everything was saved, or else the only thing that was disposed of was material considered by qualified experts to be of no further value whatever!) On the other hand Dr. Schellenberg, head of that department responsible for disposing of things, stated simply that, "We goofed!" That admission was distinctly heard by Kahler, Porter and Mattes, although later in a letter exchange with Mattes he reversed course, and questioned that anything of real value had been destroyed. Goof it certainly was, on a grand scale, but it was too late to remedy, for the records had been destroyed, with no effort by the archivists to microfilm or otherwise copy them beforehand. The evidence of their one-time existence, aside from Mattes' vivid and painful memory, is his 1956 checklist of missing items compiled from the 1951 National Archives "Index to Post Records," a total of 170 volumes lost forever! In addition, there are several items of correspondence on the subject which now repose in a research folder at Fort Laramie National Historic Site. [\[86\]](#)

While the loss may not seem exactly tragic to non-historians, and even some historians might disdainfully observe that it was a loss only of antiquarian details, it was a severe loss to Fort Laramie history, leaving a large hole in the historic record. Mattes' examination of the Guard Reports, for example, had shown that these not only included routine entries on prison inmates, their arrivals, punishments, and discharges, but the Captain of the Guard noted the exact time of arrival of every wagon train, every Pony Express rider, every stage coach and whatever else constituted civilian entrance to the Reservation, the nature of their business, sometimes the identity of the leaders, and the time of their departure. Can anyone with the slightest respect for history question much less measure the value of such information to historians, or the interest it could have engendered in the large segment of the public that reads American history? What a priceless asset these volumes would have been if they could have been returned to Fort Laramie for research by eager students and to put on display! Yet those to whom these records were entrusted didn't perceive their immense value, or else they were very callous in their treatment of them. Its almost as if they had wanted to get them out of

sight and mind before anyone could discover their existence. It seems improbable that anyone other than Mattes had ever taken a good look at them.

If the National Archives for whatever reason wanted to dispose of these records, they should have sent them to the National Park Service, or else to the state historical societies involved. Or they could have auctioned them off to wealthy collectors of Western Americana to help reduce the national debt! Or they could at the very least have transcribed them on microfilm. But the cold fact is that priceless Fort Laramie records were instead destroyed without a trace by those charged with responsibility for their protection.

It so happens that not all categories of Fort Laramie records were destroyed, only those above noted, which were primarily those in ledger or bound book form. Mattes also made an inventory of Post records which were not destroyed, and a program of transcription was started. At first these were microfilmed, and typists at Fort Laramie had to transcribe them. Later the Xeroxing method was developed, and direct page-size transcriptions could be made. Among records that were so salvaged during this period were Post Surgeon's medical histories, Letters Sent and Received, and Muster Rolls. In addition, certain sources other than Post Records were tapped, including records of the Adjutant-General's Office, the Quartermaster-General, The Department of the Platte, the Office of Indian Affairs, and the Bureau of the Census.

Outside of the National Archives, Mattes was able to line up such items as the papers of John Dougherty (onetime post sutler), the Fort Pierre letterbooks (of the fur trade era), and excerpts from the Missouri Republican, all in the files of the Missouri Historical Society at St. Louis; and the Lieutenant John Bourke Indian war journals at West Point. The colored Stanton Plan of the Fort in 1881 was discovered in Chicago (onetime headquarters for the whole western theatre of the Indian wars), and color copies were made. Lloyd McCann provided data on the Grattan Massacre, and a rundown of all trading posts in the Fort Laramie vicinity.

A "Fort Laramie Bibliography" was put together in loose-leaf notebook form, being somewhat more useful than the old 3 x 5 card file started in 1938. Finally, in 1950 all the Fort Laramie research records which had been accumulated by Mattes at Scotts Bluff and shipped to Omaha for his use there, were returned to Fort Laramie at Hieb's request. These records constituted the foundation of the voluminous research library that exists at the Fort today. [87]

This account of Fort Laramie research in the 1950s which began on a negative note ends in similar fashion. Despite pleas by Hieb, Mattes and Dr. Porter of Washington, D.C. that the John Hunton diaries be entrusted to the National Park Service, L. G. (Pat) Flannery of Torrington (one-time editor of the Fort Laramie Scout) elected to retain them personally. In his retirement he aimed to edit them for publication, and he did just that for the diaries through the 1880s. (Supposedly there are diaries for every year from Hunton's ranching days in the 1870s until his death in 1928). However, all the diaries, including those after 1890, came into the custodianship of Flannery's widow in 1964. As of 1978 these diaries are withheld from further publication or research use by scholars. [88]

During Hieb's period attendance grew from 22,000 in 1950 to 35,000 in 1958. In the latter half of this period, despite his pre-occupation with research and restoration, Hieb was able to offer to visitors somewhat more than the usual self-guided tour of building exteriors. First of all, the visible process of restoration itself

intrigued many visitors who were glad to see finally a real restoration program at the Fort. Secondly, after the Commissary Storehouse was restored and space for a museum laboratory was provided in the Cavalry Barracks, the collection was moved out of storage in the Officers Row. Some of the larger pieces and the more valuable pieces that could be secured through locked cases were set up as a new exhibit room in the south end of the Commissary Storehouse, while all other items found a new temporary home in the Barracks. From time to time the exhibits in the Commissary would be expanded and upgraded; as of this date (1978) that same exhibit room is still in business, together with information desk and sales rack added later.

A third breakthrough by Hieb was an illustrated Fort Laramie Historical Handbook, similar to those successfully used at other historical areas in a published series by the Government Printing Office. After some revision and adjustments of Dave's draft in Omaha it was sent to Washington. It was published in late 1954 under Hieb's indicated authorship, and for over 20 years, it was a primary interpretive tool. Originally it sold for 25 cents.

Thought was given to the need for historical re-furnishing of at least a few rooms in the restored structures. The 1956 Master Plan contemplated such token treatment of the Sutler's Store, Old Bedlam, Officers Quarters F, and the Cavalry Barracks. The public was happy to see the structural restorations, but unhappy that they couldn't then enter the buildings. Obviously it wouldn't be sufficient to show them just the bare walls; the buildings had to be furnished and that was a gigantic order, requiring extensive research in a different dimension, not to mention the problem of finding authentic items of the various periods. Regional Director Baker expressed concern over this matter, and none other than ex-Governor Leslie Miller wrote to Director Conrad L. Wirth urging that he approach Rockefeller or the Ford Foundation or some such philanthropy about getting help in the matter of furnishings. However, nothing came of Miller's suggestion. As far as funding from regular Park Service appropriations was concerned, this would never come to pass, in part because the Park Service simply didn't have a rationale for funding historical furnishings (in the same manner as museum exhibits) until much later, and in part because in the 1950s what modest funds there were went into the structures that had first to be secured before restoration of their contents could be considered. [89]

In 1956 the Rocky Mountain Nature Association severed its connection with Fort Laramie. Accordingly Dave Hieb occupied himself with the formation of a new independent Fort Laramie Historical Association, spurning efforts to have him join either the Oregon Trail Museum Association at Scotts Bluff or the Eastern National Park and Monument Association. The charter and by-laws for this new organization followed the forms prescribed by law, with local variations. Many enthusiastic local citizens found a way to get involved in Fort Laramie activities by becoming charter members. At the first annual meeting of the Fort Laramie Association in December, 1956 it was disclosed that gross sales were \$1,000. of which \$150. went for museum equipment and library books. Under various Superintendents this Association has continued to grow to this day (1978). [90]

One high-minded money-making project of the old Rocky Mountain Nature Association was derailed in 1954 when a ruling was handed down by the Washington Office that pieces of the original siding from Old Bedlam could no longer be sold as souvenirs, and that the stock-pile of same would have to be destroyed. The implied reason was that somehow the seeming commercialization of authentic original historic remains

was a desecration, and it would give visitors wrong ideas. Dave dutifully complied but in retrospect there seems to be something wrong with the decision itself. Why destroy all of this priceless evidence? This seems to be on a par with the National Archives destruction of original Fort Laramie records. How valid is a philosophy that original architectural pieces have such spiritual value that we are obliged to make them dematerialize, so that they may live only in memory? [91]

For all of his tangible and enduring contributions Dave Hieb labored during much of his stay at the same grades (GS 6 and 7) as Superintendents of areas of the lowest administrative level, and below that of such areas as Devils Tower and Effigy Mounds. In 1952 Mattes protested this injustice and inequity, and the fact that Park Service management seemed unable to recognize the distinctive quality of Fort Laramie, or to reward a man with such outstanding performance. At the same time and in subsequent diatribes he deplored the Fort Laramie appropriations as "niggardly" in comparison with other areas of far less significance in American history. It is incredible but true that Hieb received only a single personal achievement award despite his extraordinary ability and accomplishments, and this was a magnanimous "Superior Accomplishment" award of \$125. in 1953. Finally in 1954 he did receive a promotion to GS-9, and in 1956 he went to GS-11. However acceptable to Hieb, these promotions were not so much the result of Mattes' prodding or recognition of Fort Laramie's distinctive quality as they were of a general upgrading of all Superintendent positions everywhere. [92]

In May 1955, when Hieb was right in the middle of his restoration program, the Washington Office came up with the incredible idea of transferring him to Manassas Battlefield in Virginia! Shifting personnel around frequently for various administrative reasons is common practice, and eleven years in one place is unusual for a Superintendent. Sometimes that indicates that the fellow is so incompetent or mediocre that he might as well live out his life on the spot. However, in this case, whoever engineered the Manassas idea was oblivious to the importance of the Fort Laramie program, or that Hieb was indispensable to its completion within the funding framework then current, since no other man brought in willy-nilly as Fort Laramie Superintendent would be apt to have his capability of doubling as a restoration supervisor. When Mattes protested to high heaven against this exercise in bureaucratic obtuseness he was backed up by Acting Regional Director John McLaughlin who advised Washington that if Hieb were transferred by them arbitrarily, against his and everybody else's wishes, then the Region would simply then and there terminate the Fort Laramie restoration program. Even though money was available, in the absence of competent direction in the field it would violate the Service's own principles to pursue efforts at restoration. With that blast Washington backed off from the idea of shuffling Dave around just for shuffling's sake, although muttering something about moving him elsewhere "next fiscal year." [93]

When Dave did transfer to Omaha in 1958, with a promotion to GS-12, it was in recognition that a new era had dawned, and restoration at Fort Laramie would hereafter be handled on a formal planning and construction basis by full-blown professionals of the Western Office, Design and Construction, San Francisco. By this time Dave had completed his personally planned and directed restorations based on fluid "rehabilitation" funds. And he and his family were quite ready to move to Omaha with its amenities after eleven years in the wilds of Wyoming.

During the 1950s the Director was real high on the idea of having biennial meetings of all Superintendents, nationally, at some compatible place in one of the national parks. The purpose of these meetings was

ostensibly to lecture upon and have work sessions on current Park Service management problems, though the practical effect was to bolster morale by giving Superintendents presumably all hard-working and underpaid the equivalent of a family vacation. Many sought to broaden their horizons by visiting other areas en route. Dave attended such sessions at Grand Canyon in 1948, Yosemite in 1950, Glacier in 1952, Great Smoky Mountains in 1955, and Grand Teton in 1957. [94]

During this period Fort Laramie staffing finally got some beefing up. In 1950 W. L. Jeffrey was appointed the first full-time permanent maintenanceman, with quarters in the Barracks, while Art Darnall went with the restoration crew. In 1955 Lois Woodard of Fort Laramie town whose father gave the invocation at the 1937 dedication services got the first permanent spot as clerk-typist. Lois had first worked at Fort Laramie in the early 1940s as a museum laboratory helper with the National Youth Administration, and Hieb had hired her as a "6-month clerk-typist" to follow Marilyn Brittenham. In 1957 Jim Petty became the first permanent Historian for the area. The seasonal historian force was inaugurated at this time also. Jim Bowers was there only briefly before going to Custer Battlefield as the first seasonal historian there (though resigning soon to go with the Denver Public School system). William F. Bragg, Jr., later a public relations man and college professor, was the second seasonal historian, serving two years. Among later seasonal appointees with Hieb was Jack McDermott (later to become permanent Historian) who became highly active in research projects and the affairs of the Fort Laramie Association, and eventually became a high official in the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Another was Bob Munkres who became a Political Science professor at Muskingum College in Ohio, and another prolific writer on frontier history.

The 1950s were not a time for public celebration. The emphasis was on work accomplishment, and the time to celebrate such accomplishment would be in the future. There were, however, a few low-key observances. In June 1952 the area participated in ceremonies at the nearby grave of Mary Homesley, who had succumbed on the trail 100 years earlier. In August 1954 there was some fanfare in recognition of the Grattan Massacre Centennial. The Goshen County and Wyoming State Historical Societies sponsored these events. In July, 1952 the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming had a field day when they dedicated no less than three of their official markers just outside the Monument boundaries, along the approach road at the Old Army Bridge, near Fort Platte, and opposite the northwest corner of the Monument, a sizeable monument and plaque to commemorate "Portugee" Phillips ride of 1866 to Fort Laramie from Fort Phil Kearny to report the Fetterman Massacre. The latter seems to have been a Declaration of Independence by the Commission which was just a shade miffed because of Hieb's insistence on revision of the wording of the plaque they had placed in front of Old Bedlam in 1940. [95]

Aside from the historical informants above mentioned there were some notable VIPs who turned up during this period. Among them were the novelist A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (his second visit); Wyoming's Senator Joseph O'Mahoney; Dr. Waldo Wedel of the Smithsonian Institution; Dr. James Olson, Superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society; Actor Raymond Burr, starring in a popular radio series called "Fort Laramie"; and (also a second visit) Waddell F. Smith of San Rafael, California, talking up the idea of a bang-up National Pony Express Centennial in 1960.

Probably the most distinguished visitor was Bernard DeVoto, in June, 1953. DeVoto, a man of letters of national reputation, was also a western historian of the first magnitude with such major works as Course of Empire and Across the Wide Missouri to his credit. By coincidence Regional Historian Mattes turned up

during his visit and, along with Hieb, there was some heavy conversation under the cottonwoods, mulling over fine points of the western fur trade. The following year Mae Reed Porter, owner of the now-famous A. J. Miller drawings of 1837 used to illustrate DeVoto's book, turned up in company with Dr. Howard Driggs of the American Pioneer Trails Association. This would be the last visit to Fort Laramie of either of these long-term devotees of Oregon Trail history. [96]

In addition to his continuing involvement with the Highway 26 Association, Dave figured in two constructive public relations projects. First of these was to provide a haven for the old NPS exhibits at Lake Guernsey after notice that that museum had been vandalized in the absence of a caretaker. Those paintings which pertained to Fort Laramie and Oregon Trail history were put on display in the Commissary, while others were safely stored until protection could be ensured at Lake Guernsey. This move, made in 1955, was by mutual consent of the Bureau of Reclamation which technically owned the Guernsey museum, and the State of Wyoming, which intended to take over the place as a state park.

Another public relations job related to the Old Army Bridge, which had been turned over to the State and, in turn, to Goshen County. The County Commissioners finally gave up on this antiquated structure, which was hopelessly inadequate for the increasing numbers of visitors as well as local ranch traffic. In 1957, with State aid, they built a nice new 6-span concrete bridge over the North Platte, about 100 feet upstream from the old relic. Dave's role here was in talking to both State and county officials to secure their sworn guarantee not to demolish the Army bridge, but to just leave it alone until the NPS could get a bill through Congress to authorize extension of the Monument boundaries to include the bridge and its approaches so it could be properly preserved and restored as an exhibit. Hieb had been keeping track of the bridge problem for years, beginning in 1947 when it had first been necessary to detour traffic over a rough ford. He discovered through research the document by which this bridge (as well as another now vanished one over the Laramie) was originally turned over to Wyoming Territory, and that it contained a clause which stated, in effect that as, if, and when the bridge was no longer needed by the State, it would revert to the U. S. Government. There was no resistance to this proposal by State or County officials; they were happy to avoid the cost of demolition. But careful monitoring of the situation seemed necessary to ensure that some careless County employee did not accidentally take it on himself to dismantle the 80 year old structure.

In 1953 the old Master Plan bugaboo bobbed up again when Director Wirth and Chief Landscape Architect Carnes expressed skepticism about the plan of segregating future new facilities across the river. By this time the Omaha Office had overcome its skepticism and was 100 percent in favor of this concept, and they were taken aback by this new attack on the plan from on high. In 1951 Fort Laramie had been removed from under Rocky Mountain, and it was no longer Dave Canfield's problem, but he felt so strongly about the matter that on July 23 he wrote this bitter memorandum:

I am informed that the Fort Laramie Master Plan has met with the Director's disfavor. Since I have been deeply involved in that development plan. . . I certainly hope that when restudy is made that I will be invited to participate so that I may explain the thoroughly considered reasoning that went into the present plan from those who conceived it, i.e., Ken Mitchell and myself. . .

While I was in the military, where there was possibly some hope held out I might not come

back, the master plan was junked under the "new broom sweeps clean" principle. After much interesting but largely useless research had proved nothing pertinent in the way of developing a superior master plan, by valiant effort I rescued and resuscitated the almost cold corpse and nursed it carefully back to life.

I have been on the ground with many specialists and experts from the Washington Office and other high levels and have learned nothing to discredit the last edition. If it is to be thrown into the hopper and planning started from scratch again, I would truly be appreciative of an opportunity to take part in the discussions. [\[97\]](#)

As it turned out, Canfield's apprehension was misplaced because Omaha now favored his plan, and Washington wasn't pushing real hard on the alternative. In 1953 the whole Master Plan question was still academic but in 1955-1956 the subject was revived with a bang with the advent of Director Wirth's famous Mission 66 Program. This was a proposed ten-year development program for the Park Service so designated to dramatize it as a high-priority item with the Bureau of the Budget and Congress. On March 30, 1955 Regional Director Baker wrote to the Director expressing pleasure at the Fort's bright prospects under this new program:

Fort Laramie is one of the outstanding historic shrines in the American West, but in the 18 years of our custodianship we have been able to do little more than patch up and protect the historic structures, with a bare minimum of interpretation, and makeshift quarters for administration. Fort Laramie is highly eligible for full treatment in the Mission 66 program.

Regarding the Master Plan, many sections have been approved, but not the General Development section. . . We are unanimously in favor of the Master Plan [providing for new development across the river].

The year 1966 will mark the 100th birthday of the Fort Laramie Treaty Council, the prelude to the last decade of Indian warfare. We believe a big celebration at Fort Laramie in 1966 would afford dramatic demonstration of Mission 66 achievements. [\[98\]](#)

All this enthusiasm was dashed by a big gob of cold water in the form of a Mission 66 Plan for Fort Laramie originating with Washington D.C. planners, which in effect would torpedo the 1954 Master Plan. Eivind Scoyen, Chairman of the Mission 66 Committee, condemned the Canfield cross-river concept as "unrealistic." But if that was unrealistic, his new proposal was retrogressive, going back to the idea of approaching the historic area from the north, on the west side of the Laramie, across the extinct Quartermaster area; using the Cavalry Barracks for permanent administrative and visitor center purposes; limiting boundary extensions to a strip 600 feet wide to the north; and putting the parking area in the bottoms west of Old Bedlam, with a nearby picnic facility. However, residences and utilities would be directly across the river, accessible by a new vehicular bridge. The frosting on the Washington cake was a recommended policy of restoring buildings individually to their respective periods of maximum importance, without regard to the chronological consistency or unity of the whole. [\[99\]](#)

Baker's memorandum of July 8, 1955 to Scoyen (signed by him but like most Fort Laramie correspondence

written by Mattes) expressed consternation at the new proposal, which was mainly a retread of a very old one which had been rejected years before:

. . . We realize that in this Mission we are not to feel bound or restricted by previous thinking as it may be reflected in existing Master Plans. Nevertheless, we do not believe that past thinking which has gone into Master Plans should therefore be ignored. It is the consensus here that the Mission 66 proposal reflects a "lowering of our sights" at Fort Laramie at a time when they should be raised. We feel rather strongly that the historical values at Fort Laramie, embracing "the pageant of the West," are of sufficient magnitude to warrant the type of bold treatment reflected in the existing Plan.

The [existing] Master Plan scheme is the product of many years of planning and consultation by a succession of Superintendents, Regional Directors, Landscape Architects, and Historians. We do not believe that there is anything sacred about past thinking, but we feel that it is significant that unanimity of thinking on the subject was finally achieved by this group of administrators and technicians after a considerable period of detailed study. We can't avoid a feeling that up to this point we have been on the right track and it is difficult for us to accept a plan which would not do full justice to the unique historical values at Fort Laramie.

We expect that considerations of economy and practicality must have weighed heavily in your Mission 66 thinking, but it has not been our conception that Mission 66 must necessarily envision a plan that has to be consummated by 1966. If a plan commensurate with the area values will take longer than 10 years to achieve, then we are still for that plan.

Specifically the Region objected to the suggested new approach road which would destroy historic building sites, the gross inadequacy of the suggested boundary extension, the intrusiveness of the suggested location for residences, the proximity of the parking area to the parade ground, and the introduction of picnicking which would tend to promote local recreational use and distract maintenance staff from primary objectives. "If the bona fide tourists want to eat their lunch under the cottonwood trees around the Fort, we believe that they should feel free to do so, in the spirit of the pioneers, without formal facilities being provided." Furthermore, Baker complained,

While we heartily concur in the plan to present various surviving structures as historic house museums with period furnishings, we do not understand the proposal to introduce anachronistic treatment of these buildings. All of the existing historic structures are being restored now as of the late period, about 1888. To provide either exterior or interior treatment for earlier periods would result in a distortion from the viewpoint of historic integrity and such treatment would be most confusing from the standpoint of the visitor. Granted that this was not the period of maximum importance, the fact is that what we actually have left at Fort Laramie are the remains of 1888. Even though there are several buildings which date back to 1849, they were altered and they evolved in various ways over the decades to reach their 1888 condition. We feel that a proper central museum exhibit plan will adequately fill in the historical background.

Reluctantly Baker offered an alternative Mission 66 Plan which would correct some of the above deficiencies, by moving the approach road northward, following the meander of the second bench, and shifting the residential and maintenance area to a location immediately west of the Fort Laramie town cemetery, along the county road approach, but still retaining the idea of a headquarters and museum in the Cavalry Barracks. Baker concluded: "The above is definitely a secondary proposal, much less desirable to us than the [existing] Master Plan scheme, and would be accepted by us only if the present Master Plan is to be conclusively discarded."

At this point Superintendent Hieb, accompanied by Regional Landscape Architect Harvey Benson, went to Washington to argue the merits of the various plans before the full Mission 66 Committee. After a lengthy and eloquent presentation by Hieb, the Committee voted to accept the principal elements of the old Master Plan (reflecting the Canfield concept) in the new Mission 66 Prospectus. Subsequently Chairman Scoyen formally concurred in a modified plan which restored the main elements all modern development including Visitor Center across the river, and no use of historic structures for modern purposes. That much represented a gratifying capitulation. However, this new Washington version of a Mission 66 Plan, still reflecting the thoughts of persuasive Roy Appleman of the History Branch, dropped more bomb-shells. It gave strong new emphasis to the fur trade and covered wagon eras at the expense of the military aspect. It still insisted on a policy of restoring each building individually to its particular period of maximum importance. And it came up with the idea that it would be a perfectly good idea, in time, to reconstruct Fort John or Fort William or both! In a memorandum of August 19, 1955 to the Regional Director, forwarded to the Director by George Baggley under cover of August 26, Mattes attempted to explode these radical ideas, starting out with an admission that the fur trade and the Oregon Trail were very important, but questioning the wisdom of any effort to give all three phases of Fort Laramie history the fur trade, the migrations, and the military "equal time":

The physical remains at the post are entirely of the military period. The last forty years of the Fort's history were distinctively military. It seems to me that it is somewhat unrealistic to play down the military aspect in an effort to resurrect earlier eras which lack surviving evidence. By virtue of existing facts which we cannot alter, the military necessarily occupies the greater share of on-site interpretation. The fur trade and emigration phases will have to depend largely upon treatment in the museum.

Scotts Bluff is the logical place to tell the more detailed story of the covered wagon migrations. No two areas in the National Park System are more closely linked geographically and thematically than Scotts Bluff and Fort Laramie. There might be needless duplication of exhibit material if we played up the covered wagon migrations at Fort Laramie co-equally with the military. . .

The buildings that we have now, and which are being restored in the current program, represent the fort which the Army abandoned in 1890. . . For all practical purposes we have already admitted the physical impossibility of "turning back the clock." Earlier architectural data are missing. Restorations of this random type would be largely conjectural, not in keeping with long-established policy. Further, restoration of Old Bedlam to an earlier date would result in impingement on the site of later officers quarters. Restoration of the Sutler's Store to pre-1883 would require the obliteration of the wing built in 1883, which has

important values in its own right. . .

Is it wise to introduce the thought that there is a possibility that we will restore Fort William or Fort John? It is doubtful if a truly authentic restoration could be made (even if we knew the site of Fort William), considering the scarcity of data on this structure. On the other hand, if Fort John were fully restored, an existing authentic structure of 1870 would be obliterated. Further, we would have the most serious kind of distortion, with an 1841-1849 trading post at one end of a military parade ground of the 1880s.

. . . It is misleading to assert that the approach road to headquarters will give visitors a view of the fort "such as was seen by the pioneer." It is true that they will be following one of the important early approaches to the Fort. But what visitors will actually see will be the restored or stabilized remains as of the 1880s. This is a discrepancy which will have to be resolved primarily by museum exhibits portraying the physical evolution of the Fort.

These momentous issues would be resolved in the future. Meanwhile superintendent Hieb continued on his productive and imperturbable way, getting "realistic" things done on a rather large scale. Except for the Great Blizzard of 1949, a few nasty dust and hail storms, and lightning hitting the southwest gable of Officers Quarters E (but providentially not igniting the building) in 1955 Hieb was not ill-favored by Mother Nature as was his predecessor Borreson. Also unlike Borreson, he was able to demonstrate his creative talents in the atmosphere of post-War budget expansion. So Hieb and his family moved on to Omaha intact, in 1958, to conquer other worlds. No Superintendent of any area in the National Park system, whether large or small, historic or other wise, could look back with more justifiable pride than David L. Hieb on his record of achievement at Fort Laramie.

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

7. Ray Ringenbach, Superintendent, 1958-1960

Ray Ringenbach was a staunch Southwestern Monuments man by personal preference. He came to Fort Laramie in mid-1958 from Tumacacori Mission because the Fort Laramie job was a promotion to GS-11. He was transferred laterally to Chiricahua National Monument 2-1/2 years later, after much agitation by himself to return to the Southwest, using the leverage that his family's health was endangered by the Wyoming climate.

Despite the comparative brevity of his term (equalled only by that of the ill-starred Thor Borreson), and his geographical misplacement, Ringenbach worked hard and conscientiously at a job that should have been exciting because of the convergence of several momentous events. These were: (1) increases in funding for restoration work, coupled with the Big Switch in technical control to the Western Office, Design and Construction (WODC); (2) important authorized increases in staffing; (3) a surge in Fort Laramie fortunes with the advent of Mrs. Virginia Hill of Denver, who donated funds to initiate the refurnishing of historic structures; (4) a dramatic upturn in visitor interest, climaxed by the Pony Express Centennial celebration; and (5) new Congressional legislation which doubled the size of the area and converted it from a national monument to a national historic site. [101]

A Scottsbluff Star-Herald feature story in July 1958 unfortunately helped to perpetuate a myth that has always plagued Fort administrators, to the effect that the Park Service intended to "completely restore Old Fort Laramie." In point of fact, at no time has any responsible NPS official ever suggested total restoration, i. e., the resurrection of buildings which were levelled or denuded by lumber salvage operations, 1890-1910. Instead the Great Debate within NPS planning circles has always been whether to utilize the surviving historic structures for utilitarian purposes or to reserve them as historic exhibits only, inside and out, and segregate all new development across the river. After the abortive effort by Washington D.C. Mission 66 planners to revive the former concept, the consolidated Master Plan for cross-river development of all modern facilities became the basis for proposed Congressional legislation, introduced in 1958, to enlarge and develop the area. When it reached this stage of Congressional commitment, that meant the cross-river plan was a sacred trust, and from 1958 on therefore (until 1976, as we shall see) all development planning was to hinge on that broad concept. An auxiliary principle was to continue giving primary emphasis to the preservation of existing historic structures, even though this meant the indefinite postponement of the cross-river development.

A new corollary established by the Mission 66 Plan, which prevailed over the Omaha Regional Office opposition, was the restoration of surviving structures, variably, to their respective Periods of Maximum Importance (PMI). This was the one significant exception to the philosophy prevailing until 1958, championed by Mattes and Hieb, that all surviving structures should be restored to the 1888 period, as they were at the effective termination of the military occupation, to present a chronologically unified Fort picture rather than a random and anachronistic "outdoor museum."

The new era of planning and development under the aegis of WODC (though with all plans subject to concurrence of the Superintendent, Regional Director and the Director) was signalled by the arrival, in July 1958, of Robert Gann, Architect, from San Francisco. Bob was a case-hardened bachelor, so he was able to cope with finding quarters in the little village of Fort Laramie, and devote long extra hours to the accelerated restoration program, of which Old Bedlam would be the center-piece, and would become his masterpiece. Since the new Superintendent and the new Architect arrived almost simultaneously, with clearly defined respective roles, Bob and Ray got along for the most part famously. The first thing they agreed upon was that they wanted "the elimination of one-or-two man domination of thought" in restoration matters, referring to the era controlled by Hieb and the Mattes-Roberson advisory team. Review of Gann's plans at all levels would certainly ensure that restoration work from July 1958 onward would reflect the consolidation of many viewpoints (including the continuing input of Mattes and Roberson). However, it must be stated categorically that restoration work undertaken during his assignment bore Gann's personal imprimatur. And it takes nothing away from Hieb's accomplishments, given his unique set of circumstances, to say that Gann's work was fully professional and has also stood the test of time, not to mention the incisive criticism that all experts feel free to direct at the work of their successors or predecessors.

Old Bedlam was Gann's Number 1 concern, but its restoration would not be completed during Ringenbach's tenure. Utilizing the new approved format, Gann first completed "Part I, Historic Structure Report" for Old Bedlam. The historic background and descriptive data was that previously assembled by Hieb, but the assessment of the structure's condition and outline of its proposed treatment was the architect's own. This report elicited considerable technical comment from Sanford Hill, Chief of WODC, about materials and structural problems, but a flap occurred between Omaha and Washington over the matter of the Period of Maximum Importance. In 1881-1882 the original two-story kitchen wing had been removed, and a single-story lime-concrete kitchen lean-to had been built to the rear. The Gann scheme, reflecting the new thinking in Washington, was to restore the building to its 1867 appearance, externally, according to available historic plans. Although this would require drastic treatment, to reconstruct all original structural elements, it would present Old Bedlam at the time of its greatest glory.

In July 1959, despite Washington's new stance on the PMI principle, Regional Historian Mattes made one last effort to invoke the opposite principle of chronological consistency, with all restoration to 1888, and the story of Fort Laramie's architectural evolution from 1849 to that date to be told by museum exhibits. Strong-minded Roy Appleman held the Washington Office in line with his PMI viewpoint. Mattes and Appleman, with Associate Director Dan Beard as referee, met in St. Louis in February 1960 to debate the issue. In the upshot the Director ruled in favor of the Appleman position. Now the Bedlam plan was set, with pre-1881 kitchen wings to abut on neighboring post-1881 lime-concrete officers quarters ruins, creating an anachronistic scene (buildings which never co-existed historically). However, since Bedlam is the only instance where architectural anachronisms occur conspicuously today (1978), the disparity seems not too

jarring, and everyone agrees now that Old Bedlam restored to its prime is far more aesthetic than the 1881 deformity. Chronological consistency would have been more seriously violated if the Sutler's Store had been restored to its pre-1883 period (thus destroying two-thirds of the surviving building), or if the 1849-1850 Fort John had been reconstructed at the expense of Officers Quarters A of 1870 (as Appleman himself has strongly advocated). For aesthetic and interpretive reasons the Old Bedlam anachronism seems to have been vindicated. [\[102\]](#)

With the final agonizing approval of Part I, work on Part II (the actual architectural plans) began with serious probing of the Old Bedlam structure in the autumn of 1960. Removal of flooring, wall boards, siding, etc., enabled Gann to get to the "guts" of the structural block, to determine the best method of ensuring a restoration that would stand for another 100 years, at the same time achieving fidelity to the original.

While plans for Bedlam were moving slowly, and with much argumentation, there was a frenzy of actual work on other structures. All funded construction work was now under WODC auspices, with formal plans and approvals, but certain projects that somehow escaped the "authorized construction" category did not enjoy full WODC scrutiny.

Officers Quarters A, which had been Hieb's responsibility, was completed by Gann, but only to the extent of touching up, i.e., painting and varnishing. Also, Hieb had not been able to find an outfit to provide customized shutters. This Gann solved by making a deal with the Washington Planing Mill, Washington, Missouri, so that by July 1959 he was able to provide historically correct shutters, not only for Quarters A, but also for Quarters E and F. Meanwhile, Hieb's completion report on A, written in Omaha, was circulated, eliciting the usual favorable comment. (Now as a Regional official who visited the Fort occasionally, Hieb observed the work of others with keen objective interest. Although he had some critical reservations about the new philosophies and techniques shown, he was too much of a gentleman to make a public issue of them, and wise enough to rest on his own laurels.) [\[103\]](#)

Another exception to WODC control was certain activity in the realm of ruins stabilization. Here Ringenbach conceived that he could administratively, and with maintenance money, handle certain projects himself, and here is where he got into trouble. On his own initiative he decided to attempt stabilization of the New Bakery (lime-concrete ruins near the Commissary Storehouse), sending in a proposal to square up the walls that had survived the 1925 fire. When he heard of no objection to his plan "within ten days" he proceeded with the work. Regional Director Baker admonished him that his ten day rule for review and approval was somewhat arbitrary and should not be invoked again, since historic preservation steps must be approved at all levels, regardless of delays.

Another Ringenbach ploy which annoyed Gann, and required whistle-blowing by the Regional Director, was his private program for "cleaning up the ruins." Specifically, Ringenbach's idea was to remove detritus (i.e., fallen walls and lintels) so that visitors could stroll freely about the ruins without turning an ankle or getting ambushed by a rattler. He used the fallen and crumbling masonry so removed as rip-rapping along the Laramie River. He was pretty far along with this unauthorized program before Gann alerted Roberson and Mattes, the latter finally convincing Baker that it was a mistake to regard "fallen ruins" as debris to be disposed of, rather than a valid part of the sacred remains. Baker got Ringenbach on the phone and

instructed him "to cease and desist," but Ray never conceded that a mistake had been made. His clean-up operation applied principally to the Hospital, the Non-Com Quarters, and the Sawmill. Too late to remedy an error of judgment, Ringenbach learned that no decision about the disposition of historic evidence should ever be made unilaterally by anyone, even a Superintendent! [\[104\]](#)

After this unpleasantness (the only serious flaw in Ringenbach's otherwise fine record) Gann assumed responsibility for ruins stabilization. During this period his principal accomplishment in that category was the full-scale stabilization of the Sawmill ruins, as a trial-and-error preliminary to tackling the Hospital. (This project was undertaken in 1960 at a cost of \$27,600, which indicates a new factor in the restoration equation inflation for this was far more than Hieb had spent on any one of his several major projects.) The results were excellent in terms of stabilization, but the use of concrete bonding beams to solve the erosion of walls topside turned out to be an error, since the smooth horizontal lines of the visible bond beams are incompatible with the "natural" appearance of bona fide ruins. In lieu thereof other methods have been employed since, such as "selective grouting" or concealed tie rods. [\[105\]](#)

Another complaint about Ringenbach's aggressiveness, albeit a minor one, in the matter of historic buildings related to the Commissary Storehouse, which Hieb had restored as completely as research would allow. Ray decided that the Cavalry Barracks could continue to serve as his quarters, but that he should move his administrative function to the more commodious Commissary, which already housed the museum. Accordingly he arranged to move into that central portion of the building which once housed the Quartermaster's offices, making a few alterations to walls, partitions, floors, and ceilings in the process, as he deemed necessary to provide office space, electricity and heating. In 1959 Mattes complained about his "tampering" with the restored Commissary, not objecting to the idea of conversion to offices, but again to the idea of making unilateral decisions with respect to the integrity of a historic structure. But in this case as in the case of the ruins "clean-up", by the time the complaint was registered and "taken under advisement" by the Regional Director, Ringenbach was on his way to Chiricahua. [\[106\]](#)

Plans for restoring the Old Guardhouse (the masonry structure of 1866 near the river) to its pristine condition, before being converted to the purposes of a Magazine in 1876, were prepared by Gann in accordance with the New Dispensation to be guided by the time of maximum importance, which would require the undoing of some details of the Hieb restoration. However, work on the Old Guardhouse would come later. The one important restoration completed by Gann during the Ringenbach interlude was that of the New Guardhouse, built in 1876. This was a ruin, stripped of its lumber like other late-period lime-concrete structures, but it is distinctive because of its location. It is isolated at a corner of the parade ground otherwise made barren by the disappearance of adjoining barracks. It is also distinguished by the fact that it sits square with the cardinal compass directions, and therefore at a 45-degree angle with the parade ground, the only Fort structure so oriented.

Regional Historian Mattes in Omaha, in his continuing capacity as coordinator for Fort Laramie programming, first conceived the idea of reconstructing a roof over the New Guardhouse ruins in the spring of 1958. The idea did not particularly appeal to Hieb or Ringenbach, but Gann embraced it with enthusiasm and it quickly gained acceptance by landscape architects and interpreters. Although roofing is, of course, not an unheard of way to preserve a fragile ruin, there was no thought here at the time of roofing all such ruins at Fort Laramie, only the New Guardhouse. This would be an exception to the rule, justified for the purpose

of restoring some visual balance to that corner of the parade ground, and also to aid interpreters as a place to pause on their parade ground tours, or as a simple shelter for visitors. What made the idea feasible from the standpoint of authenticity was the existence of a Signal Corps photograph of 1889 obtained from the National Archives which gave a clear view of the parade ground elevation of the intact structure. It enabled the architect to come up with a reasonable facsimile of the original roof, at least as to external appearance. The interior detail, having to be conjectural anyhow, would permit maximum structural stability. [107]

Plans for the roof reconstruction "Stabilization and Partial Restoration of the New Guard House" were approved, and construction was authorized in 1960. In a joint Gann-Ringenbach project to probe the foundations of the late-period Army structure, workmen encountered clear evidence of the fact that the New Guardhouse had been superimposed on the masonry foundation ruins of an earlier frame structure. The existence of small cells in this hidden "ghost" structure, coupled with the evidence of early military ground plans (1851 and 1854), confirmed that this was the 1850 Guardhouse, the Original or First Guardhouse, as distinct from the 1866 and 1876 versions. (A gruesome find it was, to think of how human beings had once been shackled and confined there!) The Regional Office readily endorsed the idea of preserving the First Guardhouse foundation ruins as an in situ exhibit adjoining the exterior foundation wall of the New Guardhouse, and it was so arranged, with appropriate exhibit panels. Meanwhile, after pouring of new footings and buttressing of the foundations, the New Guardhouse walls were stabilized, with cement tie beams and restored window grilles. The framing, shingling, and louvered ventilators of the reconstructed hipped roof offered no technical difficulties, nor did the reconstruction of the open front porch. With painting of wood porch and trim, and grading around the structure, the project was completed before Ringenbach's departure. [108]

A decision was made not to reproduce original interior walls or other partitions. The open space provides shelter for exhibits and display of Army vehicles or other large pieces. The original 1850 guardhouse outline may be seen inside as well as outside the structure through a diagonal void in the New Guardhouse floor. The porch has become a principal focal point for interpretive talks and demonstrations.

Not all 1958-1960 development was limited to historic structures. In July 1959 a delegation from WODC including Engineer Al Heubner and Landscape Architect Sam Serrano visited the Fort to get a bird's-eye view of long range planning requirements and, since there would be no actual development across the river for some years, to advise on current needs. Before they arrived Ringenbach had proceeded with installation of a new water distribution system around the parade ground, and had greatly enlarged the "temporary" parking area next to the Cavalry Barracks. He had also beefed up his fire-fighting capability with a new fire truck and tanker unit. Since there was no optimism about an early move across the river, the WODC delegation staked out a location for a new prefabricated metal Shop-Firehouse building in the "temporary" utility cluster north of the Cavalry Barracks. This additional "temporary" structure, completed in 1960 for \$14,200, is now (1978) celebrating its 18th year. [109]

Two aspects of planning were stepped up in late 1959 and 1960. First was some detailed analysis of road alignment, parking facility, and visitor center - utility - residential location requirements across the river. Second was a concern about landscaping the parade ground area, that is, the delineation of utility roads, public walks and pathways, possible decorative fencing, and vegetative cover plan, all in accord with historic evidence. In October 1959 Sam Serrano and Merrill Mattes met at the Fort for an intensive two-

week survey of the total landscaping problem, which resulted in a series of "PCPs" or Project Construction Proposals in accordance with a new format devised by Washington and WODC. It would be profitless to go into details, because of planning revisions and re-revisions since that time, but a few key proposals made then for the first time, may be noted:

- (1) The future approach road should permit views of the Fort, requiring some vista clearing of river trees.
- (2) The future approach road to the Visitor Center will parallel some surviving Oregon Trail remains, which should be preserved and interpreted en route.
- (3) The future parking area should be well screened behind plantings or an earth berm.
- (4) The future Visitor Center - headquarters should be designed inconspicuously to one side of the parade ground axis, near the mouth of Deer Creek; the pedestrian bridge should come in near the Fort John site; also, it should ramp down and up to keep it as inconspicuous as possible.
- (5) Electric carts could be used to transport the handicapped from the Visitor Center to the historic ground; there should be a separate road and auto bridge across the river to the south, for official vehicles only.
- (6) The future utility area should be "out of sight."
- (7) The residential area, if necessary, should be likewise concealed or camouflaged, but it would be better if there were no residential area, with employees living in town, and a 24-hour guard system employed.
- (8) Since it had been decreed that the Period of Maximum Importance should be the criterion throughout, there was no point in restoring parade ground trees of the late Army period. The same would apply to board walks, fencing, vines, and other refinements of the late 1880s. If walkways proved necessary, earth-tone bituminous mat would serve. The only vegetation in the historic area should be native grass which, despite the barrenness of the Fort at PMI, would prevent the dust from becoming too realistic for modern visitors! [\[110\]](#)

About this time a proposal was made by Bradley Patterson of the White House staff to the Director that Fort Laramie be thrown open to public camping because it was such a famous campground in historic times. The proposal was politely rejected, as were frequently recurring proposals that formal picnic facilities be provided. It would be agreeable, however, to allow "informal" minimal-facility picnics or sack lunches in the cottonwood grove between the Commissary Storehouse and the Cavalry Barracks. [\[111\]](#)

The years 1959-1960 are noteworthy because of some real breakthroughs in area staffing, research, curatorial work, refurbishing, legislation, and public relations. Although Ringenbach did not initiate any of these moves, he was the Superintendent of record when it all happened. The initiative had been taken, in

each case, by the Regional Office and Superintendent Hieb.

In terms of staffing, Fort Laramie got a great boost when in 1960 Jack McDermott became the permanent Historian, Rex Wilson became the first permanent Curator of collections, and Sally Johnson became the Furnishings Curator. This gifted trio, all of whom later went on to fulfill higher ambitions, together with Bob Gann as Project Architect, were instrumental in raising Fort Laramie to new heights of attainment and public recognition.

McDermott, University of Wisconsin product, who had spent several years as a seasonal at both Custer Battlefield and Fort Laramie, had demonstrated superior talent in both research and interpretive areas, and was hand-picked by the Regional Office for that reason. He reorganized the massive research files at the Fort to make them more useful, worked closely with Gann in unearthing fresh data required for the Historic Structure Reports, initiated several fruitful research projects on his own initiative, expanded the activities of the Fort Laramie Historical Association, arranged for its legal incorporation and, among other things, contributed a regular column, "Fort Laramie Foot Notes," in the Torrington Telegram. Although he was destined for greater things he would be around long enough to put Fort Laramie on a fully professional footing, historically.

Regional Museum Curator Newell F. Joyner recognized that the Fort Laramie artifact collection had grown to alarming proportions. He calculated something like 80,000 pieces which would take years to process or reprocess by approved up-to-date methods of accessioning and cataloguing, not to mention curatorial or preservation work on these items. He also pointed out that storage facilities were woefully inadequate. The storage problem was solved in the usual temporary fashion by obtaining new metal cases to put in the old Cavalry Barracks facility, along with work tables and a sink. The Curatorial problem was solved in the person of Rex Wilson, fresh from Fort Union National Monument in New Mexico, where he had a fine indoctrination in historical archeology. He not only plunged with zest into housekeeping chores but also proceeded to do a creative job of classification of the assorted artifacts, such as bottles, buttons, bullets, coins, and whatnot. As an example of his contribution, he came up with nearly 1,000 bottle specimens of which he identified about 600 different types. He corresponded widely to establish their identities and origins, and later published several papers on aspects of the Fort Laramie collection. He also initiated the painstaking process of establishing monetary values for selected items. [\[112\]](#)

Although an archeologist by training, Rex did no archeology per se at the Fort. Two of the three archeology projects that were undertaken during Ringenbach's day were supervised by Ringenbach himself, who as a Southwestern Monument employee had been exposed to archeological procedures. These were, first, the salvage of random artifacts in connection with the 1958 water pipeline. Surprisingly enough, there were no artifacts of unusual interest in this lengthy dig around the perimeter of the parade ground, nor were there any signs of early structures. His second archeological job was the discovery and careful unearthing and stabilization of the 1850 guardhouse foundations in 1959, actually the most gratifying archeological discovery at the Fort up to that date. [\[113\]](#) In 1958, anticipating the restoration of Old Bedlam, the Regional Office had induced the Smithsonian Institution office in Lincoln, Nebraska to take on the little chore of excavating the sites of the two original kitchen wings, which were well defined by rocky depressions. Charles M. McNutt of that office conducted the dig, but reported nothing sensational. [\[114\]](#)

In 1958 the Region and the Superintendent were painfully aware of the lack of furnishings in the restored buildings, and the need to restrain the curious public from entering the nicely finished but empty buildings. In an effort to remedy this, the Region sanctioned a scheme of Ringenbach's to undertake an experimental refurnishing project for Officers Quarters F. In this he had the help of the local Federation of Womens Clubs, to scare up old antiques, furniture, and other items, and he had the technical support of Joyner and Historian Russ Apple, on brief assignment from Mount Rushmore. (The large Fort collection included very few authentic or useable items for this purpose.) These efforts paid off in the form of a refurnished Officers Quarters, which mollified the public to a degree, but which was gravely deficient in authenticity. This was not the way to solve the basic problem, but how could it be solved when the NPS programmers and the Bureau of the Budget in Washington would not hear of Government funding for historic furniture? Wasn't it enough to restore the buildings? [\[115\]](#)

The furnishings dilemma was solved in a most unexpected way. In August 1959 the Regional Director, Howard Baker, received a phone call from a Denver attorney representing Mrs. Virginia Hill of that city, who said she wanted to memorialize her late husband who had evidently made his fortune in Wyoming oil and gas, by donating \$50,000 to the National Park Service for some worthy park project in Wyoming. Accordingly, the attorney suggested, Baker should submit a few alternative proposals for his and her consideration. Baker called a staff meeting for ideas. Several staff members suggested the purchase of real estate inholdings in Grand Teton National Park. Merrill Mattes pointed out that this was a heaven-sent opportunity to provide the badly needed historical furnishings for the restored Fort Laramie buildings. Everybody who had a scheme went back to their offices to write up a proposal. Mattes came up with a report entitled, "A Proposal for the Restoration of Interior Furniture and Furnishings in Historic Structures at Fort Laramie" which itemized the anticipated cost for furnishing ten buildings, totalling \$100,000. In a conference with Baker he suggested that if Mrs. Hill would donate \$50,000 for furnishings acquisitions perhaps the Government could match that with a like amount for the cost of Curatorial salary and travel over a five year period. However, he further suggested that perhaps Mrs. Hill would like to entertain the idea of donating \$100,000 to Fort Laramie, instead of just half that amount, so that she could get all the credit, and that would avoid the awkward delay of waiting for the Government budget to catch up. Baker agreed to this approach, and took off for Denver. Although he did dutifully present other suggestions, including Jackson Hole land, it was the Fort Laramie proposition that immediately intrigued Mrs. Hill, and she went for the \$100,000 without batting an eyelash, as Mattes predicted she would. [\[116\]](#)

With the first installment of Mrs. Hill's money secured, Mattes then took up the task of locating a highly qualified Furnishings Curator. Although many others were screened, Curator Sally Johnson of the Nebraska State Historical Society, a Nebraska University graduate, turned out to be a "natural," being readily available for new adventures, and single so that extensive travel away from home posed no problem. Accordingly, she was hired and went to work in January, 1960 under the direction of the Regional Historian but with frequent assignments to Fort Laramie. The procedure which she and Mattes evolved, after establishing unit (historic building) priorities, was to research the subject thoroughly, prepare a furnishings report for approval, and then go out around the countryside, antique shops, or collections wherever they might be, round up what was needed and finally, after all acquired items were accessioned, install them in the buildings. [\[117\]](#)

The first year, 1960, was of course devoted almost entirely to research on the history of the Fort and its inhabitants in general, and those of Officers Quarters F in particular, which was selected as the first project

to be completed. This decision was made on the basis of the fact that Merrill Mattes had struck up an acquaintance with a onetime boy occupant of that building living in Washington, D.C., retired General Reynolds Burt, and Mattes wrote a book about the adventures of his father and mother, Andrew S. and Elizabeth Burt on the Indian frontier (Indians, Infants and Infantry, Old West Publishing Company, Denver, 1960). In addition to having actual items of furnishings from the period of his family's occupancy of the buildings in 1887-1888, General Burt was able to supply many items from memory. The final clincher for the selection of Officers Quarters F was that, being the restored building of latest vintage, the items should be the easiest to come by, and therefore could be completed fairly early to demonstrate to the public that the Fort Laramie program was entering a whole new exciting dimension. It was in this manner that Officers Quarters F, which for a time had been referred to as the Hunton House, has come to be known as the Burt House for interpretive purposes. [118]

Giving priority to the Burt House to ensure an early date for the completion of "the pilot project" would also impress Mrs. Hill who was passing out her money to the National Park Service in installments, and it was important to keep her interest at high pitch! In an early article for publication in the Dude Rancher, Sally reported learning from Mrs. Hill that her decision to support Fort Laramie furnishings had been influenced by stories told her as a young girl by her grandmother, Mrs. Seymour Ellis, who had crossed the Plains in a covered wagon, in 1859 or 1860, and had stopped then at Fort Laramie. [119]

April 1860 was the time of the beginning of the famous Pony Express mail service between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California, launched by the partners, Russell, Majors and Waddell. The 75th anniversary of this thrilling historical phenomenon had been observed in a modest way by the Oregon Trail Memorial Association at the Old Fort in 1935. It was inevitable that there would be some kind of recognition in 1960, but it probably would not have taken the colorful form of a Transcontinental Re-enactment had it not been for the organizing initiative and energy of Colonel Waddell F. Smith of San Rafael, California, a descendant of one of the partners. In 1958 he toured the western states involved to generate interest, and in Salt Lake City that year the National Pony Express Centennial Association was born, with the full support of Utah's Governor George Clyde, and the Director of the Wyoming Historical Department, Lola Homsher. In 1959 there was a series of meetings at towns along the old route to help get the idea of a Re-Enactment rolling, including ones in North Platte and Gothenberg attended by Mattes and Ringenbach. Meanwhile Mattes had become a Director-at-large of the Association, researched the Pony Express extensively, and had articles on the subject published in the Omaha World-Herald Sunday Magazine and Nebraska History, "The Pony Express from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie." He also assisted with the organization of local Sheriff's patrols and other equestrian groups to coordinate the Re-enactment. [120]

The 1960 Re-enactment itself, with relays cross-country all the way from both Sacramento and St. Joseph, took over three weeks, given modern conditions, compared to the record ten days set originally. Two relay riders were scheduled to pass each other in South Pass on July 31. Since the riders were carefully scheduled, the date set for the celebration at Fort Laramie was July 25, when the westbound Pony rider would arrive there, and over 2,500 visitors were on hand. The principal speakers were Waddell Smith and Chief U. S. Postal Inspector David Stephens. Both Director Wirth and Regional Director Baker were on hand, as well as Historians Apple and Mattes, and ex-Superintendent Hieb. Because the Sutler's Store was the historic post-office for the Fort (though not a Pony Express relay station) it was the focal point for the celebration, and the sale of Fort Laramie covers. The Pony rider splashed across the Laramie River at 2:47 PM, and took off his

mochila (saddle bag) and handed it to his relay rider who then took off westward in a cloud of dust. This poignant bit of pageantry was witnessed by a dense throng. It was a historic moment. [\[121\]](#)

Other celebrations of lesser note during this period included a "Show Me Day" on July 16, 1958, the occasion of the National Monument's 20th anniversary; the arrival of the Oregon Centennial Wagon Train, en route from that state to Missouri in May, 1959; and on July 19, 1959 the dedication of completed Officers Quarters A (minus furnishings) with flag-raising ceremonies by the First Governor's Guard and a group answering to the name of Wyoming 5th Volunteer Cavalry. These events and publicity relating to the restoration projects contributed to the continued swelling of Fort Laramie attendance, to a new high of 45,000 in 1960.

Without question, the most important Fort Laramie event while Ringenbach was Superintendent, a brief period marked by many important developments, was the enactment of major Congressional legislation, expanding boundaries and giving the area a new identity.

The background of the new legislation was long recognition by area and regional personnel that the Fort Laramie park boundaries should be expanded to encompass historic ground along the Laramie River downstream (the Quartermaster area, telegraph station, early emigrant crossings, and the historic bridge site); also, to take in land on the opposite side of the Laramie River to protect old trail approaches and provide for a future headquarters area. While in Omaha in 1959 ex-Superintendent Hieb did most of the work on the required Boundary Status Report which became the basis for the legislation. He also contacted Senator-elect Gale McGee and key Torrington citizens to ensure Wyoming support for the expansion.

On January 4, 1960, Roger Ernst, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, sent nearly identical letters to Wayne N. Aspinall, Chairman, Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, and James E. Murray of the corresponding Senate Committee, commenting on H. R. 8567 "to revise the boundaries and change the name of Fort Laramie National Monument." The substance of the bill was to authorize expansion of the original 214 acres by an additional 372 acres of private land, plus 11 acres of public domain, minus 33 acres deleted for exchange purposes, for a net increase of about 350 acres. The Fort Laramie National Historic Site would now have a total of about 563 acres.

Mr. Ernst explained that this legislation was necessary because of the Congressional Act of September 4, 1950 (64 Stat., 849) which, at the same time establishing an enlarged Grand Teton National Park, prohibited the extension of any national parks or the extension or addition of any national monuments in Wyoming except by the authorization of Congress. (This proviso, in effect, amended the Antiquities Act of 1906, making it impossible to expand the National Park system in Wyoming by incorporating Federal lands by means of the traditional Presidential Proclamation route.)

Mr. Ernst further explained that the additional lands were needed to better protect and interpret the historic features, to facilitate historical and archeological research, and to provide space for an improved entrance road and headquarters development. A small triangular tract was needed straddling the North Platte River to protect the old iron bridge, while another small tract in the northwest corner brought the boundaries up to the county road. The excluded lands (to the south) were not historic in nature and were screened from the area by bottomland timber. Several owners would be involved. The estimated cost of land acquisition was

\$75,000. [[122](#)]

The Fort Laramie expansion and re-christening bill passed both houses of Congress without undue incident, and was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on April 29, 1960 (PL 86-444; 74 Sts. 83). The national monument was now transformed into a National Historic Site.

The name change in itself was no earth-shaking development but, along with the land expansion, it symbolized the birth of a new era of development. But as it turned out, that new era of the Sixties and Seventies would be primarily concerned, not with modern construction on the extended lands, but with the second phase of the Great Era of Fort Laramie Restoration.

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

8. Charles C. Sharp, Superintendent, 1961-1973

Charles Sharp, like Ringenbach, was a career Southwesterner who transferred from Chaco Canyon, but unlike Ringenbach he was not "hooked" on the Southwest so did not agitate to return there, but instead became a Wyoming fixture. In fact he thought so much of Wyoming that he decided to retire right there, in nearby Torrington.

Sharp was Superintendent of Fort Laramie longer than any other man, from his NOD March 1, 1961 to his retirement effective March 30 1973, a full 12 years. Dave Hieb had served eleven years. The 25 year period, 1947-1972, which they jointly spanned (including Ringenbach's brief interlude) could be called the Great Restoration Period, since most significant restoration work on Fort buildings, inside and out, occurred during their combined Superintendencies. Actually, the great bulk of such restoration occurred during a 20-year span, 1950-1970, and it is interesting coincidence that this lengthy program began with the structural stabilization of the Old Bakery building, and ended with the interior restoration of that same building, including a working bread oven which is a focal point of the Fort's famous "Living History" program. This seems symbolic of the transition from the Hieb period of necessary concentration on basic hard core stabilization and restoration of endangered old buildings, with few frills for the benefit of visitors, and the more recent period of full-blooming historic house museums with period furniture, furnishings, and costumed attendants, swarming with visitors, and emphasis on extraordinary measures to protect the buildings for posterity.

In contrast to Hieb's largely solo performance in master-minding his restorations with maintenance or "rehabilitation" money (Old Bakery, Sutler's Store, Cavalry Barracks Verandas, Commissary Storehouse, Old Guardhouse, and Officers Quarters A, E, and F), restoration and stabilization performed during Ringenbach's and Sharp's time (mainly Old Bedlam, the New Guardhouse, the Old Army Bridge, the Bakery Oven, and various ruins) were handled as construction projects under WODC auspices, and with an official architect. After Sharp's departure some restoration work remained to be done, mainly the Cavalry Barracks interior, and more eternal fiddling with lime-concrete ruins, but under Sharp the restoration reached its climax.

The three most notable happenings of his administration were the seemingly miraculous "resurrection" of Old Bedlam, the crown jewel of the building complex, the active campaign to provide authentic period

furnishings for it and most other restored buildings, and the acquisition of new lands authorized by the Fort Laramie Act of 1960. All three occurred during the first half of his 12-year administration, among the most hectic six years in the park history. [\[123\]](#)

Sharp's role in actual restoration was not merely a nominal one. He personally engineered or assisted on several of the preliminary studies, and of course he was the local coordinator—the pivot man, the expediter for all restoration activity, including research, planning, manpower, materials, contracts, progress review, and public relations, including the climactic dedications. While he could lay no claim to Hieb's unusual talent as an architectural technician, he had all the other attributes of a model manager of a major historic site—energy, enthusiasm, conscientious concern for detail, a disdain for the 40-hour week, and a sense of humor. The latter faculty, in particular, sustained him and others during a time of intensive activity and the multiple pressures which accompanied the explosive growth of the National Historic Site from figurative adolescence to adulthood. When Charlie said in one of his monthly reports that he was "busy as a cat in a dog pound," he said it all.

Of course restoration work, both structural and decorative, was by no means the whole story. This climactic program, and its attendant publicity, brought forth unprecedented numbers of visitors, the annual box-score jumping from 50,000 in 1961 to 76,000 in 1964 when Bedlam was dedicated, to over 150,000 in 1972. This tripling of visitors during the 12-year period created great strain and tension on management because of the usual lag in funds for manpower and equipment needed to cope with the acceleration. Charlie proved to be resourceful in devising ways and means of stretching his slender resources and cajoling his superiors for more operating funds during his time of tribulation.

While restoration and coping with visitor multiplication were Charlie's dominant concerns, there were others. While expanding maintenance and protection needs also required attention, the biggest struggle in the first half of his regime was the acquisition of lands authorized by the 1960 bill, made difficult by balky sellers and stop-and-go financing. Charlie bore the brunt of this painful process and had several scars to prove it. Other honorable scars resulted from jousting with planners who as a breed are forever wanting to change things after the Master Plan is theoretically settled. After a bizarre episode in the perpetual planning extravaganza—the so-called Western Fort Study Team—Charlie said that he was compelled to take "tranquilizers by day and Bourbon after 5 PM" in an effort to keep a tenuous grip on his sanity.

Sharp and family occupied the usual quarters in the Cavalry Barracks. Early on, because of the prospect of indefinite delays in building a new headquarters-residential complex across the river, Charlie predicted that he would occupy the Barracks "longer than the Cavalry," but this prediction was not borne out by events. In fact, in June 1967 the Sharps vacated these ancient quarters and moved into their own home in Torrington, mainly because these quarters had become untenable and unsafe, from defective wiring which threatened the entire structure, as well as insects, rodents, bats, and other creatures which persisted there despite eradication, fumigation, and fulmination. Prior to that, in 1964, he had moved all office activities into the Commissary Storehouse, where museum exhibits, collections and Historian's office had been previously located under Ringenbach. (This "temporary" arrangement is still there, A.D. 1978).

In 1962 Superintendent Sharp was reallocated to GS-12, so that the Fort Laramie grade was finally brought into line somewhat commensurate with the widely acknowledged importance of the area. He officiated at

three epochal dedication ceremonies, in 1961, 1962, and 1964. He fostered some major research efforts by his Historians, both permanent and seasonal, and most of these men so encouraged have since achieved notable success elsewhere. During this time Fort Laramie truly matured, achieving national recognition to the extent that other preservation organizations and agencies came to him for advice and encouragement, and University professors brought their students for study and inspiration. In 1972 Sharp was appointed by the Governor of Wyoming to the State Bicentennial Commission. When he retired he was honored, not only locally, but by Colorado State University at a banquet at Fort Collins. Of Sharp it can be said that he retired gracefully and with honor.

The subject of primary importance at Fort Laramie is historic preservation. First things come first and, in the context of the Sharp administration, the project for the definitive restoration of Old Bedlam is of premier importance.

The format evolved by the Washington Office to record research, planning, design, and construction of historic buildings is the Historic Structure Report, in three parts. Part I contains all available historical data on structural history and events pertaining to questions of restoration; another section on archeological data, if any; and most important, architectural analysis of conditions and broad recommendations for treatment. Part II, following approval of Part I, consists of detailed architectural drawings. Part III is, in effect, the project completion report, including the recording of any variations from approved plan required by unforeseen conditions, and a photographic record of work progress.

Part I for Bedlam, written by Dave Hieb in 1957, was incorporated bodily into the original 1959 report and the 1960 revision. He summarized the architectural evolution of the building from the original 1849 "two-story block of officers quarters with 16 rooms," through its changing patterns of partitions, stairways, and verandas to its full glory of the 1870s, reduction to a double-set of quarters in 1881, and its declining state after 1890 as school-house, cow shed and pig-sty. It served as Commanding Officer's post headquarters from the beginning until 1867, being the focus of war and peace conferences during that epic time, when it was referred to by the Indians as "The Big House." Several excellent old plans and photographs richly illuminate the historic sequence. Hieb considered this to be "the oldest and most historic structure in the High Plains West."

Gann's section of the report deals successively with condition of foundations; fireplaces and chimney stacks; studding, posts and bracing; floor framing and cover; roof structure; exterior siding, trim, fascia, posts and rails; door and window sash and shutters; stairways; interior trim; painting; hardware and sheet metal work. This is followed by a set of recommendations reflected in the construction log below. Because of intensive restoration efforts under Lombard and Hieb, and some further deterioration, Gann found the HABS drawings of 1937-1939 "very valuable" to reveal pre-park conditions. In general he found the structural system a fascinating example of pre-Civil War frontier architecture, a tribute to 1849 designer and builder Lieutenant Daniel P. Woodbury. Although the interior of the building was a shambles the framework was surprisingly sound despite 110 years of use and abuse, sound enough at least to permit retention of most essential elements. One factor which contributed to the stability of the marvellous old ruin was the brick and adobe in-fill of the outer walls, "either for insulation or bullet-proofing." The disappearance of the original kitchen wings and rear veranda and stairway system was a plus factor, since reconstruction based on the evidence of historic plans and archeology involved fewer headaches than restoration, i.e., the delicate melding of old and new. (Valuable archeological data as to the rear ground plan was provided by the

Smithsonian project of 1959.)

Part II is a set of 16 beautiful intricate drawings by Gann, completed in 1961 after construction was underway because of hidden factors that were revealed as work progressed. Part III (Completion Report) with rather full photographic coverage, was written by Sharp, and all record photos in this 1966 report were supplied by him. However, for the purpose of a simplified narrative the best summary of actual work progress is that gleaned from the Superintendent's narrative reports:

December, 1960 - Flooring removed to facilitate analysis of understructure, salvaging sound pieces for reuse. Work crew off for the winter.

March, 1961 - Visit to project by Lada Kucera, WODC, to evaluate weight-load factors.

April, 1961 - Kucera, concluding restoration of existing remains to be hopeless, recommends dismantling of original structure and reconstruction from scratch. Mattes and Baker advise WODC; "We do not concur. A structure built during the California Gold Rush has survived 100 years of use and weathering. While decrepit, it is not hopeless. We have a deep moral obligation to preserve it as nearly as possible in its original form and substance." Sharp echoes complaint about confusion and conflict over Bedlam plans, which has "put Gann in a dither." Crew under Earl D. Warthen reactivated. Building braced with timbers to prevent interim collapse, site fenced and declared a hard hat area.

May, 1961 - Crew of 9 obliterate sagging 1881 lime-concrete kitchen lean-to. Exposed structural block timbers treated with Penta and interim sheathing applied. Massive crumbling original brick chimneys taken down, reuseable brick salvaged for use on reconstructing outer-layer. Careful recording of fireplaces and flues.

June, 1961 - Stabilization of original building block 70% completed, with structural steel reinforcements to meet the demands of public assemblage loadings. All defective studs, joists, plates and diagonal bracing replaced, using native pine, rough sawed, full dimension. Eight concrete piers under north and south hall floors. Salvaged beams used as replacement floor joists. Excavations for chimney footings and new kitchen wing foundations.

September, 1961 - The "restoration vs. total reconstruction" issue finally resolved by WASO decision in favor of the former. Part II, HSR by Gann first draft completed. Total programmed amount \$55,000, plus \$27,000 already spent. \$20,000 allowed for Fiscal Year 1962. Completion hoped for by December 1962.

October, 1961 - Complete stone foundations for wings, continue re-building of chimney stacks. Salamanders and mortar additives used for low-temperature protection of masonry.

November, 1961 - "Continuation of project merely a matter of money and fostering the survival of an overworked architect." Regional Director Baker concurs in WODC recommendation to study requirements for an atmospheric control system, which never

materialized because engineering requirements would have destroyed what was left of the original structure (also, cost was prohibitive).

January, 1962 - Contract let to construct new chimneys.

February, 1962 - Gann on bills of materials. Work on new chimneys. Framing of chimneys at attic and roof levels.

March, 1962 - Reconstruction of chimneys with new brick core and reinforced concrete footings. Delays in obtaining structural lumber because bidders are reluctant account special dimensions and materials.

April, 1962 - Work stalled. Mattes recommends that selected portions of interior and exterior walls be displayed behind glass panels to provide visual evidence of original construction detail.

May, 1962 - Unseasoned lumber delivered, dipped in penta, air-dried and re-dipped to retard checking and twisting. Work crew back on payroll.

June, 1962 - Ground floor framing of wings. Last two chimneys up through first floor. Main block doors and window framing repaired and reinstalled. Crew beefed up to 14. Mattes report to Regional Director: "Complexities of the restoration are everywhere apparent, with the policy of saving original materials, yet ensuring stability. Despite maximum progress this year, cannot be completed till the spring of 1963."

July, 1962 - Kitchen wings framed, wing chimneys through roof line, new main block siding treated and in place. Original siding pieces numbered, removed, treated, re-set.

August, 1962 - Kitchen wings and reconstructed back veranda framing completed, fireplaces completed. Cedar shingles in lieu of original pine.

September, 1962 - Wings complete except for siding. Slow delivery on special dimension pine flooring and siding.

November, 1962 - Wings and porches completed. White priming coat overall.

December, 1962 - Install flooring of ponderosa pine from Laramie Peak, same thickness and random width as original. Remove scaffolding. Close project down for the winter, lack of materials.

January, 1963 - Search for vintage glass and hardware.

February, 1963 - Warthen on home-made custom doors.

April, 1963 - Crew back on job. Plastering. Original fireplace mantels re-installed and others reconstructed in like pattern. Steel bracing of outside stairways. Recovery from Curtiss Root of original rails and spindles, interior stairway, taken to town by John Hunton in the 1920s and revealed in chance conversation overheard by Sharp in Jim Nolan's Trail Hotel Bar.

May, 1963 - Plastering near completion.

June, 1963 - Work on interior and exterior stairways. Vintage glass from Blenko Company, Milton, West Virginia.

July, 1963 - Back stairs complete except for painting. Most work done on front stairways. Glazing, painting, and lightning protection.

August, 1963 - Cannot complete with existing funds, submit new work order.

September, 1963 - Outside stairway completed, porch floors completed. All exterior work completed except painting.

October, 1963 - Exterior painting. Glazing windows. Fabrication of doors and shutters.

November, 1963 - Complete except for interior details.

December, 1963 - Cold weather forces shut-down.

April, 1964 - Warthen finishes celebrated interior stairs.

May, 1964 - Shutters completed.

June, 1964 - Spray coat on shutters, removal of construction shed and brick piles.

A few notable quotations from Sharp's Completion Report may be added to round out the restoration picture:

Remarkably, enough original 1849-1850 ponderosa pine siding remained under the porches on the Parade Ground side, and a few sections from other locations, to permit complete covering of that side with the original material.

Although shutters, interior and exterior doors, and window sash were in a deplorable condition, only a few had to be substituted in their entirety except in the wings. . .

Except for a closet under the interior stair, all plaster had to be replaced. This was backed with bonderized metal lath and simulated the old surface. . .

. . . We obtained original dimension ponderosa from gyppo outfits on Laramie Peak, same

source as the flooring. They usually delivered at night, with invoices written on a slab of wood, but brought good material. . .

The requirements to save all possible original material, while building in strength and durability greater than the the original, were sometimes conflicting. This resulted in a considerable amount of slow and difficult detailed work. . .

After many years of headaches, battles fierce as those of the Indian Wars, and expenditure of a substantial amount of work and funds, the ugly duckling was at last a white swan. [\[124\]](#)

In late 1962, after most exterior work had been completed and a white priming coat had been applied, Old Bedlam loomed once more imposingly over the parade ground to change the metaphor like a resplendent Queen among ragged subjects. Sharp referred to it as highly photogenic and a rare example of "a trembling relic" converted into "a great attraction." After the building was dedicated in 1964, the only criticism of record was that by a nameless nitpicker from the Omaha office who complained that the building looked "too new." Aside from the fact that it looked new, historically, to begin with and each of the several times it was freshly painted, normal weathering would quickly nullify this small concern, (A more valid concern would be that later maintenance programs would become overly conscientious about keeping Old Bedlam in new mint appearance, instead of letting it lapse into the mellow appearance of middle age.)

A few foot-notes on the unique Old Bedlam project seem appropriate. Counting the time that Dave Hieb spent on his 1957 research until the 1964 dedication, the project took seven years, though actual construction work took four years. The total construction cost, including plans, supervision and overhead, but not including research and furnishings, was in the neighborhood of \$245,000. [\[125\]](#) With pro-rated cost of archival research and the furnishing project added, the total could come to around \$300,000, which would work out on the 1978 market to well over \$1,000,000. According to a remark made by Gann to the writer in 1963, about 80% of the restored structure consists of original materials. This, of course, would have to be exclusive of the reconstructed rear wings and verandas, probably also of the re-built brick chimneys. If these are included, it is the opinion of the writer that the percentage of original materials, by weight or volume, would come to around 50%, which still beats the reconstruction job recommended by Kucera, which would have reduced the percentage of original materials to zero!

A curious addendum to this project revolved around the unusual character of its architect. First of all, Gann deserves enormous credit for being the master mind and he should have a bronze plaque in his memory placed somewhere in Bedlam, since he died in March, 1965 (in San Francisco) and there is ample reason to believe that his hectic program and strenuous exertions on behalf of Fort Laramie, combined with other factors, contributed to his premature death.

A lot of things probably contributed to Sharp's gray hair but one of them was Bob Gann's erratic nature, including emotional storms and frequent disappearances at crucial times. Some of these disappearances were officially engineered by his bosses back in San Francisco, but others were his own idea. At any rate, he seems to have borne out the popular conception that geniuses are not in the ordinary mold, and his erraticisms as well as WODC's vagaries are indicated here to underline one of Sharp's many unusual problems as project coordinator.

Gann had resided in Fort Laramie town and worked at the Historic Site from his arrival in 1958 until early autumn of 1960, when he was dispatched to Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park in North Dakota to supervise the restoration there of the Maltese Cross Cabin. After a creditable job there, despite a collapse which required medical resuscitation, he took off for San Francisco on his own initiative. When Sharp plaintively inquired about his whereabouts, Regional Director Baker wrote a stiff note to the Chief, WODC indicating that he was needed desperately to complete plans for Old Bedlam, for which construction money had been available for three years. Part of the problem was a squabble between the Omaha and San Francisco Officers over who would pay which share of Gann's salary. Evidently that was settled because he was back at the Fort in January, 1961, resigned to his fate. (He seemed to vacillate between his preferences for Fort Laramie as a place of pastoral charm and San Francisco as the colorful metropolis.)

In July 1961 Gann fractured a rib from causes unspecified but stayed on the job until autumn when he again took "Dutch leave" for San Francisco, not returning until January 1962, and it was his absence during the interim, not working on material lists, which caused slow delivery and "green lumber" problems. He was no sooner settled than WODC sent him on a "world tour" first to Sitka, Alaska, and then to City of Refuge, Hawaii, in both cases to design new visitor centers. (This is testimony to both his remarkable design skills and also the apparent shortage of competent design architects at WODC.) He was not back from Hawaii long before he announced to Sharp that he was going back to San Francisco for good, and "would be replaced." Sharp's loud squawk about this led to a meeting of minds at the site in July 1962, to cope with the new crisis. Appleman from Washington, D.C. and Mattes and Roberson from Omaha were adamant that Gann had to stay to finish the project, at least until the end of the calendar year. The Regional Director advised Washington that if Gann was gone they would close down the Bedlam project. Washington leaned on WODC, and Gann buckled under the pressure. He did, however, fly to San Francisco for a month, in August, and returned with a young assistant architect. The pair left for the winter, but Gann was back for a month in the spring of 1963, to advise Warthen on finishing touches, including some architectural detail, such as shelving and lighting, which were primary concerns of the Furnishings Curator.

All of these fits and starts by the project architect add to the colorful saga of Old Bedlam. The man who made up the difference, as far as getting the job done, was Earl D. (Slim) Warthen, a Lingle construction contractor and all-around craftsman, who was project foreman. In practical restoration matters he turned out to be somewhat of a genius himself, though a fully reliable one, Gann did the design work and was present during most of the critical investigation and construction work, but Warthen was the indispensable crew leader and architectural technician who translated Gann's designs into a convincingly authentic restoration. Sharp did most of the worrying and chivvied the Region and WODC about funding problems. That Bedlam was restored so beautifully, surmounting all problems technical, monetary and emotional is a tribute, actually, to all three men. [[126](#)]

A brief summary of other historic preservation projects, 1963-1971, will have to suffice, because this broad view of the park's history does not pretend to be a detailed record of all design and construction work. That is contained in the series of technical reports to be found in the Fort library, including reports by Sharp, McDermott, Murray, Gann and others, with most design work by Bob Gann (in spite of his aberrations) and virtually all supervision by Warthen. The list is roughly in order of project completions:

Hospital Ruins Stabilization, 1963-1964: The lime-concrete Hospital of 1873 was the third such structure of

record at the Fort, and the first lime-concrete building to be erected. Its ruins are conspicuous because of their location on the plateau overlooking the main Fort, plus the fact that a portion of it was two-story, and some of the second-story walls remain. Hieb had done some rehabilitation work, including spraying with silicone, but door and window sections were now failing and dangerous, while a portion of the two-story wall had tumbled down. The work was performed in two stages. In 1959 there had been reconstruction of the small kitchen wing roof, including ceiling joists, rafters, sheathing and shingles. A new frame was substituted for the original interior door, and remains of the chimney were stabilized. The second stage, 1963-1964 was the sizeable job of reinforcing and stabilizing the massive grout walls and lintels of the main structure ruins, which seemed to be defying the laws of gravity. This painstaking work included use of reinforced concrete and buttresses on deep thick extended footings to support leaning walls, insertion of hidden tie beams to prevent further wall movement, support of the two-story section and all lintels with heavy metal columns, fill chimney flues with concrete, coating of foundation below grade with asphalt-based mastic, parget wall-tops with polystyrene, and spray all with silicone solution. Cost \$27,600. [[127](#)]

Old Guardhouse restoration to original condition: Hieb had restored this building to its 1888 appearance, after it had been converted to a Magazine in 1876. The new dictum about PMI (Period of Maximum Importance) required that the clock be turned back to 1866, the time of construction, or shortly thereafter. The basic HSR was prepared by Sharp and McDermott in 1962, and revised in 1963 after detailed commentary by Nan Carson. Most of the work was accomplished June 1964 to July 1965, as described in a Completion Report by Warthen of January, 1967. Work consisted mainly of rebuilding the chimney, rehabilitating the plank jail floor by Hieb, waterproofing below grade, re-shingling, ventilating, freeing windows from Magazine fill, period treatment for cell and guard-room windows, doors, stoops, guard-room partitions, plastering and white-washing. Cost \$5,400. [[128](#)]

Old Army Bridge Restoration, 1965-1969: This remarkable old iron bridge, of bow-string truss design, is 400 feet long with three spans, two of 125 feet and one of 150 feet length. Built by contract in time to accommodate military and civilian traffic of the climactic year 1876, it was in dismal shape when it was finally released to the Park Service by Goshen County Commissioners in 1960, following passage of the boundary expansion act. Until plans for its rehabilitation could be put together and approved, and the cost covered, both approaches were barricaded, portions of the rickety structure had to be braced to ensure against collapse, and upstream rock revetment built to safeguard the piers and ice-breakers. The HSR by Sharp and Gann, with research by McDermott, was submitted in September, 1962. Restoration work was performed in several stages: restoration of the iron superstructure and planking, started in April 1965; the reconstruction of ice-breakers, in December, 1965; and stabilizing of bridge piers in 1968. The ironwork involved special period castings ordered from foundries in Lingle and Gering. Work on the piers (bridge footings) and the prow-shaped ice-breakers (timber cribbing filled with rock) had to be timed to take advantage of mid-winter low current level. This project, requiring both patience and ingenuity, was completed in 1969 with the application of Ferrubron iron oxide paint to the ironwork. Total cost \$36,000. [[129](#)]

Officers Quarters E and F, 1962-1965: Substantially restored earlier by Hieb, there were problems to be corrected as the result of weathering plus the additional impact of heavy foot-traffic after refurnishing. In 1962 the front porch of "F" required a rebuilt platform because of this traffic, and in 1965 the Mansard roof required repair and re-shingling. "E" walls were cracking, a problem of structural deterioration from

inadequate footing, and settling. This was corrected also in 1965, on the basis of recommendations by Lewis Koue and Herb Wendt of WODC, in time for installation of furnishings. [130]

Officers Quarters B, C and D ruins, 1965: These stark ruins of once imposing 1-1/2 story buildings, erected in the early 1880s to the south of Bedlam, are desolate and depressing, but essential to preserve the integrity, or at least the continuity, of Officers Row which, on axis with the Sutler's Store, constitutes the backbone of the Fort building complex. Again, Hieb's valiant efforts had to be amended in time, just as drastically as in the case of the Hospital, because of structural failure and some actual collapse which threatened public safety. In 1962 the entire perimeter of the three structures was fenced off. Preliminary reports were put together by Bob Murray in 1964 and 1965, and work was performed in the latter year, summarized in a Completion Report of 1966 by Sharp. Aside from patch and fill, the principal work involved jacking up slipped section, and heavy wood bracing of apertures. Because of the irregularity of the wall profile reliance was placed on concrete parget instead of horizontal bonds.

Administration Building Ruins, 1967: The relatively intact masonry walls of this 1885 structure, the last one of record erected by the military, had been treated by Hieb, mainly stabilization of foundations, and probably saved by him from serious threat of general collapse, but time was taking its toll, and in 1967 there was urgent need to arrest further deterioration. Portable scaffolds facilitated the delicate work of supporting lintels, and installing nailers and rough bucks (vertical supports) in the openings, filling voids, calking cracks, and patching plaster and stucco. There was some use of steel rods and angle irons, bolted together, and jacks were used to elevate slipping masonry blocks. Wall-tops and sills were treated with Weld-crete thinned for maximum penetration. Interior ground surface (below masonry floor level) was graded to vent a southeast corner, opened to allow rainwater to escape. Cost \$15,700. [131]

Old Bakery Interior, 1970-1971: The shell of this structure was effectively stabilized and restored by Hieb in 1950-1951. His work was substantially intact, except for needed rehabilitation of shingled roof, masonry walls, windows, and exterior trim. However, the most important factor here was a decision, recommended by Office of History and Historic Architecture, Western Service Center, and concurred in by the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha to restore the interior as of 1876, including one of the two original ovens, for working exhibit purposes. Preliminary historical and architectural studies were contributed by Jim Sheire and Charles Pope of the Washington, D.C. Office of the Chief Historian, in 1969, while design work and working drawings were accomplished by Architect Lewis Koue of the Western Service Center, in San Francisco in 1970. Highlights of the restoration included details of oven and hearth footings, brickwork and metal component construction, interior framing and finish, and partitions required to separate baker's quarters and work space. Cost \$9,000. [132]

New Bakery Ruins Stabilization, 1971: Ringenbach's efforts to stabilize this 1883 structure, ruined by fire in 1925, were aborted by the Regional Office opposition to his unilateral approach. Sharp found the walls weakened and severely eroded, in some places to only one-third of the original 18-inch thickness. Early collapse was threatened, and public safety was at stake. Because spalling was up to eight inches deep, too much for trowel work, stabilization was achieved by returning to the original method of construction. Forms were built and set up to proper thickness. Only one section was filled with lime-concrete mortar at a time, with planking two feet in height. After a 24-hour period for setting, the form was moved upward until the wall top was reached. Then the entire form was moved ahead to the next column. Prior to forming, a 1-inch

stucco mesh was affixed to the wall, horizontal reinforcing bars added, holes drilled, and tied through the walls with 12-inch galvanized wire. Vertical bars were tied to the horizontal ones, and then the forms set in place. Cost \$8,400. [\[133\]](#)

Despite concern when Bedlam's plans were being mulled over, heating and other atmospheric controls of historic structures at Fort Laramie have been avoided because of a general conviction, at least until recently, that historic buildings there, of ancient origin, may be better off without the introduction of fire and electricity and all kinds of conduits, as long as there is a strong support system of guards and emergency fire protection. An extensive mechanical system for these fragile and priceless structures seems incongruous.

Lightning protection is one precaution that can be taken without internal gutting, by electrical systems. In fact, the idea is to keep Mother Nature's electric discharges from igniting the historic structures. After several years of soul-searching and experimenting with various devices, one was hit upon which involved an inconspicuous rod-and-ground system, a product of the Thompson Lightning Protection Company. The work was accomplished in 1963 for \$3,300 under contract with Evan G. Paules. Such protection had been provided for Bedlam and the New Guardhouse already. This project completed installations on eight other buildings: the Sutler's Store, Officers Quarters A, E and F, Cavalry Barracks, Old Guardhouse, Commissary and Old Bakery.

A few foot-notes on the Sharp era are in order, to illuminate the expanding involvement of both Washington D.C. and San Francisco personnel. In 1964 the old Eastern Office, Design and Construction (EODC) had moved from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C.; there had long been a WODC in San Francisco. Most of the historic preservation specialists (historians and architects) had always been in the Washington Office with the Chief Historian, but in 1965 Lewis Koue was designated Historical Architect in San Francisco. (Architect Gann was never classified as a Historical Architect, though he actually so performed at Fort Laramie.) In 1969 a new Branch of History and Historic Architecture was created in both the re-named Eastern Service Center (ESC) and the Western Service Center (WSC) in San Francisco, with Merrill J. Mattes as Chief of the San Francisco Branch. He had been transferred there from Omaha in 1966 as Alaska park planner, but in 1969 he once more became involved in Fort Laramie preservation matters. He would become further involved as Chief of the Historic Preservation Team (for all NPS projects, nationwide) when ESC and WSC were merged as the Denver Service Center in November, 1971.

Another switch was in reporting and planning procedures. In 1969 the Director's Office relinquished all project approval authority to the Regional Directors, so no longer did projects have to clear through that rarefied level before work could begin on anything. As early as 1967 responsibility for basic historical-archeological research shifted from the area historians to those stationed first in Washington and San Francisco, and then in Denver. Bob Murray was the last area historian to make such a technical contribution. (While performing occasional miscellaneous research chores Fort Laramie historians have since concerned themselves with interpretation, not research.)

The funds generously supplied by Mrs. Virginia Hill to restore furniture and furnishings in the historic buildings, thereby making them come alive, were put to work in 1960, as we have seen, with Sally Johnson focussing first on Officers Quarters F. Since Major Andrew S. Burt and family had occupied these quarters of 1887-1888, and since the youngest son Reynolds J. Burt, still alive and well in 1960 (and his niece Mrs.

Dorothy Watts also of Washington, D.C.) was able to supply numerous items that had been used personally by his family while in residence, the quarters were furnished specifically as "the Burt House." It is the only restoration at the Fort where the furnishings can be tied to a known resident, that is, with a fair percentage of the items exhibited being original. Actual pieces of furniture, a dinnerware set, clothing, portraits, and many personal items were provided by the 88 year old General (born at Fort Omaha in 1874, died in Washington, D.C. 1970, at age 96.)

Installation of the Burt heirlooms plus other items collected at antique stores and sundry sources began in June, 1961. On the 25th of that month the successful completion of the first furnishing project was observed by dedication services held at the cottonwood grove between the Cavalry Barracks and the Commissary Storehouse. A crowd of about 1,000 assembled at ceremonies presided over by L. G. Flannery of Torrington, one of the leaders engaged in the crusade to save Fort Laramie. The program included a welcome by Sharp, remarks by Regional Director Baker, and an address by Regional Historian Mattes outlining the history of the Burt family and the furnishing project. Then he introduced the benefactor, Mrs. Hill, whom he had driven from Denver to the Fort a day or two earlier. A poignant moment was the playing over a loudspeaker of a taped message by General Reynolds J. Burt, who had lived in the house as a boy. After numbers by the Lingle band, the Burt House was finally opened to visitors, the first "total restoration." [\[134\]](#)

Sally next embarked on a very ambitious program for the complete refurnishing of the Sutler's (or Post Trader's) Store, with the goal of returning the store proper to an authentic appearance of 1876, and the other sections office, post office, enlisted men's bar and billiard room, and officers club to some semblance of circa 1886. At the same time she bravely took on the goal of furnishing one half of the double-set Officers Quarters A as the hypothetical quarters of a Cavalry Officer of 1872, with wife and two small children. Complications of a sort arose when Sally had a romance with and then married Dick Ketcham, a young WODC engineer who was at Fort Laramie in 1960-1961 surveying for roads, water lines, etc. There was nothing wrong whatever with that except that Dick was headquartered in San Francisco and that's where Sally went to live, in January, 1962. Although she had hoped to continue on the refurnishing project for the duration, Messrs. Baker and Mattes took the position that the changed situation required a change of personnel, to ensure continuity of operations out of Omaha; however, it was agreed that Sally could remain on the payroll through June and complete her current projects.

For a time she had an office in the Old Mint Building in San Francisco, part of the Western Museum Laboratory. As it turned out, California was a happy hunting-ground for the wealth of objects of the 1870-1880 periods needed for the two buildings. A typical communique from Sally to the Regional Director is indicative of her feverish activities:

From a dealer in Mill Valley we purchased our clerk's desk, the Wells Fargo type, and numerous smaller items; in San Francisco, the final two of our six poker tables were obtained; bar chairs, goblets, mugs, etc. were located; and a thorough search for wallpaper was initiated. The latter search led to the basement of a wallpaper company in the city, where old patterns littered the floor and shelves. Unfortunately, only a few resembled in the slightest the fragment that survived on the walls of the Enlisted Men's Bar. By coincidence an antique show was held in Sausalito shortly before my departure, which gave me an opportunity to pick

up a Plains Indian Pipe Bag to hang in the Officers Club.

A long trip was made to the Southern Mother Lode Area, where I was fortunate enough to locate a number of rare labelled Dupont gunpowder cans, an Indian bag, a wine keg, plus a charming old hobby horse.

At last, on May 16, the return trip to Fort Laramie was begun in a car filled completely with the small and not-so small items that had not been shipped in advance.

At Fort Bridger I was surprised to meet Regional Historian Mattes and Architect Bob Gann, who were consulting with Wyoming state officials on restoration problems. . .

While California proved to be bountiful, there were many items which had been collected or lined up for shipment from Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and other points in the Midwest. One memorable piece was an antique billiard table trucked from St. Louis and delivered to the sleepy Superintendent at 6 AM one Sunday morning. [\[135\]](#)

The Sutler's Store posed problems about partitions, decorations, and fixtures such as shelving, counters and bars. These were solved in part by "shadow" evidence revealed by markings on remnant walls, floors and ceilings, and partly by logical deduction from general knowledge of activities of the respective periods. Also it will be remembered that certain elderly residents of the neighborhood, notably members of the Sandercock and Nolan families who were children at the Fort in the 1880s, were able to supply some clues to room and fixture arrangement. At any rate Slim Warthen was able to provide the installations made to Sally's specifications.

A catalog of items put together in the Sutler's Store would be inappropriate here, but the spectrum includes buffalo robes, guns, traps, hardware, groceries, sewing accessories, shoes, sunbonnets, in the store; billiard and bar accoutrements in the enlisted men's bar; and gaming tables, playing cards, paintings, trophies, and an assortment of bottles in the more genteel officers club. The Sutler's office and post office, with plain functional furniture and fixtures, and equipment and ledgers of the period, also seem convincing.

The Captain's Quarters reflect the sparse and hammered-together packing box furniture and belongings of a family on the Indian frontier, when low pay, difficult transportation, and improvisations were limiting factors. Sally's three reports on Officers Quarters A and F, and the Sutler's Store, are an important part of the indigenous literature. [\[136\]](#)

Again there was a dedication ceremony, on July 22, 1962, which was attended by an estimated 3,500, a large crowd for that part of Wyoming. This time the event was made momentous by the presence of the Strategic Air Command Band of Offutt Air Force Base, Omaha, which arrived via transport plane to Scottsbluff, and busses to the Fort. Since Mr. Baker had a conflict, Merrill Mattes was delegated to be Master of Ceremonies, while Historian Roy E. Appleman of the Washington Office gave the dedicatory address, his topic being the saga of Falling Leaf, the Sioux Indian "princess," daughter of Chief Spotted Tail, who in 1866 was entombed at the Fort in a scaffold burial. Again Mrs. Hill was present to be recognised. The poignant climax of the program was a farewell tribute with flowers to Sally Johnson, whose contributions in two short years

were truly remarkable.

The colorful ceremony was attended by several notables, including the durable Pat Flannery, ex-Superintendent Hieb, and retired ex-Coordinating Superintendent Dave Canfield. Several members of the Sandercock family who had occupied Officers Quarters A for 47 years after the Army pulled out, and who magnanimously donated several items of original furniture, were also present. Invitations had been sent to the Commanding Officers of various identifiable military units which had been stationed at the old post; this ploy produced three military visitors: Lt. Col. Abernathy, 2nd Infantry, Fort Devens, Massachusetts; Lt. Col. E. H. Shemwell and Captain Patton, 10th Infantry, Fort Carson, Colorado. The Torrington Rebekahs served lunches to 90 VIPs in the Sharps' Cavalry Barracks Quarters. Then, as Sharp reveals, a "special soiree" took place in the Officers Club after dark, "attended by aficionados and workers. It had been 72 years since the Officers Club was properly used, and heroic measures were taken to reestablish the proper atmosphere." (Mattes regretfully had to skip this exclusive late hour baptismal ceremony as he was obliged to escort teetotaling Historian Appleman to Douglas, Wyoming, for the night. However, it is reported that the convivial Canfield and his companion, George Grant, the old NPS photographer, patriotically participated.) [\[137\]](#)

The person selected by Mattes as successor to personable Sally Johnson Ketcham was Nan V. Carson, also with a Master's degree in History, from Omaha University. She proved to be an aggressive young woman of amazing energy and ambition. She attended the July 22 ceremonies as a spectator only, but EOD in August and spent much of October at the area, becoming familiar with every detail and establishing working relationships with local specialists McDermott, Murray and Gann. With the Historian she worked out plans for mail exchange of historical materials. She consulted with Murray on the sizeable problem of the house-keeping or maintenance of the expensive new furniture and furnishings, both exhibited in place and in storage, particularly troublesome textiles, glassware, and special value items such as oil paintings, herbarium, etc. Jointly they evolved improved procedures for record-keeping, including a Locator File for articles on display. She noted the prevalence of pestilential wasps and mice in restored and refurnished buildings, requiring eradication. [\[138\]](#)

With Gann she went over the four structures next in line for refurnishing Old Bedlam, the Old Guardhouse, Officers Quarters E, and the Magazine the first two being scheduled for early restoration to period, and the second two requiring certain repairs before they could be made habitable. She was particularly concerned about interior details pertaining to furnishings, i.e., wall, floor, and ceiling surfaces, built-ins, closets, fixtures, illumination, etc.

It was decided that Carson should first focus her energies on the refurnishing of Old Bedlam, as the grand center-piece of the Fort. Her Furnishing Report on this structure, completed in April, 1964 dealt comprehensively with its history, its known or hypothetical occupants, and associated events. Her basic recommendation was that the south half be restored as of 1865 when occupied by Colonel William O. Collins of the 11th Ohio Cavalry, and wife, with living quarters upstairs and offices down. The lower story of the north one-half would be restored as bachelor officers quarters of 1855, while the upper story would be left vacant for the present. The plan was approved, floor plans designed, object lists prepared, and procurement begun.

By June 1 the last nail had been driven and the last bit of paint had been applied, and all was in readiness for the Furnishings Curator who then arrived, along with her truckloads of goodies, to set up the premises as if they were being lived in, and the residents had just tip-toed out for a stroll. Firearms, buffalo robes, playing cards, whiskey, tobacco juice, uniforms, and accoutrements marked the bachelor quarters. An imaginative touch on a fireplace wall is an assortment of signatures of various officers of the period, blown up from projected Army records on microfilm. The Commanding Officers headquarters, with desk, battle flags, and personal sidearms, is somewhat formal and the rear room has the appearance of a court-martial in progress (with the court out for a coffee break). In the upstairs quarters, everything seems spare and practical, but with the magic feminine touch. Because Fort Laramie is blessed with an unspoiled environment in all directions, one can look out of Elizabeth Collins' window and feel the atmosphere of a make-do home in the Indian-infested wilderness. Although Bedlam got its name for the alleged hilarity of its inhabitants, and the bachelor quarters seem to suggest a devil-may-care way of life, a sense of tragedy pervades both sets of quarters when visitors are reminded of the grim Grattan massacre of 1854, and the death of Caspar Collins, the Colonel's son, defending Platte Bridge against the Sioux in 1864.

Old Bedlam was dedicated on August 16, 1964, with the front porch as speakers' platform. Regional Director Lon Garrison gave the main address to a surprisingly light crowd, considering the importance of the occasion. Charlie pointed out that there were large droves of visitors on the following days and weeks, suggesting that a lot of people avoided the ceremony for unfathomable reasons. An auxiliary program was held from the outside deck of the Commissary building museum, where Waddell Smith of San Rafael, California, presented a large bronze Pony Express plaque to Superintendent Sharp. [\[139\]](#)

Carson's next project was the furnishing of "E" as the quarters of a hypothetical young surgeon with wife and young children. Her preliminary account of medical practices and conditions in the frontier Army, as well as problems that Army wives had to cope with, laying the groundwork for furnishing specifics, is a fascinating one. Her stipulation of four children in this family was a gesture of recognition of the fact that "19th century families often grew to awesome proportions, following the example of Queen Victoria, whose family of nine set a stiff pace." This project helps to demonstrate "the shoehorn ingenuity and unflinching sense of humor necessary to squeeze a sizeable family into the average two-bedroom quarters." Sophistication in subtle period gradations was required by Nan to make the 1880 scene perceptibly different from the neighboring 1870 and 1887 quarters. The most distinctive room is the Surgeon's study and part-time office where natural and anthropological specimens, as well as medical gear, attest to an officer of scientific bent who has been around a lot of territory. The project was completed in 1966. [\[140\]](#)

There was no dedication, no fanfare of any kind for the Surgeon's Quarters opening. As it turned out, furnishings for the Old Guardhouse were so severe that it offered limited challenge, and a decision was made not to furnish the Magazine with any fidelity, but to use it to exhibit odds and ends of ordnance and transportation. Before she could get into the rejuvenation of the Old Bakery and the Cavalry Barracks, romance intervened once more, and Mrs. David Carson became Mrs. Don Rickey, and moved to Washington, D.C. Once more this left the Hill Furnishings Restoration Project up in the air.

In 1968 Mrs. Hill had released another \$50,000 to the project, making \$150,000 in all. As of 1970 the unexpended balance was \$55,000. The Superintendent and staff were authorized to purchase new or replacement furnishings with these funds, according to their best judgement, and there was no further hiring

of a special Furnishings Curator.

Both Sally (Johnson) Ketcham and Nan (Carson) Rickey have left their vigorous and distinctive impact on the Fort Laramie scene, despite the relative brevity of their respective tenures as Furnishings Curator. In November, 1962 Mattes had recommended to the Regional Director that a large bronze plaque to Virginia Hill be placed in the lobby of the future Visitor Center. There is no Visitor Center to date (1978) and there is still no plaque. (Mrs. Hill died in 1972, before Superintendent Sharp could present her with a personal plaque which had been made by the Fort Laramie Association in token of appreciation.) The dimensions of her benefaction are such that she deserves some kind of memorialization, as does also Charles S. Hill, her husband who made all that money in the first place, and in whose memory she made the donation! Perhaps a plaque on the grounds near Old Bedlam or the Sutler's Store would be appropriate if there is official reluctance to place it within one of the historic buildings themselves. Without Mrs. Hill's philanthropy the Furnishings program would have been deferred at least ten years, would then have been infinitely more costly and, because of the increased demand for antiques, collections of equal value could not have been achieved at any price.

After every celebration there is a hang-over. After every one of the three Big Dedications of restored buildings the headache confrontation with reality took the form of sharply increased attendance, coupled with acute personnel shortages and the necessity to devise ways and means of coping with the crowds storming the new attractions. An index to the problem is given in post-dedication statistics:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mid-summer (3 months)</u>	<u>Annual total</u>
1960	28,826	45,605
1961	32,485	49,924
1962	42,772	63,555
1963	40,235	65,800
1964	49,137	76,267
1965	60,892	88,319
1966	65,805	94,573
1967	68,814	94,362
1968	83,457	125,121
1969	72,174	100,806
1970	91,665	122,852
1971	92,042	136,024
1972	112,639	157,983 [141]

That's the growth picture during Sharp's time, and 1972 was the peak year, with a figure not equalled through 1977. The point to be emphasized here is that Sharp and company had to cope with this population explosion, and it was not just a matter of counting heads. It was a matter of arranging things so that these eager citizens could visit all of the interior-restored buildings, and that involved unprecedented, and scarcely anticipated, problems of traffic, circulation, and protection protection of the buildings and their contents as

well as the tourist Army.

On summer Sundays when attendance began to reach 2,000 per day, Sharp knew how Horatius felt at that famous bridge. "Too few with too little, against too many." Although Sharp frequently complained about the pressure, there were few if any complaints by visitors about the way things were handled, and in retrospect our judgment would be that Sharp did an outstanding job in meeting the emergency. This was accomplished by his own dedication to the job, an excellent staff, and by trial and error in evolving more efficient methods of interpretation and protection.

Staffing was the key. During his most crucial years of tangential development he had the exceptionally able support of Supervisory Historian John D. McDermott. Jack had gone to the Interpretive Conference in Omaha in the spring of 1961, and several months later did a stretch at the Yosemite Training Center. Late in 1964 he was tapped for a two-year Management Seminar in Washington, D.C., which meant the end of the Fort Laramie "launching pad" phase of his meteoric career. In July 1965 Curator Bob Murray was named to succeed him, likewise doing a notable job in research and interpretation until his resignation from Government service in 1968 when he took the unusual course of going into business for himself, in Billings, Montana, as a historical consultant. Tom White succeeded Murray and served until early 1973 when he moved to Phoenix.

In 1960 Mattes had urged the establishment of a second or assistant Historian position to take care of the burgeoning volume of business. Such a position was established on a 6-months appointment basis in 1963, being first filled by William J. Shay of Broomfield, Colorado, an old but energetic and highly motivated Army veteran, who remained seven years. Later he taught history at Eastern Wyoming College in Torrington, where he now resides. Jim Petty transferred back from another area to fill in as Curator behind Murray, and continues in that capacity to this day (1978). Sharp was able to brace his permanent staff with a second permanent clerk-typist, Beth L. Eaton. Lois Woodard was elevated to the role of Administrative Officer in 1960.

In addition to the permanent staff, the Superintendent was able to get several seasonal ranger-historians, or technicians, or guide positions authorized and Fort Laramie has been fortunate in being able to line up highly capable and enthusiastic men and women to serve at the information desk, or as tour guides, patrolers or living history demonstrators. Many of these individuals worked well beyond the allotted 40 hour week, without overtime pay. In the early Sixties Sharp developed a corps of local volunteers to help show the buildings but the source dried up as the novelty wore off.

Initially there were guided tours of the buildings. When this became impractical because of numbers the buildings were simply opened and personnel stationed at strategic points to offer information and guard against thievery and vandalism. When this second stage was reached the doors to the furnished rooms were provided with inset waist-high partitions. Other methods were experimented with but the final solution was 1/2 inch Plexiglass panel doors, which permitted full vision, but prevented deliberate "breaking and entering." The trend shifted away entirely from guided tours, except for special groups, and turned toward centralizing information services in the Commissary museum. At the same time exhibit panels and easels at the building sites were steadily improved, and literature provided so that the visitors could guide themselves around the premises. The three basic items of literature have been a small leaflet with general information, a guide to restored buildings published by the Fort Laramie Association, and the official Historical Handbook.

Also, almost annually exhibits in the museum have been revised or extended and upgraded so that the visitor who is not in a hurry can really absorb a great deal about Fort Laramie military, emigrant and fur trade history. Also, there has been an extensive array of sales publications.

In March, 1963 Sharp, McDermott, and Mattes, at the behest of Chief Historian Kahler, made a grand tour of Eastern historical areas, from Gettysburg to Hyde Park, and including outstanding non-Federal museums such as Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, the Dupont industrial village near Wilmington, and the Civil War Centennial at Richmond. At this time everyone got the impression that the new Visitor Center across the river was imminent, and Mattes and McDermott were supposed to come up with a brilliant new Museum Prospectus. Mr. Kahler was evidently concerned about the provincialism of this trio. He didn't actually use that word. He put it more politely, like, "Why don't you fellows look around and see how the rest of the Park Service operates" and, more particularly, "Observe how we use our imaginations back here in the civilized East." Duly inspired, the Historians wound up with a sensational Museum Prospectus but, of course, with no Visitor Center materializing, nothing came of it, and that would be the last effort in this department, locally, or regionally. Subsequently museum planning would be done by full-blown Service Center Interpretive Planners and Harper's Ferry exhibit specialists. There would be no more dependence on local or Regional talent, however talented.

In May, 1967 Sharp reported that Fort Laramie was "selected", presumably by the Chief of Interpretation, as a demonstration area for the new emphasis on "Living History." That variety of interpretation has been conspicuous at the Fort ever since and accounts for much of the seasonal manpower (personpower?). This activity flourished like the Green Bay Tree under both Sharp and Maeder; a review of the first ten years of that activity is given in the Maeder section.

An interpretation-related activity that reached its climax in the Sharp era was wrestling with the museum collection which, with the furnishings program, seemed to be growing exponentially, that is, doubling, re-doubling, etc. ad infinitum. All items not on display were first warehoused in several rooms of the Cavalry Barracks (later in the Commissary). Metal storage cabinets were acquired to give some semblance of order to the jumble. Rex Wilson was transferred to the Southeastern Office, Richmond in June, 1962, but he was around long enough to accomplish miracles of classification and systematic curatorship. He had also been the ideal man to work with Sally Johnson in the painstaking process of accessioning all the pianos, billiard tables, fabrics, furniture, guns, thunder-mugs, bric-a-brac, trinkets, ornaments, and what-nots that Sally had accumulated. Bob Murray was transferred from Pipestone National Monument to replace Wilson, and they were able to overlap by several weeks, thereby ensuring continuity of purpose and method.

Before he left Rex had processed some 40,000 specimens, about half of the estimated total, and completed classification of clay pipes, buttons, insignia and accoutrements, ammunition, and firearms, in addition to his accomplishments under Ringenbach. Murray's long suit was military equipment and Indian trade items, so he was able to extend some classifications. In August 1963 he reported that he had accounted for 128,000 pieces in the total collection, of which 9,500 were catalogued. In 1967 a directive from Washington, D.C. required the reduction of surplus or uncatalogued or "cold storage" items; there should be an artifact disposal program. Murray was antagonized by this and other museum directives, feeling that they represented an unworthy emphasis on paper-shuffling at the expense of staff enthusiasm. In any event this was one factor, among several, in his decision to resign. Petty's management of this department extends well beyond Sharp's

time, so the history of the collection will be up-dated in the next section. [142]

While Sharp was Superintendent, original research by staff members was not a chore but a favorite past-time. Some of it was required by demands of the restoration program, but most of it was done because these Historians were curious about some aspect of the Fort's history, and simply wanted to do it. More recently the significant research that has been done on behalf of the Fort has been handled by others, such as Historians of the Denver Service Center, operating on a pre-funded basis, and the long era of research in depth by area Historians or Regional Historians, beginning with the initial studies by Merrill Mattes way back in 1938, seems to have passed. This is a trend throughout the Park Service, with park Historians concerned primarily with interpretive chores, and any extensive required research handled by others. Therefore this last big surge of primary research activity at the Fort is of interest, and the results are impressive: Following is a checklist of original Fort-related research accomplished by employees under Sharp. (The list is not certified as complete.) In the case of those items published the periodical is underlined:

John D. McDermott	, "Fort Laramie's Iron Bridge," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	'62
"	, History of the Cavalry Barracks", Ms.	
"	, History of the Old Guardhouse" Ms.	
"	, Leodegar Schnyder," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	'64
"	, Crime and Punishment," <u>Journal of the West</u>	'64
"	, "Indians as Human Beings," <u>Nebraska History</u>	'71
"	, Search for Jacques Laramie," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	'64
"	, Joseph Bisonette," <u>Mountain Men of Fur Trade IV</u>	
"	, James Bordeaux," <u>Mountain Men of Fur Trade V</u>	
"	, J. Laramie," <u>Mountain Men of Fur Trade VI</u>	
"	, John Baptiste Richard <u>Mountain Men of Fur Trade II</u>	
Robert Murray	, "Prices and Wages at Fort L," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	'64
"	, "The Long Walk," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	'66
"	, "John Phillips Legend," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	'68
"	, "Glass Beads", <u>Wyoming Archeologist</u>	64
"	, "Officers Quarters B, C, D" Ms.	
Gordon Chappell	, "Fort Laramie Fortifications," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	62
"	, Dress Hat, Mounted Rifles," <u>Mil. Collector & Hs</u>	70
"	, "Summer Helmets of U.. S. Army," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	67
William Shay	, "Colonel Henry Merriam's Descendents," Ms.	
"	, "Horseshoe Creek Crossing," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	70
Rex Wilson	, "Clay Tobacco Pipes," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	61
"	, "19th Century Bottles," <u>Arizonian</u>	
"	, "Evidence in Empty Bottles," <u>El Palacio</u>	60
Thomas E. White	, "A Postal History", <u>La Posta</u>	71

Paul E. Hedren	, "The Fatal Void," <u>Camp</u>	72
Robert L. Munkres	, "Plains Indian Threat," <u>Annals of Wyoming</u>	68
Richard Burkes	, "Medicine at Fort Laramie," <u>Camp</u>	69

In 1961 the long-standing and invaluable "Research Photo File of Contemporary Plans and Pictures", initiated by Mattes in the 1940s, was finally transferred from Omaha to the Fort. McDermott visited the National Archives in 1964 and made a large haul of transcriptions from Post Records and other sources. Don Rickey of the Washington Office researched and reported on the Old Bakery in 1966 prior to its interior restoration, and in 1969 he and Jim Sheire completed a research report on a Furnishings Study for the Cavalry Barracks. [[143](#)]

During this period also there were a number of "historical" visitors, that is, visitors who had some special tie with Fort Laramie and whom the Superintendent or Historians interviewed. Typical were:

- 4/61 Johnny O'Brien, soldier's son, taped interview
- 4/61 E. Dean Hunton, Laramie, nephew of John Hunton
- 4/61 Mrs. Emory Bright, Officers Quarters A
- 7/61 Harry Fine, Fort Laramie letters and postmarks
- 9/61 James Nolan, soldier's son, taped interview
- 10/61 Marshall Sandercock descendants
- 12/61 Frank Aplan, Rushville, Nebr., Janis (Jeneusse) family
- 6/62 Various descendants, Sgt. Leodegar Schnyder
- 8/65 Mrs. R. Hunter, Freeport, Illinois, daughter of Lt. Capron re: her brother's grave, found at Fort D. A. Russell Cemetery.
- 9/66 Mrs. Dorothy Watts, niece, Colonel Sheridan S. Burt
- 11/66 Mrs. J. T. Johnson, Powell, Wyo., descendant of Howard Egan, Pony Express rider.
- 4/66 Capt. Daniel Carter, descendant of Fort Laramie's locator and builder, Lt. Daniel P. Woodbury.

Archeology played a modest role in the Sharp era. In August, 1961 there was a significant discovery in connection with the Old Bedlam project. While excavating to remove the footings for the condemned lime-concrete kitchen wing of 1881, workmen discovered a stone-lined water well, at a point inside the post-1881 structure. This was restored. (Another archeological find at the Bedlam site in 1961 went somehow unreported, and will be identified and discussed at the end of this History, as revealed in 1977!)

Two soldier burials under the Hospital ruins had to be re-buried in September 1963 when they were discovered to be underneath the planned wall buttresses. Bob Murray and Newell Joyner conducted the solemn ceremonies. [[144](#)]

In 1963 Wilfred M. Husted of the Midwest Archeological Center of the NPS in Lincoln undertook an archeological survey of the planned location of the Visitor Center and parking area at the junction of the

Laramie River and Deer Creek. The parking area was sterile but in the immediate vicinity of the Visitor Center site was evidence of remains identifiable with the Ward and Guerrier trading post of 1854. Structural evidence was limited to post-holes but a scattering of artifacts suggested trade items. The paucity of remains and the brevity of this establishment (1854-1855), permitted on the Reservation only briefly after the Grattan Massacre, suggests that the site is scarcely important enough to worry about. In other words, if the ideal siting of the Visitor Center is such that it coincides with the trading post, it won't be necessary to readjust the location of the Visitor Center. On the scale of historical importance the ephemeral Ward and Guerrier post is only slightly above zero. [145]

In 1969 Husted returned to make an archeological survey of the planned roads, utility lines, and residential area on the right bank of the Laramie, apparently finding nothing of consequence. [146]

Doubtless the most important archeological project of this period was the excavation of the Rustic Hotel site in the spring and fall of 1971, reported by John Ehrenhard of the Midwest Archeological Center in May 1972. The site is on the Laramie River flood plain below the Hospital ruins and old ditch line. This was a hotel and station of the Black Hills Stage line in 1876, being legitimized on the Reservation as a branch of the Post Trader's business. It was a single-story structure of logs or slab-sides, with sod roof and out buildings. It was burned to the ground in April 1890 during the time when Joseph Wilde, the owner, was absent freighting salvaged material from the abandoned Fort to Fort Robinson. In the early 1900s it was partially obliterated by what is now the Fort Laramie approach road (1978). The archeological project was an emergency precipitated by a pending excavation for an underground irrigation pipeline, to shorten the old Fort Laramie ditch. The Superintendent notified Omaha, which had no funds to divert, so he then turned to the Western Service Center for help. Merrill Mattes, Chief of History and Historic Architecture there, authorized an obligation of \$6,500 for the dig, even though funds were not technically on hand. His reasoning (which turned out to be correct) was that he was more likely to be criticized from on high for failing to salvage an endangered Fort Laramie historic site than he would for over-obligating his programmed funds. [147]

Ehrenhard's report on the Rustic Hotel is the most definitive and professional archeological report to come out of Fort Laramie since intermittent archeology began there in 1939. There are other sites on the premises intrinsically more important than that of this obscure civilian establishment, but no site has been more thoroughly and skillfully excavated and reported. Among the few facts known about the place are that it was owned by Post Trader John S. Collins during its heyday, and operated by J. H. C. Brown, presumably the same individual who ran the even more obscure Brown's Hotel of earlier vintage across the river. Although at the outset the hostelry offered "clean beds and first class meals", in the 1880s it had deteriorated to the point that travellers complained of "horrid little bugs" and the Post Adjutant directed that it be cleaned up and fumigated. The Archeologist provides a thorough description of the ground plan, structural evidence, and artifact complex, accompanied by exceptionally fine pen-and-ink drawings. [148]

Although the Master Plan was theoretically settled by Mission 66 directive in 1956, long range planning and its attendant altercations did not take a holiday while Sharp was coping with the hectic present. (Planning and re-planning with the NPS is as perpetual as dam-building is with the Bureau of Reclamation or taxation is with the IRS.) It was revived in 1962 as a backlash from the Furnishings Project, when the Washington Office reduced estimates for the cost of a Visitor Center (from \$300,000 to \$200,000) on the grounds that

the nicely restored buildings could carry most of the interpretive load, and a smaller museum would suffice! Regional Director Howard Baker indicated support for this economical view. This incited the wrath of Regional Historian Mattes, who proclaimed:

We must overcome our habit of thinking of Fort Laramie as just another small area. In theme and magnitude of operations it is the equivalent of Jefferson National Expansion Memorial or Mount Rushmore. I predict a visitor count of 250,000 annually and a staff of 10 permanents and 30 seasonals. The Visitor Center should enclose at least 10,000 square feet, and with at least \$100,000 (over and above the \$300,000) reserved for exhibits. The vast panorama of Fort history can only be gained by a museum. The historic buildings give insight on architecture and life styles but they cannot of themselves convey the epic history which the total Fort symbolizes. Also, we need ample space to display the rich artifact collection, the finest of its kind in the United States, instead of putting this collection in the deep-freeze, to be seen only by a few stray antiquarians.

Superintendent Sharp heartily agreed, and chimed in with even more florid oratory:

The Congress of the United States has gerrymandered revised boundary to make a spectacular and historic entrance. We are buying land to fulfill the vision. We are restoring and refurbishing buildings which will attract visitors from all over the nation. . . a historic focus which will not be exceeded in the West. . . To build a Visitor Center of 5,000 square feet for a place like this would within five years present the Service with a byword for lack of vision, and we would be hiding our faces from Destiny! [149]

The exact size of the future Visitor Center Museum remained academic despite the advent of a new Master Plan Team in October, 1963, composed of Don Rickey, Frank Hirst, Charles Novak, and Dick Strait, all from Omaha. Their plan was essentially the same as the approved Mission 66 version, although the precise size of the Center was left ambiguous. There was another Master Plan go-around in April, 1965 when the Rickey-Hirst team from Omaha was joined by John Adams and Jim Bainbridge from WODC, San Francisco. In September, 1966 the revised Master Plan was formally approved, retaining the essential elements of the cross-river development a new main bridge across the Laramie, a new approach road, and utility, residential, and parking areas. A foot bridge would connect the Visitor Center on the right bank with the historic Fort, and there would also be a secondary road and vehicle bridge over the Laramie River, out of sight to the south, primarily for the use of official vehicles. As usual, the exact size as well as the precise location of the long-deferred Visitor Center was left to later determination.

There was a bizarre episode in August, 1965 when the Fort was visited by a group identified as "The Fort Study Team." Activated by the Chief of Interpretation, it was composed of Washington, D.C. Historian Roy Appleman as chairman, retired Naturalist and former Regional Chief of Interpretation Raymond Gregg from Arkansas, and Jerry Wagers of the Mather Training Center, and Ed Bierly of the Museum Development Branch, both of Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. The idea was for this blue-ribbon panel of non-Westerners to visit various Western military and fur trade posts in the National Park System i.e., Fort Laramie, Fort Larned, Fort Union, Fort Davis, Bent's Old Fort, etc. make an objective analysis, and then recommend ways and means of coordinating interpretive planning among these geographically and thematically related areas.

There were two difficulties. First, this Team forgot all about their mission to coordinate things among areas and decided instead that they would personally re-Master Plan all of the forts, one at a time, ignoring all past and present efforts by others. Second, it was made up of strong minds with widely divergent opinions, and in few cases did they submit a unanimous recommendation. In a way this was a blessing because as a result few of their radical ideas gained acceptance.

Furnishings Curator Nan Rickey of the Omaha Office elected herself to join the group at Fort Laramie and she gave moral support to Superintendent Sharp's defense of the orthodox Master Plan. Already beset by conflicts of opinion and indecision by higher authority on other subjects (such as arguments over the size and scope of Visitor Center exhibits, above noted), the visit by the Study Team and its noisy arm-waving tactics unsettled Sharp's nerves, requiring strong antidotes. ("They got on a horse," complained the bewildered Superintendent, "and rode off in all directions.") When the Team report surfaced in January 1966 Sharp suffered another relapse, but recovered when assured by Regional Office personnel that their schizoid recommendations would carry little weight. Except for Recommendation No. 2 noted below, which was later adopted, the Fort Study at Fort Laramie, as elsewhere, was a seemingly pointless exercise, resulting in one more costly but ineffectual planning document. However, since planning has been a major activity over the years at Fort Laramie, and the Fort Study team cannot be accused of failing to use their imagination, a summary of their positions may be of value in demonstrating how planners over the years have "boxed the compass" in considering, for good reasons or bad, all possible Master Plan alternatives.

1. Location of Visitor Center: Unanimous against the standard Master Plan proposal for development "opposite the site of Fort John." at the mouth of and the right bank of Deer Creek. Reason given: this would result in the development of a huge modern complex on open ground close to the old Fort area, constituting an intrusion on the historic scene. Split recommendation: Wagers and Bierly for a Visitor Center "near the site of the Laundresses Quarters", opposite the Old Bakery, which would be screened by cottonwoods "except for an overlook". They would place the utility area on the North side of the Laramie River, northeast of the Cavalry Barracks, and administrative facilities in the Commissary building. Gregg agreeable except would put the Visitor Center "at the Ward-Guerrier site," that is, the orthodox Master Plan location. Appleman holds the minority view for locating all facilities west of the Laramie River, and north of the Cavalry Barracks. (This was the Scoyen plan of 1956.) "This recommendation uses the present county road approach, eliminates four bridges over the Laramie River and Deer Creek, and three miles of new road construction," thus saving \$500,000 or so. "No feature of the development should be visible from the Fort area except the Visitor Center which should be at the extreme northeast end of the Fort," and could be made to look like a historic building. (The Appleman proposal, which echoes the old Borreson and Scoyen concepts, had been hashed over and squashed presumably forever over a decade before. The Wagers-Bierly concept boggles the mind, and defies intelligent comment.)

2. Housing: Committee unanimous in recommending removal of residential units from the Cavalry Barracks. "The Cavalry Barracks, of wood construction, is the worst fire hazard on the area." (It is, of course, of lime-concrete except for roof and interior portions.) The Committee is also unanimous in its view that Fort Laramie does not need any kind of resident housing.

3. Administrative offices: Unanimous that the Commissary building be used for administrative offices, permanently, preserving only the exterior. "Its location would give Superintendent and staff close observation of Fort operations and practices." (The use of this building may or may not turn out to be

"permanent" but its certainly getting a good long run, 18 years so far, as of 1978.)

4. Protection: "It may be necessary to employ one night watchman."

5. Utility Area: Majority view that this should be northeast of the Fort, "on the Foote property." Appleman prefers to use this for visitor parking, and put the utility area "near the old military bridge over the North Platte, and adjacent to the county road."

6. Archeology: Unanimous recommendation to excavate the site of Fort John. "Attention should be given to any evidence indicating the location of the earlier Fort William on the same site." After exposing the evidence, "consideration should be given to appropriate interpretive development at the site." Appleman and Gregg feel that "reconstruction of Fort John may be justified." (Fort John was excavated in 1950, without tangible result. Fort William may or may not be "on the same site". It may be a mile or more downstream.)

7. Furnishing Historic Structures: Four buildings furnished so far (Old Bedlam, Sutler's Store, Officers Quarters A and F). Committee believes that "A" should not have been furnished, and that only one other building should be furnished the Cavalry Barracks. (Presumably Mrs. Hill's money should be returned to her, with thanks.)

Superintendent Sharp's invited comments on all this cerebration are given in a 6-page letter to Chairman Appleman, which makes good bedside reading, but which we will refrain from quoting, except for the opening paragraphs:

It was very kind of you, as well as being downright revolutionary, to want to have a Superintendent's view of the Fort studies. . .

It should be noted for background information that although this was not a Master Plan study in the usual sense, we did in one evening and two nerve-wracking days go over nearly all the ground, and nearly all the questions, and question all the hard-won decisions which have been fought out in four years of master planning here. During that four years two full scale master plan study teams and any amount of individual and staff cogitation had in turn recapitulated the previous 25 years of planning here. . . [\[150\]](#)

As noted, the Master Plan was approved in 1966 without fanfare, and without incorporating any of the debatable Fort Study team recommendations, whether majority or minority opinion. However, whether influenced by the Fort Study team views or not, the Omaha and Washington offices decided, soon after the Plan approval, that it would be a mistake to continue occupancy of the Cavalry Barracks any longer, and it would be another mistake to perpetuate the idea of a suburban housing development for employees opposite the Fort. Accordingly, Sharp moved into Torrington in 1967 and, despite water and sewer lines extending to the once-favored residential area, Master Plans since that date have omitted employee housing. There was really no argument left to defend housing in the Barracks; beside the fire hazard and the strong reasons for not housing employees in historic buildings on general principles, the old pile was fast becoming uninhabitable. The main reason for dropping new residential housing, aside from rising costs and the questionable protection to the Fort afforded by off-duty employees living across the river, was that the

Washington Office had adopted a new and tighter policy against construction of employee residences anywhere, in any park, except where proven absolutely necessary. At Fort Laramie, at any rate, the new guard system introduced when Sharp departed for Torrington nullifies any remaining arguments for modern housing on-site.

The only other significant planning document to emerge during Sharp's incumbency was an Interpretive Prospectus by Nan Rickey of the Harper's Ferry Center, and Historian Tom White of the area. Since such documents are always in mortal danger of being overturned a few years later by another crew of eager planners, it is sufficient here to note the highlights of this thoughtful and imaginative plan, the latest of many over the years (including versions by Mattes and McDermott) but the only one to be approved, as of 1972: Iron Bridge Parking Pullout; Radio Interpretive Broadcast enroute to Visitor Center; Visitor Center with interpretive lobby (no separate space for museum exhibits), window for panoramic view of the Fort, a motion picture about "Manifest Destiny and the United States Army;" the Historic House Museums with Audio Stations; self-guiding Fort tours; signs and markers, information literature, and Living History demonstrations. Emphasis is also given to proper storage for the extensive unexhibited museum and library collections. [151]

While there was the usual quota of energy expended on re-thinking the Master Plan in Sharp's era, there were several noteworthy non-historic improvements, some benefitting temporary facilities in the historic zone, others looking toward that glorious day in the distant future when all modern facilities would be moved to the south side of the Laramie River. The shop-firehouse building of 1960 has already been reported; other developments are identified here:

1961 Water Supply Pumphouse: This was probably the most important non-historic improvement of the period because it was intended to be the permanent solution to a dependable water supply for the National Historic Site, including the capacity to fight fires. Because the future headquarters-utility area was to be across the river from the Fort proper, the intention was to install a water system over there, but test wells there indicated insufficient flow. This coupled with other problems, including lingering uncertainties about the precise location of the permanent headquarters, led to a joint WODC-Regional decision to build over a well at the north end of the good old Cavalry Barracks, right in the middle of the old temporary utility complex. The inconsistency of building a permanent pump-house here, when all modern development was supposed to be elsewhere, was explained by the fact that the spot yielded an apparently unlimited flow of water for all present and envisioned future needs, on both sides of the river. So here, nestled in the shadow of the venerable Barracks (but in a manner not too obtrusive on the historic scene) is a very modern cement block structure which contains these primary units:

1 service well, with big pressure tank and electric motor over 2-inch pipe.

1 fire and irrigation well over 6-inch pipe, feeds directly into main water line, no pressure tank. Turbine pump. Three-phase electric motor. Automatic starting for fire fighting when pressure or level drops to a fixed point in pressure tank. Gasoline powered tractor motor for standby in case of power outage.

1 gas chlorinator system. Cost \$55,300.

1961 WODC survey by Richard Ketcham, water distribution system.

1962 Installation of private telephone line to the Fort, after years of combatting country switchboard and public party line interference. "This," proclaimed Sharp, "was as important to us as the first transcontinental telegraph line of 1861 was to the nation."

1962 Brady Engineering Company surveys new area boundaries, and the site of the planned new bridge over the Laramie River.

1964 Modern public comfort station, including utility connections, installed on east or "blind" side of Commissary Storehouse basement. Cost \$18,000. This replaced two outdoor toilets on the cottonwood grove side of the Commissary, which had served up to 65,000 visitors per year. The historic wooden replicas behind Officers Row had long been discontinued, but these plastic out-houses had been part of the landscape for so long that they almost seemed like historic buildings in their own right, though no one shed a tear at their passing.

1964 New fire well and engine system, and beginning of rigorous annual fire and safety inspections by Regional expert, Forester Frank Childs. (Carried away by enthusiasm on one occasion, in demonstrating to Sharp the virtues of a new foam fire suppression system, Frank filled a furnished room in "A" with the stuff, resulting in irreparable damage to fabrics. This made Nan Rickey most unhappy.)

1965 New yard lights with electric eye switch, solar controlled mercury vapor lamps, for security purposes.

1965 Picnic area, with tables. Picnicking was specifically prohibited in earlier Master Plans, and has not been encouraged by more recent ones, but nonetheless a genuine picnic area did appear somehow magically, and ""without benefit of clergy," presumably on an experimental basis. This experiment has been going on now for 12 years (as of 1978) and seems to have become an accepted part of the historic landscape. It seems innocent enough to be picnicking under the cottonwoods west of Officers Row, on nice Government benches and tables. The main objection is the need to impose two more plastic privies on the historic landscape.

1966 Southwestern tree planting crew, making one more effort to plant intrusive parade ground trees, in conflict with the principle affirmed and re-affirmed repeatedly that any restoration at Fort Laramie will be to "the period of maximum importance."

1966 Installation of modern heating system in "temporary" Commissary museum-headquarters.

1966 New fire truck.

1967 Fencing of new boundaries upon completion of land acquisition authorized by 1960 legislation. 4-strand barb on metal posts.

1969 New utility road and bridge to connect historic area with future headquarters. Cost \$121,500. The

principal construction elements were 0.82 miles of 20-foot wide bituminous mat road; reinforced concrete bridge; concrete box culvert across Deer Creek; 246 linear feet of culvert; stone riprap, and guide posts.

1969 Extension of water and sewer system to future maintenance and headquarters areas. Cost \$71,600. In the absence of actual development these lines remain dry as of 1978, and those to the residential area will remain unused forever. Also water line from the new pumphouse temporarily terminates at the river's edge. Contractor for road as well as sewer system was Reiman-Wuerth Company of Cheyenne. Kent Fuller, WSC Engineer, was in charge of both these projects, as well as the following:

1969 Metal storage shed at Cavalry Barracks utility complex.

1971 Underground Irrigation ditch. The old ditch is "historic" in the sense that it was built in 1892-1894 by John Hunton and others. However, it was unmilitary, unsightly, and unsafe. To remedy this, almost 3,000 linear feet of 30-inch asbestos cement pipeline was built across the park land, plus 28 linear feet of inlet and outlet structures and 700 linear feet of 8-inch drainline and 86 linear feet of 12-inch welded steel pipe for irrigation turnouts within park boundaries. Specifications by Western Service Center from plans and surveys by U. S. Soil Conservation Service. Laser beam used to keep pipe on line and grade. Cost \$60,144. (See above re: archeology of Rustic Hotel Site, required by construction of new straight-line ditch replacing old ditch on contour curve.)

1972 Repair of new utility road damaged by 1971 overflow of Laramie River. [152]

Superintendent Sharp's biggest contribution to posterity, after his coordination of restoration and refurbishings programs, was to negotiate the purchase of land from nine private owners, as authorized by the 1960 Act. In some respects this was the stickiest job that could be handed to any Superintendent, and he acquitted himself with valor (but not without bruises). He had the help of Jack Aiton in the Midwest Regional Office from 1961 to early 1966 and the Realty section of the San Francisco Service Center thereafter but he did the bulk of the negotiating and the legwork, though without previous experience in acquisition procedures ("A learn as you go project").

In almost every case the steps to be followed consisted of surveys and appraisals (with the land owner's permission), inquiry as to owner's wish to sell and asking price, negotiations, options contract with offering price, usually more negotiations before owner's signature and then, of course, the whole rigamarole of title search, tax adjustments, etc. ad infinitum until a Government check was delivered personally by the Superintendent to the seller. The big hang-up was "negotiations," with the usual gap between appraisal and the owner's own notion of value, and that's the main reason the whole process took the best part of six years, 1961-1967. It is also why Charlie deserves a medal, because throughout it all he had to maintain composure and good cheer, trying to keep reluctant sellers from being too unhappy about being compelled to sell. (No actual condemnation or "declaration of taking" was filed, but mention by San Francisco officials of that alternative was routinely made.)

Charlie gives this unofficial retrospective summary of the lengthy process: "blood, sweat, tears, a lot of meetings, memos, red tape, and frustration." Following is an official summary or tabulation of the land purchases:

<u>Tract #</u>	<u>Seller</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Selling Price</u>	<u>Time lapse, appraisal to pay-off</u>
1	Sophia M. Foote	136.28	\$38,500	1961-1967
2	Gurney D. and Edna B. Gregg	26.35	\$45,660 + 33 acres	1960-1963
2 A & B	Jack F. and Lorraine Gregg	45.17	\$12,500 + 16.51 acres	1963-1966
3 & 4	Betty J. Bay	49. 78.	\$12,900 12,200	1961-1962
5	B. A. & Ellen Shoemaker	1.12	\$ 500	1966-1967
7	Laura Alice Flannery	2.45	\$ 150	1965-1967
8	Byron H. Paules	24.44	\$ 900	1966-1967
9	C.A. & LaQuette H. Oliver	23.42	\$ 4,400	1965-1967
TOTAL		386.89	\$127,800	

It will be noted that the total cost is \$52,800 above the \$75,000 estimated by the National Park Service in 1960.

As to acreage, the 386.89 total is that private land bought, but not the actual total added to the original 214.41 National Monument acres to make the final total for the expanded National Historic Site. Note that 33 acres of the original land was relinquished to Gurney Gregg as part of his deal, and 16.51 acres of land bought from Betty Bay was transferred to Jack Gregg. Deduct those figures from the total, then add eleven plus acres of public domain mentioned in the 1960 Act and we arrive at the total of 563 acres, more or less, reported by Superintendent Sharp in his Annual Report for 1972.

While there is no warrant here to log each step in each transaction, certain aspects of the land acquisition process may be noted. The dealings with Bay, Paules, Oliver and the owners of tiny parcels Urbach, Shoemaker and Flannery were relatively fast and uncomplicated. The two Bay properties, the first to be acquired, were historically important, one along the North Platte River south of the Old Army Bridge, the other along the south bank of the Laramie River, east of the Foote property, where there are distinct Oregon Trail remains. The Oliver and Paules properties consolidate NPS holdings along the Platte River, the latter being at the junction with the Laramie River. The Urbach and Shoemaker parcels protect the approaches to the Old Army Bridge, and the Flannery sliver corrected a surveyor discrepancy in the northwest corner of the original Monument. (See Appendix Map)

The Jack Gregg property connected the approach road scene between the two Bay tracts. While he was a willing seller, his legal affairs were in such turmoil that it took a lot of time and exchanges of correspondence with his attorneys and the U. S. attorneys to unravel the skein and clear the title.

Gurney Gregg controlled lands between the Laramie Canal and a line joining the south boundary of the old National Monument and the Foote property, vitally important to consolidate the plans for a Visitor Center -

headquarters complex on the right bank of Laramie River. He owned 3,400 acres of ranchland and it wouldn't be supposed that he would miss 26 acres but it happened that the 26 acres was his operating headquarters and controlled water rights to Deer Creek, so the elements of severance damage and relocation costs were factors. Although amicable relations prevailed throughout, the problem with the Greggs was the awkward gap between adjusted appraisals and asking price (maximum \$56,000), and some effort by the owner to enlist political backing for his position. Settlement was finally achieved when Gurney's lawyer convinced him that going to court would cost him more money than he would gain.

The large Foote tract was vitally important because, north of the Laramie it included historic building sites (the Quartermaster area, corrals, stables, telegraph office, approaches, etc.) and south of the Laramie it included most of the future headquarters complex, modern approaches, and Oregon Trail routes. It is probably not surprising that negotiations for this largest and most important single holding were protracted for several years and, while amicability prevailed on the surface, there were understandable tensions. Again, no purpose would be served in detailing the see-saw history of the negotiations, which involved appraisals and counter-appraisals, offers and counter-offers, until it became entirely predictable that each time the Superintendent and his backers attempted to reach Sophia Foote's price she would jack up her price again, just out of reach. This tiresome game was ended on November 22, 1966 when she signed for final sale, following Thomas Kornelis' letter from San Francisco advising her that if she didn't sign within two weeks the Service would file a declaration of taking, leaving the price up to the courts.

The Foote stand-off resulted in two actions by her and sons which were adverse to the purpose of historic preservation, and demonstrate the need for Federal legislation which would restrain private owners from such adverse action after the lands have been Congressionally authorized for purchase, regardless of deferred purchase. Knowing that the Government required the land for the benefit of posterity, and knowing that their actions were destructive, even though not technically illegal, they destroyed evidence of Oregon Trail remains on the south side of the Laramie River by creating bull-dozed "fishing ponds," presumably with commercial purposes in mind. And on the north side they destroyed much of the old military dump by plowing it up recklessly to collect bottles and other relics which abounded there. This latter action was understood to be at the behest of commercial collectors who figured to be just one step ahead of NPS enforcement of the Antiquities Act of 1906, making such vandalism (on federal lands) a federal crime. According to the beleaguered Superintendent, these deplorable actions "were not forestalled by appeals to their nobler nature." [\[153\]](#)

It is regrettable that consummation of the land purchase program had to end on this sour note. To mix metaphors, it was a tarnished victory, but finally the NPS had control of the entire area of historic Fort Laramie, including the 1876 iron bridge and intermediate lands leading to the future development area. Now it also controlled historic ground along the Laramie River from its mouth upstream for over two miles to the county road which defines the western boundary.

"Public relations" is a rather nebulous activity that covers a lot of Superintendents' sins, and its definition can be stretched to cover the whole spectrum of administrative activities, since these are all subject to public scrutiny. In Sharp's case the major events restoration, refurbishing, and land acquisition took care of themselves with routine recognition by the media. But the principal "PR" was the consecutive accumulation of over 1,100,000 visitors from 1961 through 1972, all of them customers who were not only satisfied but

thrilled by what they beheld at the resurrected "Old Fort." With this kind of clientele coming in and swarming all over you, who needs to go out and blow bugles? However, a few examples of conscious activity in the PR department may be foot-noted.

Relationships with the Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department were strengthened by a cooperative project on Fort Fetterman and Fort Bridger, requested by Director Lola Homsher. In May, 1962 Mattes and Gann, accompanied by State personnel, made a site study of both historical properties, and came up with specific recommendations for restoration measures which were later substantially adopted and acted upon by the State. In March 1964 McDermott assisted Paul Henderson of the newly formed Wyoming Recreation Commission on these projects. Later Bob Murray gave research assistance to this Commission on several other of its projects, and this activity was a factor in his later resignation to work full time as a consultant. [\[154\]](#)

The Lake Guernsey Museum problem came full circle in 1964 and 1965 when representatives of the State Recreation Commission requested the return of exhibits retrieved by the Park Service in 1955 putting some on display and some in storage. The Park Service was persuaded that a new era had dawned at Guernsey, so consented to the release, and in November 1965 Bob Murray assisted in the return and re-installation of the old but still artistic Western Museum Laboratory exhibits. This, of course, freed space for an expansion of Fort displays. [\[155\]](#)

After the 1964 dedication there were a few minor but mentionable special events. On August 14, 1966 the 50th Anniversary of the National Park Service was observed by a gathering of about 400 history-minded folks to listen to a symposium which included Professor T. A. Larson of Wyoming University and Don Rickey of the Park Service. In April 1967 the Cheyenne Centennial Wyoming Train passed through, a token celebration of that "Magic City's" 100th birthday. In June, 1972 there were busloads of members of the Council on Abandoned Military Posts, convening at Denver, who came up to see the Fort; a highlight of this affair was an Army-style lunch served to the group by Fort personnel, courtesy of the Fort Laramie Association. [\[156\]](#)

More on the order of entertainment than celebration were four movie events, all in one banner year 1964. In June ABC used Fort Laramie as "surrogate" for Fort Abraham Lincoln, North Dakota in a film about Custer and the Indian Wars. In October Warner Brothers, producers of the film "Cheyenne Autumn" based on the Mari Sandoz history of the break-out from Oklahoma in 1878, utilized the Fort as scenic backdrop, and had a TV publicity extravaganza, with Indians, stagecoaches, "stars", about 600 extras, and 2,000 spectators, including Governor Cliff Hansen. A St. Louis camera crew filmed Fort Laramie for a JNEM interpretive film, and a British Broadcasting Company was also "on location." [\[157\]](#)

In 1964 also occurred the death of L. G. (Pat) Flannery, one of the godfathers of Fort Laramie National Monument, while 1970 saw the death of Meade Sandercock, whom Sharp described as "the last direct link with Fort Laramie Army days." These old-timers lived long enough to learn that (in 1963) the Bureau of Reclamation was initiating studies for a proposed Gray Rocks Reservoir, with a dam which would be built just eight miles up the Laramie River. The thought of such a project, inundating the Laramie River Valley, creating power plants which would smudge up the western horizon with their smoke, and threatening the integrity of Fort Laramie itself, would be enough to make any old-timer, or western history enthusiast,

blanche or turn over in their graves, as the case might be. Confronting new threats of this nature, perhaps the inevitable consequence of "progress," would be a primary challenge to Sharp's successors.

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

9. Richard H. Maeder, Superintendent, 1973-1977

Superintendent Maeder's incumbency was just over four years, from June, 1973 to September, 1977. The expiration of his term rather neatly fills out the first 40 years of Fort Laramie in public ownership, beginning with the State of Wyoming acquisition in April, 1937. The 40th Anniversary of National Park Service management will be July 16, 1978 when a new Superintendent will have been in office just a little over six months. Hopefully he will be around long enough to emulate the enviable record of conscientious productivity and stewardship of his predecessors. By whatever kindly Providence or quirk of Fate (since NPS management cannot always bat 100 percent in the selection of park area Superintendents), Fort Laramie Superintendents have always been a special breed.

Dick Maeder, who began his career with the NPS as a seasonal ranger at Mount Rushmore, has been a ranger at Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, and an interpretive specialist in Washington, D.C. He transferred to Fort Laramie from the Arizona State Office at Phoenix; from Fort Laramie he went on to become Superintendent of Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas. [\[158\]](#)

While there was some historic preservation work during Maeder's incumbency, this was more a period of consolidation of long-term gains, of stabilizing operational methods and procedures, and laying the groundwork for major new developments which would mark the culmination of many decades of hopeful planning. It was also a time of geographical re-orientation, management-wise, for in 1974 a new Rocky Mountain Regional Office was created in Denver, superseding the old Midwest Regional Office in Omaha to control National Park Service operations in Wyoming and other mountain states.

There are several ways to measure progress, and one is statistical. In four decades how well has the NPS discharged its responsibility of preserving and restoring Fort Laramie? Well, to actually preserve, stabilize, and restore, it has spent an approximate total of \$550,000. If we are to update the valuation of all funds expended for this express purpose since 1950, and considering the fact that most of the major restoration was accomplished in the period 1950-1963, at relative bargain rates, the total valuation in 1978 would exceed \$3,000,000.

What about costs of operation as a criterion? In 1939 Custodian Lombard received a salary of \$2,000 out of

a total Fort Laramie budget of less than \$3,000. The 1960 budget of \$37,500 included Superintendent Ringenbach's salary of around \$8,000. In 1977 Superintendent Maeder earned as much in one month as Lombard did in a year, or about eight times as much as Superintendent Hieb's salary when he initiated the effective Restoration Program in 1950. This, of course, reflects the phenomenon of inflation and not a differential in degree of responsibility. To some extent this is true of operational funds also. In 1978 the Fort Laramie budget for operations, including maintenance and all other recurring costs, was \$325,000, which is over 100 times the initial Lombard budget. But inflation is only part of the story here. The magnified budget also reflects the fact that there is a lot more to take care of in 1978 than there was in 1939. The difference is that the restoration program has matured, so to speak, and along with that there is a corresponding increase in both public and official awareness of the value of Fort Laramie, in both monetary and spiritual (or, if you prefer, inspirational) terms. This greatly heightened awareness is reflected also in the visitor "body count" which grew from 4,000 in 1939 to over 150,000 in 1972, which gives us a respectable multiplier of 40 or an increase of 4,000 percent.

Another way to measure progress since 1939 (actually 1940, the first budget year) is in staffing. Lombard's staff was a total of one himself. Maeder's staff was a total of 12 permanent, plus nine seasonals or other nonpermanent classifications, like "temporary full-time" or "permanent less than full time." So according to whether you are looking at winter or summer staffing, it has increased by 1,200 or 2,000 percent. Now while to some extent the restoration and operating costs reflect inflation, the visitor count and the size of staffing do not. They are the best measure of the progress of 40 years, and the conclusion is that it has been phenomenal.

The 1978 staff of career employees consists of the following positions: Superintendent, Supervisory Historian, Park Technician, Museum Curator, Administrative Officer, Clerk-typist, Supervisory Technician (Chief of Guards), three Guards, Maintenance Foreman and Maintenance Worker. Those "other than permanent" include the following categories: park technicians, park aids, clerk-typist, laborers, museum aids, and guards. [159] The Superintendent would be the first to tell you that he is understaffed. He wouldn't be a good Superintendent if he didn't tell you that, and he is undoubtedly right, depending upon how you define the workload. But over 20 employees is a marked improvement over a grand total of one, by any measurement. The area doubled in size in 1960 but the new area is mainly vacant land and you don't allocate employees on the basis of acreage; if you did Glacier Bay and Death Valley would have thousands of employees and Fort Laramie would go back to just one!

It is significant that the largest category of present permanent employees is in the area of protection or, to use the preferred current term, "security." There are five permanent guards (including their supervisor and one "less than full time") designated as such plus a variable number of seasonal guards. With the assistance of other employees who "keep an eye on things" while they perform other duties, Fort Laramie now has total security in human terms, that is, at least one person on the premises at all times, and at least two for seven months of the year, that is, seven days a week, and 24 hours per day. There could be no better evidence of Government recognition that Fort Laramie is something of great and irreplaceable value than this blanket security system. [160]

From 1939 to 1967 "security" was theoretically achieved by residency of the Custodian/Superintendent, and for some time also the maintenanceman, in the Cavalry Barracks. But by general consent this historic

building was vacated in the latter year when Sharp moved to Torrington, and that meant that guards had to be stationed on the premises during the 16 hours a day when regular employees weren't present. Anticipating this, Lewis Eaton was the first night-time guard (then designated "park aid") in 1966. Since that time the permanent guard staff has grown to the present five: George Hill, Octavius Calgiore, Ernest Pratt, John Sullivan, and Kenneth Weber, the latter being supervisor and having the longest term of guard service. (Eaton has been converted to interpretive services, as Park Technician.)

Guard duties consist primarily of periodic patrols, both around the historic building complex and the total area, each guard being equipped with a 2-way radio. While those on patrol must be prepared to meet any emergency, the permanent guards are the only ones who are qualified with recognized "law enforcement authority." According to Weber, this is achieved only by 400 class-room hours in law enforcement given at a Federal training center at Brunswick, Georgia.

Security problems pertaining to buildings, the prime resource, are theft, vandalism, and fire. The wealth of historic furnishings are a great temptation, of course, to unscrupulous collectors or pranksters. Historic objects, principally guns, have been stolen, and one case of a stolen child's doll from Officers Quarters A was successfully prosecuted. The use of replica furnishings rather than originals in buildings with free access, as in the Old Bakery and the Old Guard house, helps to reduce the risk. [161]

Vandalism is almost nil but, to be sure, only because of the constant presence of uniformed personnel. Fire is the biggest threat, from smoking, spontaneous combustion, or lightning. Nonsmoking in the historic buildings is rigidly enforced, and an effort is made to eliminate combustible materials. Lightning rods are supposed to neutralize a strike but if lightning does strike (as it has done in recent years to Officers Quarters E) there is a good water supply, well-placed hydrants, and fire-fighting apparatus on the ready: one pumper for structural fires, one "wild fire" truck, and one foam generator. Should a fire start, of course, everything depends on early detection, and the instant assemblage of manpower. There is also an argument for the installation of burglar and fire detection devices, which would require bringing electricity to the historic buildings, as well as an argument for a heating system for the buildings, individually or collectively, to assure the ideal temperature and humidity for the fabric of the structures as well as the furnishings. We can only caution that anything can be overdone. Too much mechanical security can itself violate historic values which at Fort Laramie have thus far, over the decades, remained inviolate. [162]

While the types of threat posed by disorderly conduct, riot, or malicious destruction for fanatic reasons seem remote from this tranquil place, it is a historic fact that Fort Laramie was threatened, at least verbally, in 1973 and again in 1975 by radical members of the American Indian Movement who have a record of illegal occupancy and destruction, as at Wounded Knee, South Dakota and Shiprock, New Mexico. Outside law enforcement agencies are, of course, alert to such threats and would converge on the Fort in a hurry if needed. In an age of sociological upheaval accentuating the rights of special groups with historic grievances, it would take only one such group, or one individual fanatic, to destroy one or more Fort Laramie buildings.

There are just two things that Fort Laramie is "all about." One is "the resource", the physical evidence of past glory which the NPS is charged by Congress to preserve, the other is the human resource. The main indispensable part of the human resource is the visitor whose taxes help pay for parks like this and who comes to gain knowledge and inspiration. His numbers now exceed 100,000 a year, and since the peak year

of 1972 of over 150,000 seem to have stabilized within this range. The other facet of the human resource is the park staff as well as NPS employees elsewhere who contribute in various ways. Park employees are the catalytic agent that make it work. Some administer, some protect, some build, restore, and maintain, but the ones who deal directly with the patron, the Great American Visitor, are those involved in Visitor Services, or Interpretation. Like Charlie Sharp in his later years, Dick Maeder has had the opportunity to experiment and expand in this field, now that the primary restoration job has been 95 percent achieved.

If the area were unattended the visitor could get along somewhat, as he was compelled to do, for example, in those days when lone Custodians Lombard and Borreson were away on other business. But that was when there was only a group of empty unrestored buildings. Now all buildings are stabilized and restored to a large degree, and some are full-fledged historic house museums. So the visitors' experience must be organized, with best possible interpretive effect, i.e., to convey knowledge and appreciation of and even reverence for this colorful segment of our past. This means employees, and those primarily responsible for the effectiveness of visitor services are the Superintendent and his Supervisory Historian. Maeder has been strongly people-oriented, as have his successive Historians, William Henry, Jr., and Douglas C. McChristian. Lew Eaton and Jim Petty among permanents, and Paul Hedren and Tom Lindenmier among nonpermanents have played active front-line roles.

The main elements of visitor routine that have evolved to 1978 follow the pattern of parking near the Cavalry Barracks (at the 40-year old "temporary parking area"), visit the "temporary museum" in the Commissary Storehouse which gives insights into Fort history, and obtain orientation from the uniformed attendant there. The "main course" then is a self-guided tour of the historic buildings, where interior furnishings can be viewed either through transparent plastic outside doors, or through transparent plastic shields over room doors, viewed from hallways. Leaflet, guide-booklets, and signs aid in interpreting these exhibits in situ. Then you return to your car, sometimes paying a return visit to the museum to ask questions or buy literature displayed by the Fort Laramie Association. (Other aspects of Fort history are touched on at the Old Army Bridge and along the county and park approach roads.) To serve visitors during regular hours in the summer there is a Living History program interpreters in period dress.

Living History requires "props" (costumes and equipment), a lot of painstaking research to ensure accuracy, and trained "actors" who must have some native talent as well as training. Also this interpretive form exists only when these trainees are on duty, so in comparison with fixed exhibits it has the disadvantage of being transitory, that is, something that may or may not occur during your visit. (The one thing that is there all the time is the automated series of bugle calls, from reveille to taps, which sound off at regular intervals.) However, at Fort Laramie in particular, because of emphasis on accuracy as well as enthusiasm, it has been an effective new dimension, stressing aspects of garrison life as counterpoint to the broad sweep of frontier military history. Data for the following abstract on the evolution of the Fort's Living History program was supplied by Doug McChristian:

The Living History program began in 1966 under Murray. This simply involved seasonal rangers in NPS uniforms periodically firing historic weapons.

The following summer the demonstrations were extended to include seasonals Ken Korte and Glenn Burkes wearing replica Army uniforms. Clothing and accoutrements, mostly originals,

were the subjects of talks at the 1876 Guardhouse.

In 1968 Tom White became Supervisory Historian. Demonstrations continued at the New Guardhouse with a cavalry trooper and an infantry sergeant of the mid-seventies speaking about soldier life, and using firearms.

A new and popular dimension was added in 1969 when the Sutler's Store and Bar-rooms were refurnished and opened to the public. Keith Beers in civilian costume was stationed there to interpret the many facets of this establishment. Cavalry and infantry weapons demonstrations continued at the New Guardhouse on a regular schedule.

Bill Henry transferred here from Custer Battlefield in 1969 to assume direct responsibility for the program the following year. He brought technical skill as well as enthusiasm to the job. Under his influence the program took on new dimensions and greater attention to authenticity.

In 1971 a soldier field camp was added, to be manned by soldiers throughout the summer. They portrayed rigors of campaign life through discussion of clothing, equipment, food, weapons, and field service. That year also Volunteers in the Parks program began. Mrs. Nadya Henry portrayed the role of an officer's wife.

In 1972 an officer's maid began interpreting facets of the role of women employed at the post. Lewis Eaton took over the role of the post trader's clerk, a job he has held to the present time (1978). Lance Grobowski was hired to portray a "mountain man" or fur trapper. He camped on the bank of the Laramie, living in his tipi day and night, and demonstrating Indian and fur trade crafts.

In June and July, 1972 two special weapons demonstrations were held. The original Gatling gun was fired with ball ammunition, Also, interpreters from other western military areas assembled here at invitation of the Fort Laramie staff (then Sharp, Henry and Hedren). Visitors included McChristian from Fort Larned and Lindenmier from Fort Fetterman State Park.

Discussion initiated at the 1972 meeting led to the concept of the Military Arts Camp of Instruction. After two years struggle to get official sanction and funding, Henry coordinated the first camp at Fort Laramie, June, 1974. A second course in 1975 was hosted by Fort Davis, Texas. The third camp was again conducted at Fort Laramie in 1976. About 20 participants became totally immersed in a recreation of soldier life during the Indian wars, spending four days in the Cavalry Barracks and two days on a march up Deer Creek.

In the summer of 1973 a company garden was introduced to provide insight on Army diet and supply problems. A prisoner, under guard, did hard labor at a woodpile. The full-time use of the Old Bakery was the major addition to the 1974 season. In 1975 a cavalry trooper demonstration was initiated by Tom Lindenmier, who provided his own horse and equipment.

Bill Henry transferred to Fort Larned in September, 1975, being replaced by Doug McChristian from Fort Davis. During the 1976 Bicentennial season the program continued in full swing. A sentry was added at the Old Guardhouse, to interpret Army discipline, the judicial system, and punishments.

In 1977 the cavalry trooper act was revived as the park acquired two horses, and two complete sets of replica equipment. An infantry soldier explained his different role. A company laundress scene was set up between the Bakery and the New Guardhouse. Three buildings Store, Bakery, and Guardhouse, were manned on a full-time basis. [163]

Living history interpreters visited area schools upon request, during the period 1969 to 1974, to explain garrison life. In the latter year this activity was suspended due to the energy crisis.

In 1973 there was an experimental "moonlight tour", and since then there have been two such tours scheduled annually, on a reservation basis. (Obviously this primarily benefits local visitors since most tourists come from distant places on a random basis, just passing through). An 1876 atmosphere prevails on these unique tours.

Special 4th of July observances have been staged annually since 1973, with such attractions as ceremonial raising and lowering of the 37-star flag of 1876, gun salutes, Army encampments, free cider and sarsaparilla at the Sutler's Store, free Army bread at the Bakery, 19th century games (sack races, greased pole, etc.), fashion shows, band concerts, and speeches. This is of course mainly a Fort Laramie regional community affair which has become a praiseworthy tradition. On Independence day in the Bicentennial year a crowd of over 3,000 showed up. Other events relating to the Bicentennial included the arrival on September, 1975 of the east-bound Pennsylvania Bicentennial Wagon Train, witnessed by another 3,000, before suspending their act for the winter. On May 24, 1976 this same train departed from the Fort and continued crosscountry to Valley Forge in time for the festivities there on July 4. In June 1976 Old Bedlam was the setting for the climax of a re-enactment of the famous Portugee Phillips ride from Fort Phil Kearny in 1866 (only that was in late December!) In August a "Bicentennial Bottle Show" (a display of antiques rather than an occasion for conviviality) attracted over 2,000 visitors. [164]

A few other observances of special interest may be mentioned. In June, 1974 there was a Governor's Day, the place swarming with 1,500 members of the Wyoming National Guard and the Casper Drum and Bugle Corps. That year also a philatelic exhibit was set up under sponsorship of the Wyoming Bicentennial Commission, and the U. S. Postal Service had a one-day stand at the old Fort Laramie post office in the Sutler's Store to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the military post founding. In June, 1976 the area hosted the Rocky Mountain Department of the Council on Abandoned Military Posts, led by attorney William VanDuzer of Denver. At the banquet in Torrington attended also by staff members, Merrill J. Mattes of Littleton, Colorado (Denver Service Center retiree, and Fort Laramie's first Historian and Custodian) gave a talk on the beginnings and early days of the National Monument, previewing his upcoming Park History project.

Each autumn the Fort plays host to the Senior class in Planning, Recreational Department, College of Forestry, Colorado State University, shepherded by Professor Art Wilcox. Similar classes and seminars have

shown up from other institutions of higher learning, Michigan State and Wyoming University among them, and the Fort is frequently visited and the staff consulted by members of the Wyoming Historical Department and the Wyoming Recreation Commission, who handle state exhibits and historical properties, respectively. Fort Laramie, in other words, has become a mecca for historic preservation and park planning students and experts alike, who come to see a model historical park in action. [\[165\]](#)

Fort Laramie has not been untouched by the supernatural. Maeder soberly reported to his superiors that on October 7, 1976 he had seen "the Fort Laramie ghost," along with "15 members of the Cheyenne Westerners who had joined a few locals for a ghost watch on the second floor of Old Bedlam." He characterized the group as "a prestigious and sane group of people whose testimony could be relied upon." This ghost, of course, had to be the diaphanous daughter of the American Fur Company manager of 1847 who, according to the legend reported by Superintendent Hieb as told to him by Colonel F. W. Allison in 1951, went on a horseback ride and never returned (Sob!). Every seven years however, on a full moonlight night, the ghost of horse and rider reappears. Sure enough, on this occasion said horse and rider were seen crossing the parade ground. "They disappeared near the Laramie River and were not seen again." Now Maeder and the respected Westerners don't drink, and they are known to be worshippers at the altar of historical accuracy. Therefore we can only assume (since we cannot bring ourselves to believe that this was a "put-up job") that what they saw was either "the Spirit of '76" (western version) or a stranger who was trespassing, coincidentally, on Government property. The really impressive thing is that the audience gathered beforehand, in expectation of seeing the Fort Laramie ghost, and her poignant apparition was right on schedule. Amazing! [\[166\]](#)

We will not dwell on the character of the "temporary museum" exhibits except to note that they reflect the annual upgrading efforts of the interpretive staff. It may receive criticism from alleged experts who consider it "old-fashioned," but if that's a criticism, it's the way visitors like it, and they spend a lot of time there. Among the more effective displays are those of coins and buttons, uniforms and weapons, and the vivid and illuminating contemporary photographs which research workers have discovered. Also, the Commissary museum is the only place on the premises, outside of a map at the site of Fort John, where visitors learn much of anything about the fur trade period of Fort Laramie. [\[167\]](#)

More pertinent to the historical perspective is the status of the museum collection and what happened to it since Jim Petty assumed the curatorship in 1965. In effect, the main thing that's happened to it is that the bulk of the uncatalogued cumulative collection has been declared surplus and has been disposed of, leaving some 13,500 of the more valuable catalogued items. Murray claimed a total of over 100,000 items in his day, though Petty thinks the grand total was more nearly like 80,000. The number isn't so impressive, mathematically, when we remember that this included every bullet casing, every bit of broken glass, and every fragment of anything. It seems that around 1965 the Harper's Ferry Center, which calls the shots in the museum department, mandated that large field collections (which means all items not on display at the moment) had to be inventoried, and then all items deemed either worthless or surplus to legitimate area needs were to be disposed of through standard Board of Survey procedures. Accordingly, there have been at least three such Surveys, one with Murray and two with Petty. Items condemned by hopefully qualified staff members can be destroyed or taken to a dump, presumably. Bob Murray moved at least two truckloads of such items away from the area to points not of record. However, items which have any conceivable value to others have been offered liberally to other areas of the National Park system, such as Colonial, Scotts Bluff, and Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, to state agencies, and to local museums. Sometimes articles of

value which are nevertheless surplus have been exchanged with other parks, agencies, or museums. [168]

Because of storage limitations in the present, and probably also in the future, there are two categories of museum items which tend to be burdensome—oversize items such as furniture and transportation gear not displayable, and general collections from official archeological projects. Although there have always been strict standards as to accepting only authentic items, the definition of such items is subject to individual interpretation and, unless a given item is proven to be a genuine Fort Laramie original, its indefinite retention in a field collection or "study collection" tends to be costly in space and therefore monetary terms. Accordingly "white elephants" are among the likeliest targets for Board of Survey actions. As to archeological collections, while in theory all items of a given provenience should be retained in "study collection" status, in practice some of the more scroungy fruits of archeology are felt to be a drug on the market, of little or no research value, and therefore disposable. There is a new policy of sometimes reburying such a collection in vaults or barrels, and the site recorded on a map and photos in the catalog. This treatment was given to most of the items yielded by the Rustic Hotel dig of 1972. [169]

Although there was accessioning, cataloguing, and marking of sorts in earlier years, going back to the CCC and ERA projects of 1938-1939, scientific record-keeping in accordance with Service-wide standards did not begin until 1958-1959 when Regional Curator Newell F. Joyner inaugurated the new system. This has been followed by Rex Wilson, Bob Murray and Jim Petty. All records and markings prior to 1958 have been incorporated into the new system. This hinges on four basic forms of recording—the Accession Book, the Accession File, the Catalog, and the Locator files.

The Accession Book simply records the sequence of accessions beginning with Number 1 on September 12, 1939 when the Harmeier family donated miscellaneous things found on the premises. There are (as of October, 1977) 543 accession files or file folders. The number is misleading because some accessions may represent the donation of only one item while others may represent large and diverse collections, with hundreds of pieces. The overall collection (minus the 100,000 odd pieces, plus or minus, surplused since 1965) was assembled from the following sources: (1) intermittent official archeological projects between 1938 and 1972; (2) surface finds by Government personnel; (3) donations by private individuals; (4) donations by or exchange with other parks or other State and Federal agencies; (5) purchases by the Fort Laramie History Association or the National Park Service, including purchases with funds from the Virginia Hill Donation account. (The Hill assemblage, the most valuable part of the entire collection, is covered under only one accession number, though the items catalogued exceed 1,000 and still growing.)

Items in the collection, from beads, bullets, and bottles to guns, uniforms, toys, chintz curtains, buffalo robes, paintings, and pianos, cover virtually every type of historical specimen in the NPS classification system. Among the most recent items acquired are an 1849-model mountain howitzer and 1876 Gatling gun, gun carriages, limber with ammo chest, pack saddles, and harness. (If men and horses could be rounded up, it seems there is now enough gear to start another Indian campaign.) The most visible part of the collection consists of the furniture and furnishings in the Sutler's Store, Old Bedlam, Old Bakery, Old Guardhouse, and Officers Quarters A, E, and F, plus wagons, ordnance, and heavy equipment displayed in the New Guardhouse, the Magazine, and on the parade ground; and of course whatever items are on exhibit in the Commissary building museum. The rest is in storage mainly in that same building, along with the Curator's office and laboratory. [170]

All items have been assigned monetary value according to the staff curator's knowledge of the antique market, with minimum valuations of \$1. Items deemed to be worth in excess of \$100 are recorded and listed as accountable Government property. Given valuations, of course, are generally behind actual current values on the collectors' market. Petty believes that the theoretical value of the entire collection is in the neighborhood of \$100,000. That much alone has gone into the Hill Collection. It seems that the figure could be doubled or tripled also on the strength of extra value accruing from the mere fact of association with historic Fort Laramie. [\[171\]](#)

A new furnishing project underway in 1977 is the Magazine, to store ordnance and supplies of the period circa 1867, for which an original inventory is available as guide. Meanwhile furnishings for the Cavalry Barracks blankets, gun holsters, canteens, and whatnot are being gradually assembled against the final restoration of that building's interior, scheduled for 1980. As of January 1, 1978 about \$35,000 remained in the Hill Donation account, which should easily finish the job. The only refurnishing of surviving historic buildings beyond that would be for the Commissary Storehouse itself, as, if, and when it may be vacated. [\[172\]](#)

The Fort Laramie Historical Association (FLHA) has continued to flourish over the years, becoming ever more prosperous. When Sharp EOD gross sales were \$2,000 per annum; when Maeder EOD they had grown to \$22,000. The figure for 1977 is right at \$40,000. This of course reflects the general prosperity of the country as well as the visitor upswing, but it is a rather amazing figure for a small operation. Adults and children alike seem to have a compulsion to buy something. Maeder professed to be in awe of "the unrestrained buying power of the general public." [\[173\]](#)

What do they buy? Whatever items the Association offers, mainly books, of which about 65 titles are listed in the inventory. Because the cost of hardcovers has floated up out of sight the bulk of offerings are paperbacks which now retail at the same prices that hard covers once did. In the spirit of the law which authorizes Associations such as this, sale items are required to have a tangible relationship to the area theme. However, since the history of Fort Laramie spans that of the entire frontier of the Northern Plains, 1834-1890, that legitimizes a pretty wide range of historical subjects. There is substantial profit also in the sale of post cards, film, memorial coins, and philatelic items. Miscellaneous sale items include replica military insignia, sunbonnets, clay pipes, china doll kits, and pewter soldiers. Some of these items have been offered for sale at the Sutler's Store during the summer season.

What does the Association, a non-profit organization, do with their profits? For the 6-year period 1971 to 1976, when gross sales ranged between \$20,000 and \$38,000 plus for a total of \$169,000, the Association disbursed \$25,000 of their net profits, or 15 percent of gross sales, in ways benefitting the Fort's research and interpretive program. One of the more important ways is to contribute directly to the effectiveness of the Living History program, by buying period costumes, equipment, and accessories, and paying for the cleaning bills. Other expense items include some temporary museum exhibits, framing, photo reproduction, microfilming and Xeroxing of research materials, subscriptions to newspapers and periodicals, membership in organizations like the Highway 26 Association, and miscellaneous expenses that would be awkward to handle administratively, pertaining to public celebrations and special tours and gatherings. The Association pays for the cost of reproducing photos and other items for outside researchers and mailing them out, for nominal reimbursement. It also publishes a handsome color-tone tour guide.

Doubtless the biggest, or at least the most enduring contribution by the Association is the Fort Laramie Library. The great bulk of the books here have been purchased by the Association and donated to the Government. This is one of the finest specialized libraries in the National Park system. It began in a modest way with Superintendent Hieb who began Association activities, and accelerated under Sharp, Maeder and their Supervisory Historians as FLHA profits soared. Although covering most all aspects of Western frontier history, it is specially strong in the areas of the Indian Wars, the frontier Army, and rare military manuals. Rare items are kept under lock and key. Among these are a fairly complete set of all historical, archeological, architectural and restoration project reports pertaining to Fort Laramie going back to 1938. Most of these reports are one-of-a-kind and together they constitute a unique and priceless assemblage of specialized knowledge about the Fort's history and its restoration. The Association pays for the hardcover binding of these reports, as well as the binding of periodical series and the re-binding of old books as required. [174]

The Library contains around 2,500 carefully catalogued books, as well as bound periodicals and reports, and the small space allotted to it in the Commissary building results in shelf space being jammed (particularly in the locked cases) and gives anyone searching for titles in the cramped aisles a sense of claustrophobia. Because of the extreme importance of this research library (coupled with the bulky official research files, photographs, card indexes, maps, microfilm, and Xeroxed material which are now separate from the Library) it will be a tragic error if planners and architects who design the future headquarters building fail to provide adequate space for a Fort Laramie Library and Research Center which needs room also for future growth. The combined Fort Laramie Library and research collection, to which the Association contributed so heavily, is a historical resource commensurate in importance to the physical remains of the Fort, because it contains most of the basic data which made the Restoration possible.

The FLHA, with a fluctuating membership of around 50 (plus honorary members selected for unusual contributions to the Fort's history, restoration, interpretation, or management), has an annual Sunday meeting at the Fort, formerly in February, but now in November, which is usually well attended by those members of local residence. The Association in fact is an excellent device to enlist the active interest and support of Fort neighbors, young and old alike. It should be noted that proceeds of sales also go to pay for an annual audit as well as summer help at the sales desk. As of 1978, Doug McChristian is the Executive Secretary, while Lew Eaton functions in effect as Librarian and Business Manager.

An impressive amount of research has been accomplished by Park Service historians and archeologists over the decades; it is doubtful if any historical area of the park system has been more thoroughly researched than Fort Laramie. This is not to say that there is no research left to be done. There are always some blanks to be filled in about specific happenings at or near the Fort, 1834-1890, as well as the stern circumstances of fur trade, emigrant, and military life that contrast so starkly with our relatively comfortable world of 1978. Perhaps the major unfinished project, one that would require the close collaboration of historian and archeologist, is the identification and marking of all extinct building sites. A corollary to this is the need to resume the search for Fort William, the first Fort Laramie. Since no trace has been found of the hypothetical site at the early trail crossing of the Laramie, well downstream from the parade ground area, and a recent clue has turned up suggesting that Fort William might, after all, be in the vicinity of the Fort John site and present parade ground, a project to ascertain the validity of this location should be given highest priority.

While no reconstruction of Fort William is contemplated, particularly if it should prove to be under the military site, its "rediscovery" would be a major research achievement, and could greatly enrich the interpretation of the fur trade period. [175]

With regard to the surviving structures which are the principal reason for the Park Service's presence, in compiling data for a 1976 Congressional Briefing Book, Superintendent Maeder refers to the area's principal resource as "14 buildings, 8 standing ruins," which of course conforms with our 1915 and 1937 inventories, since under the National Park Service no historic buildings have been either added or subtracted from the collection they inherited in 1938.

Classifications tend to be arbitrary and wobbly. The present official checklist reads as follows:

<u>Intact Buildings</u>		<u>Ruins</u>
Old Army Bridge	Cavalry Barracks	Sawmill
Commissary Storehouse	Old Guardhouse	Administration Bldg.
New Guardhouse	Old Bakery	Officers Quarters B
Old Bedlam	Sutler's Store	Officers Quarters C
Officers Quarters A	Privy	Officers Quarters D
Officers Quarters E	Chicken House	Hospital
Officers Quarters F	Magazine	Non Com Quarters
		New Bakery

Not included in the above is a standing wall fragment of another unlabelled officers quarters, close to the Magazine. If that isn't a standing ruin, what is it? The New Guardhouse is a standing ruin with a reconstructed roof. So in a sense it is not exactly a ruin but neither is it exactly an intact building. While the Magazine itself seems intact today, it is actually a standing ruin with roof reconstructed to historical specifications. The original 1849 Guardhouse and the 1867 Infantry Barracks are quite visible ruins, one might say "standing foundations." There is no inventory of visible archeological remains; such an inventory must be accomplished by a future survey. These remarks are not meant as quibbles but to point out that definitions are slippery. They will become slipperier if the Park Service succumbs to the temptation to veer away from its long established policy not to reconstruct vanished buildings, such as Fort John or the 1856 Infantry Barracks, or to reconstruct roofs on standing ruins other than the New Guardhouse and the Magazine which was done in each case for special reasons. (The flagpole is another reconstruction which is exceptional.) To summarize, aside from questions of classification, preservation only of authentic ruins and restored original buildings has been the Number 1 goal of the Park Service at Fort Laramie in the past, and should continue so in the future. That has been its principal claim to distinction.

No extensive restoration work per se was undertaken under Maeder, but there was some preservation/restoration activity over and above cyclic maintenance. Most important was "Emergency Repairs, Cavalry Barracks" in 1973, with architectural design work by Russell Jones of the Historic Preservation Team, Denver Service Center, and the \$27,400 day labor job supervised by Earl D. Warthen, a key figure in restoring Old Bedlam and other major structures under Sharp. This was brought on by the alarming

condition of the ancient roof. The project formula: "Remove shingles, replace sheathing as needed, re-shingle with fire retardant treated shingles. Remove non-historic chimneys, replace others destroyed by remodeling. Fabricate and install metal roof ventilators. Early photos of the east elevation show clearly the historic chimney and ventilator arrangement, but no early photo of the west elevation exists. Accordingly only careful analysis of concealed evidence in the fabric itself revealed the existence of the original west side chimneys. The restored roof has seven lime-concrete chimneys extending from bearing walls, three brick chimneys, and four ventilators. The latter were located according to trimouts in original sheathing. (The 1978 budget provides for the HSR and architectural design work to finalize restoration of the Barracks, mainly the scrambled interior, Estimated cost \$400,000.)

The important job in 1974 was "Roof Repairs, Sutler's Store," required by persistent leaking in the roof of this hybrid structure (an inverted "W" profile), composed of early NPS shingles over the adobe and stone sections, and an 1883 corrugated iron roof over the concrete section, with a poorly drained valley between. The Completion Report on this day labor job, which cost \$11,400, summarizes the work. Removal of corrugated iron was difficult because it had been secured by screw type nails. After spraying the sheathing with water-proof compound, weather-board was applied with cement-coated nails, then a layer of rolled rubberoid roofing, and a layer of slate roofing. Original corrugated iron was straightened, cleaned and replaced, leaving breather space under the iron. After removing wood shingles, sheathing sprayed likewise, layer of tarred felt applied, and re-shingled with cedar.

In 1975 Maeder was able to accomplish a bit of "interior restoration" to the Sawmill Ruins. In pre-Park Service times the steam boiler with fire box which once occupied this building was somehow and for unknown reasons removed to the Laramie River bank, in line with the Old Bakery, and it was visible there, partly submerged, in 1938. In 1973 a flood again exposed it to view. With the donated help of the 960th Maintenance Engineers, Wyoming National Guard, and their power crane, the 3-1/2 ton boiler was hoisted from the river and conveyed back to its place of origin within the ruins. "A delicate job," declared Maeder, in thanking the public-spirited Guard. It seems improbable that the Sawmill will ever be restored in a functional way, but it's nice to know that the boiler is back home. [\[176\]](#)

In 1976 there were two ruins stabilization jobs, costing \$21,700. Despite some stabilization work by Hieb and others, the Non Com Quarters, the elongated ruin north of the Hospital, was deteriorating rapidly with some recent sectional collapse. This called for drastic treatment prescribed by Regional Historical Architect Rodd Wheaton. Diamond mesh wire was fastened with galvanized nails to the old grout, and vertical reinforcing steel bars positioned. Form boards were placed at bottom, then elevated one pour line each 24-hour period, to allow for setting of formula concrete mix. There was no reconstruction. Free standing piers and voids remain. Reinforcing bars were employed at corners, Novarat preservative was applied to remaining wooden elements, a few lintels and side bucks and some lath. Stabilization of the General Sink consisted of grouting of low foundation walls, and restoring brick trough in a grout bed, using brick discarded from Bedlam fireplace chimney stacks. [\[177\]](#)

Another 1976 project, accomplished with operating funds, was the erection of a new replica flagpole or flagstaff, purporting to be a typical model of a U. S. Army flagstaff of 1870, as revealed in Signal Corps photographs of other contemporary posts. It is made of two extra-long spliced pine poles from Laramie Peak, donated by the U. S. Forest Service. The 50-star flag is flown normally; a replica 37-star flag of 1876,

on special occasions. The flagstaff location near the New Guardhouse was authenticated by Superintendent Hieb before he erected the iron pole used previously. The stump of one of the original wooden poles is in the museum collection. [178]

In 1977 architects of the Historic Preservation Branch, Denver Service Center, compiled a "Historic Resource Maintenance Guide" for all historic structures, utilizing data fortunately preserved in a series of records and reports by Lombard, Hieb, Ringenbach, Sharp and Gann. The intent is to ensure that maintenance work continues to be historically accurate. The Guide itself seems valuable mainly as a reminder and a basis for systematic scheduling of maintenance. To ensure accuracy of detail, and to avoid erroneous alterations, it seems that reference to the original plans and reports themselves would still be required. [179]

Aside from the continuing challenge to preserve authentically, it seems that there are inherent difficulties in recent preservation and maintenance work. One is the required clearances resulting from Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Maeder complained that such clearances for stabilization work on the Non-Com Quarters and the General Sink took three years! Perhaps the double- and triple-checking involved outweigh the resultant delays, but Fort Laramie would never have been restored at all if every detail of complex restoration projects like the Sutler's Store and Old Bedlam had to be cleared through the State Preservation Officer and then all the way up to the President's Advisory Council and back home again! It is a blessing that most restoration work was accomplished prior to 1966. [180]

Another difficulty confronting the current program is the danger of "maintenance overkill." With everything repaired and painted up to the minute we have a restored Fort looking like it was brand new. Maintenance should not be so "cyclic" that the buildings never have a chance to show some of the authentic patina of age. We should not lose sight altogether of the fact that in old Army days the Quartermaster was forever complaining about the poor condition of his buildings. Rarely were they reported to be in "good condition." We don't want them to be again in "poor condition" but neither should we require that they forever look brand new and sparkling.

The same need for a historical perspective applies to landscaping. In 1974 the chronically anemic parade ground trees were once more replaced by a professional tree crew, and they have been watered vigorously ever since. Now among proposed projects is one to "turn back the clock" on the Sutler's Store by replacing the 1876 period store exhibit with one dating eight or ten years earlier, the reason given that 1866 is more nearly "the period of maximum importance." If this principle must be invoked on behalf of the Sutler's Store, then why is it so consistently ignored in the case of the parade ground? Prior to the decadent period of the late 1880s, which is well outside the Fort's overall period of maximum importance, the parade ground was devoid of trees.

As for non-historic improvements, the most important development was the construction, in 1975-1976, of a larger concrete bridge over the Laramie, on the approach road to the future Visitor Center. This was built by the Wyoming Highway Department, with design by the Federal Highway Administration. The \$569,000 cost of this vitally needed improvement was split by the two agencies. [181]

In 1973 sections of the new utility road across the Laramie River were washed out by what Maeder calls

"the worst flood on record", as were approaches to the then proposed new public bridge over the Laramie. Emergency repairs were needed at both locations. (The new concrete utility road bridge over the Laramie was not damaged.) [\[182\]](#)

In 1974 approval was obtained to obliterate the abandoned Fort Laramie Ditch Company's open irrigation ditch south of the Hospital, and restore original contours. This was accomplished again with the help of the National Guard, in 1975. At the same time ditch rights over the former Foote property, held by G. W. Holtzclaw, were liquidated at a cost of \$3,500, and that ditch was also obliterated. A rational landscaping improvement was the planting of trees on the far south side of the Laramie to screen the future maintenance area, and likewise on the barren approaches to the new public bridge over the Laramie. [\[183\]](#)

Ironically, the most important feature of the Fort Laramie landscape is not the parade ground area or anything else within the present enlarged park boundaries. The most important thing is the surrounding terrain, the environs of the Fort as far as the horizon in all directions. The reason this is so important is because it provides restored Fort Laramie with a scenic setting of rare authenticity and integrity. The Fort has had the good fortune to be a respectable distance from towns, railroads, or major highways, in a region fit mainly for dry-land farming or ranching. No elevators, silos, gravel quarries, dumps, factories, suburban split-levels, or condominiums. Since the NPS has no control of this surrounding land, it is by sheer accident or happy coincidence that the integrity of these environs has been preserved, providing the NPS with opportunity for vivid interpretation of the historical environs, a proper setting for wagon trains, cavalry columns, Pony Express riders, and Indian caravans. It may not be feasible for the NPS to extend its boundaries to the horizon in all directions to safeguard the historic setting, but there should be a study of ways and means to attain this end, i.e., by being fully alert to the threat of adverse encroachments, by scenic easements, cooperative agreements, and skillful public relations. Proposals or actual projects for dams, power plants, water diversion and distribution systems, high tension lines, radio towers, etc. within sight distance of the Fort or affecting the Laramie River flow, should be monitored religiously and combatted by all legitimate means to safeguard the priceless legacy of Fort Laramie. [\[184\]](#)

Planning future developments for the National Historic Site itself during Maeder's time continued at the same feverish tempo that characterized earlier administrations, with the new Rocky Mountain Regional Office taking the initiative. It seems inappropriate to trace the ups and downs and the convolutions of this cerebral activity since some of the current concepts are in the throes of delayed childbirth which may require a Caesarian operation. It would seem out of order for a Historian who is presumably expert only on the irrevocable past to predict the future. At this moment in history (January, 1978) the two most interesting ideas under discussion are a further extension of park boundaries to encompass most all lands between the present boundaries, the county road, and the Laramie River; and the conversion of the Administration Building ruins into a permanent Visitor Center (with all other modern developments on the south side of the Laramie, in accordance with the long-established orthodox plan.) The latter proposition is of dubious merit, not just because it diverges from the orthodox plan, but because it would be a clear-cut violation of the integrity of the Historic Zone. [\[185\]](#)

It would have been nice to provide a poetic end to this history by reporting the fulfillment of the Canfield Plan of 1940 the completion of a new Visitor Center - Headquarters building on the south side of the Laramie River, near the mouth of Deer Creek, overlooking the parade ground area but so designed itself as

to be unobtrusive from the parade ground. There would be a pedestrian bridge connecting the two areas, and the visitors streaming across it would have happy expressions on their faces. However, that's not history, and it may not even be good prophecy since it hasn't happened yet after nearly 40 years of heavy planning and dreaming, but it's as good a way as any to end this ponderous report.

Almost, but not quite. It would be well to end with the assurance of dreams that have been fulfilled. The Old Fort has been saved, and it has now been beautifully restored. It is on the map as one of the most important historic sites in Western America. But what about a history of this New Fort Laramie, the details of how the Old Fort was saved from extinction, and how it was transformed into the model National Historic Site of today? In January, 1976 Superintendent Maeder submitted an "Outline of Planning Requirements" which included two significant items: "Revised Historical Handbook" and "Documented Park History." Contrary to the usual long interval between thought and deed, in this case the Rocky Mountain Region asked the writer in April, 1976 if he would undertake these two tasks. In June, 1976 the contract was signed. In January, 1977 field research work began. In July the final manuscript for a revised Handbook was submitted, and now (January, 1978) this final draft of a "Fort Laramie Park History" has been completed and delivered. That too is a dream which has now been fulfilled. [[186](#)]

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART III: THE RESTORATION OF FORT LARAMIE

FOOTNOTES

1 - Letter of April 30, 1937, Dan W. Greenburg to Joseph Weppner. Files, Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming, at the Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, Cheyenne (hereafter designated HLCW).

2 - 6th Biennial Report, HLCW, 17.

3 - Ibid., 3.

4 - HLCW Minutes, June 17, 1931; Weppner files, HLCW.

5 - Letter of September 25, 1937, C. E. Randels to the Director, National Park Service (hereafter NPS). Files, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Gering, Nebraska (hereafter SBNM).

6 - Mattes recollections. There was no inventory of furniture or other moveable items inside the buildings until Lombard's arrival in 1939. (In February of that year Fraser reported "practically all historical relics gone.") Our knowledge of what was spirited away prior to that year stems mainly from revelation of Fort Laramie odds and ends in the possession of various neighbors.

7 - Letter of March 2, 1938, Regional Director Tom Allen to C. E. Randels. Telegram of same date. SBNM files.

8 - Acting Regional Director Paul V. Brown to Randels, November 8, 1937; Mattes to Regional Director, November 22, 1937; Historian's Monthly Report for November, 1937. SBNM files.

9 - Brown to Randels, November 8, 1937; Mattes to Regional Director, November 22, 1937; Wilfred Hill Report, December 20, 1937. SBNM files. According to Hill, Mattes and Henderson were to "inventory the ruins." Hill reported also that many local people visited the project, providing information which he recorded.

10 - Letter of May 3, 1938, Dan Greenburg to Director Arno B. Cammerer, NPS. HLCW files.

11 - Randels to Allen, May 3, 1938; Allen to Randels, May 5, 1938; Randels to the Director, May 31, 1938; Cammerer to Randels, January 9, 1938; Mattes to the Director, July 10, 1938. SBNM files.

12 - Randels to Regional Director, Omaha, May 6, 1938; Randels to the Director, Washington, D.C., June 9, 1938. SBNM files.

13 - Telegram of June 22, 1938 Regional Director Allen to Randels; Acting Associate Director Jennings to Mattes, June 22, 1938; Mattes to Regional Director, June 27, 1938; Associate Director A. E. Demaray to Mattes. August 12, 1938; Mattes to Director, August 2, 1938. SBNM files.

14 - Mattes recollections, and reports by E. A. Hummel of the Regional Office. One of the Harmeier girls later married Octavius Calgiore, who had been a CCC boy during the 1938-1939 clean-up, and is now (1978) a Fort Guard.

15 - Acting Regional Director Paul V. Brown to the Director, July 29, 1938, SBNM files. Also, Mattes to the Director, August 2, 1938; Mattes to Regional Director, August 19, 1938; Custodian's Monthly Reports for July and August, 1938, SBNM.

16 - SBNM Daily Log Book, 1938-1939; Custodians' Monthly Report for August, 1938, SBNM files.

17 - General correspondence and Historian's Monthly Reports, December, 1937 to May, 1938, SBNM files. By coincidence, Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen's book, Fort Laramie (Arthur H. Clark Company, Glendale, 1938) was published while Mattes was pursuing his official Fort Laramie research project; he met Hafen in April in the latter's office in the Colorado Historical Society. In addition to library and archival studies, Mattes interviewed old-timers, among them James H. Cook of Agate, Ernest Logan and Russell Thorp of Cheyenne, Mrs. G. Freytag of Sidney, Nebraska whose father was married at Fort Laramie in 1856, and Bill Davis, a dispatch rider for General Crook, who stopped at the Oregon Trail Museum on May 30, "showing head-scars from Indian arrows."

18 - SBNM Daily Log, August, 1938.

19 - Mattes personnel file and recollections; Assistant Superintendent John Doerr, Rocky Mountain National Park (hereafter RMNP) to the Director, Washington, D.C., July 16, 1939, SBNM files.

20 - SBNM Daily Log, September 1938 to January 1939; Humberger's Monthly Reports, September, 1938 to February, 1939, SBNM files; Fraser's Monthly Reports, February to May, 1939, RMNP files at Fort Laramie National Historic Sites (hereafter FLNHS), transferred to the National Monument in 1951, when the Coordinating Superintendency was terminated. This was fortunate, because records kept at the Fort by Fraser and Lombard were badly scrambled, many missing, according to interview with Dave Hieb.

21 - Memorandum (Memo) of March 30, 1939, Ronald F. Lee, Supervisor of Historic Sites and W. G. Carnes, Acting Chief of Planning, Washington Office, to the Director, RMNP files. The Fort Laramie

situation may have been a factor in precipitating the first set of guidelines for historic restoration issued by the National Park Service, in the form of a circular memorandum of June 20, 1938, for Washington and All Field Offices, signed by Cammerer. The emphasis was on the priority of research, and the necessity of close collaboration between historians, archeologists, and architects to ensure authenticity. Copy in SBNM files.

22 - Fraser's Report of January, 1939. RMNP files.

23 - Data pertaining to the Lombard period are derived primarily from his "Custodian's Monthly Narrative Reports," June, 1939 through May, 1944, and general correspondence and reports, RMNP files. Also, personal knowledge and recollections of the author as an active participant in the program. To avoid an undue proliferation of footnotes, we will specifically note further only those items which are sufficiently distinctive to warrant specific documentation.

24 - Both of these high-level inspections are recorded also in SBNM monthly reports, since Custodian Mattes, serving also as FLNM Historian, accompanied them to the Fort.

25 - Custodian of Dinosaur NM at this time was Dan Beard, while Newell F. Joyner was Custodian of Devil's Tower. An incidental but tragic event of this period was the death of Custodian/Historian Mattes' wife, Eleanor, in late January, 1941, from uterine hemorrhage in childbirth, at Scottsbluff. In October, 1942 he married Clara Ritschard of Denver, a RMNP employee.

26 - Historic Base Maps, part of the Master Plan prepared by the Omaha Office, listed all buildings identified by the succession of Army ground-plans, numbering around 180. An arithmetical number was assigned to each building or building site (i.e., Old Bedlam as Building No. 1) but these numbers arbitrarily assigned tend to confuse, and have been little used. Incidentally, the Sawmill has always been so designated despite this statement by Bert Fraser in a memo of November 10, 1939 to Canfield: "The Wildes claim that the building marked on the Base Map as the Sawmill was actually the Pump House, and the Sawmill was south of it. I am inclined to believe they are right." RMNP files. The interview was with Louis Wilde, son of old Joe, then living at Lingle.

27 - Miscellaneous correspondence between Canfield, Lombard and Mattes; Memorandum of July 2, 1940, Historian Ed Hummel to Tom Allen, at Omaha, and Lombard's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1941. RMNP files.

28 - Architect Leslie E. Wilkie to Regional Landscape Architect, report of field trip, May 6-15, 1940, transmitted by Allen to Coordinating Superintendent. RMNP files.

29 - Mitchell Index, August 1, 1940; Lombard's Monthly Report for August, 1940; Mattes' report on trek with officials of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association, Fort Laramie to Jackson Hole, August, 1940, SBNM files. (Mattes rode with Joe Weppner, HLCW; H. W. Jackson rode with Bob Ellison). See also Program "Wyoming Speaks, Historical Pageant Play, presented at Old Fort Laramie, August 15, 1940" in FLNHS research files (Rymill papers).

30 - The Cavalry Barracks underwent extensive changes by occupants Joe Wilde and the Latta Brothers

(tenants for the Clarkes and the Aulds). In a memorandum of November 16, 1939 to the Regional Director, Region Two (later changed to "Midwest Region") Dave Canfield stoutly insisted that criticism by Architect Wilfred Hill about Fraser-Lombard "alterations to the historic structure" were unwarranted, since the structure had already been altered beyond military recognition. He enclosed copy of Fraser's memorandum of November 10 about the extent of Park Service alterations as well as some of the folklore of the converted hotel and saloon. (The RMNP files as well as the Regional Historian's files contain many such gems which must be preserved.)

31 - Although "Living History" is a concept of the late 1960s, it was practiced with a vengeance in the Lombard era when visitors needing a "rest-room" had to manage with an authoritative frontier military model officers toilet. At least they didn't have to use the General Sink reserved for enlisted men!

32 - Memo June 12, 1941, Wilfred Hill to Lombard; Hill report of visit June 29-30 by Ed Preece, Washington Office, Hummel, Hill and Lindauer from Omaha, Ken Mitchell from RMNP; Memo August 30, 1940 A. W. Burney, Acting Chief Engineer, Washington, to Regional Office re: C. E. Randels' "Field Report on Foundation Failure." Memorandum July 16, 1940 Allen to Superintendent. RMNP files.

33 - It has not been possible in this lengthy report to identify all visitors who proved to be valuable informants, so we apologize to anyone reading this history who may feel they have been alighted. It should be stressed that the second generation Sandercocks, mainly Meade and his sisters, who lived at the Fort as children, were perhaps the most important "resource" among many friendly and knowledgeable visiting neighbors. Interview with Ida Mary Melonuk (daughter of Meade Sandercock) at Fort Laramie town, November 11, 1977. See also records of interviews in Fort Laramie research files, and Lombard's memo of December 13, 1940 to the Regional Supervisor of Historic Sites, RMNP files.

34 - Custodian's Monthly Reports; G. H. Smith, Archeological Report, Summer, 1939; Memorandum, A. R. Kelly, Chief, Archeological Sites Division, Washington, to Omaha office, comments on ERA Job Number 12, Archeological Reconnaissance, Fort Laramie"; Jerome Hendron, "An Introduction to the Archeology of Fort Laramie," June, 1941. RMNP files, and FLNHS Library.

35 - Jess H. Lombard, "Old Bedlam", Annals of Wyoming (April, 1941) Merrill. J. Mattes, "Fort Laramie, Guardian of the Oregon Trail," (January, 1945), and "The Sutler's Store at Fort Laramie" (July, 1946), both also Annals of Wyoming.

36 - Some indication is given here of annual appropriations and custodial salaries to record the sharp contrast between funding in "the early days" and the present (1978). No effort has been made to tabulate appropriations and salaries annually.

37 - Old Master Plan files in Curator's Office, Commissary headquarters (1978). Among other significant documents are the report by Landscape Architect Ken Mitchell, RMNP, of field conference of April 9-12, 1941; memo of November 8, 1943, W. E. Robertson to the Regional Director; Development Outline (General Information) and Interpretive Tour Plan, 1942 Master Plan; and Mattes recollections.

38 - Acting Custodian Moomaw's monthly reports for June and July, 1944, RMNP files. According to

Associate Regional Director Baker's memo of August 8, 1944 to the Coordinating Superintendent, Moomaw's per diem was \$5., the same as Mattes got on his frequent trips to Omaha during the War as "Acting Regional Historian." While Moomaw "batched" at the Cavalry Barracks for free, Mattes "batched" in a variety of Omaha hotels which, together with meals, cost him more like \$10. per day out of pocket.

39 - Personnel records, RMNP files. Data in this chapter not otherwise documented are derived from Borreson's monthly reports and Mattes' personal recollections.

40 - Monthly reports, both Fort Laramie and Scotts Bluff NMs; Mattes memo April 3, 1945 to Coordinating Superintendent, RMNP files.

41 - Various memoranda, April 14 to July 7, 1945, between the Custodian, the Coordinating Superintendent, and Regional office, RMNP files.

42 - Correspondence of July and August, 1945, RMNP files. Mattes recollections.

43 - R. F. Lee, like Canfield, had gone off to war, and was out of the picture until 1946. During the War the NPS headquarters was moved to Chicago. Cited correspondence from RMNP files, FLNHS.

44 - It must be pointed out that the writer's thinking about the Master Plan evolved along way between 1944 and 1978, so any accusations of inconsistency are irrelevant!

45 - The position taken by Kahler and Tolson reflect not only a rationalization based on the unstated "need to economize," but also the fact that planning wisdom is not conferred by virtue of being 1,000 miles away from the site. Dr. Waldo Leland of the NPS Advisory Board told Kahler: "As to the iron bridge, I have no strong convictions for its preservation. It came into use after the transcontinental railroad was built and the Oregon Trail was abandoned." (The inference here is that nothing of historical importance ever happened after 1869!)

46 The Canfield Plan, which became the orthodox Master Plan (at least until 1977), with visible buildings and approaching autos across the Laramie, would violate the setting to some degree, but that degree will be kept low by good siting and screening. Elimination of the residential area and hiding the utility area, as well as low-profiling the Visitor Center - Headquarters building, would make the difference. While autos cannot be made invisible, they could be viewed as surrogate covered wagons!

47 - Memo of March 2, 1945 from Baker to Superintendent, RMNP; Report to Regional Landscape Architect, Field trip, June 4-14, 1945, by Halsey M. Davidson; memo November 27, 1945 Borreson to Superintendent; memo December 15, 1945 Baker to Superintendent; Memo December 4, 1945, Mattes to Superintendent, RMNP files.

48 - Letters of May 10 and 15, June 4 and August 6, 1946, Regional Director Merriam to Dr. LeRoy R. Hafen, Collaborator; trip report of June 3, Jerome Miller, Landscape Architect to Regional Director; Mattes "Report on Field Trip, Chicago to Fort Laramie, May 22-24"; memo November 13, 1946, Mattes to Canfield. RMNP files. Mattes recollections. In his report Mattes commented, apropos of proposed boundary

extensions, that "ideally we should take the whole tongue of land between the Laramie and the North Platte Rivers," thus anticipating by 30 years a Master Plan alternative of 1978.

49 - Memo March 19, 1946 Mattes at Scotts Bluff to Superintendent, RMNP; memo April 18 and July 13 Mattes at Chicago to Custodian, FLNM; Custodian's monthly report for July, 1945 revisit by Rymill and Flannery; RMNP files and Mattes recollections.

50 - Custodian's Monthly Report for June, 1946; Mattes recollections.

51 - Custodian's Reports, January to November, 1946; Acting Custodian Darnall's Report for December, 1946; Canfield confidential memo to Merriam, December 28, 1946; RMNP files and Mattes recollections.

52 - Data in this chapter not otherwise documented was derived from Dave Hieb's monthly narrative reports, RMNP correspondence files, and Mattes extended interviews with Hieb in September, 1977. Dave was a seasonal ranger at RMNP in the early 1930s; he was a permanent ranger at Carlsbad Caverns, Blue Ridge Parkway, and RMNP prior to his SBNM assignment. Hieb's history requires two chapters, in part because length and intensity of his experience, in part because of his unique role as his own restorationist.

53 - Although the term wasn't in use yet, it appears that Darnall's position was "permanent, less than full-time." No effort is made in this history to diagram every personnel appointment, permanent or temporary, with the exception of Custodians/Superintendents and later Park Historians.

54 - Custodian Lombard sent Canfield rough plans of his alterations to the Cavalry Barracks for offices and living quarters. Further alterations and improvements were made by Hieb but since it was all temporary, further details in this report are not warranted.

55 - It has been stated earlier in this report that the approach to Fort Laramie as of 1937-1977 is substantially the same used during the John Hunton period, 1900-1920. Its exact chronology is not known but this roundabout approach had to begin about the time when the fields north of the Cavalry Barracks were closed off for irrigated farming, which would be sometime prior to 1900. Visitors today (1978) lack the "Living History" experience of approaching the Fort by primitive roads and the precarious Iron Bridge!

56 - Memo of April 7, 1947, H.W. Baker to the Files; memo April 10, 1947, Canfield to Merriam; memo April 23, Merriam to Canfield; Olaf T. Hagen memo to the Files, March 1, 1948. RMNP files.

57 - Memo April 21, 1948 Associate Regional Director Baker to Canfield, with Boundary Status Reports; memorandum March 17, 1948, Canfield addenda to the Master Plan; memo November 17, 1949, Mattes to J. Miller, RMNP files.

58 - Halsey Davidson report of June 25, 1947 to Regional Landscape Architect; Mattes recollections.

59 - Memorandum of July 22, Regional Director Merriam to the files; memo of August 31, 1948, Hieb to Canfield, "Summary of Work Accomplished 1947-1948 with Major Repair and Rehabilitation Allotment"; memo of July 20, 1948, Baker to Canfield, RMNP files. Also, 5 x 8 Card File data by Hieb re: Old Bedlam.

60 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports for 1949; memo Beaubien to Merriam of July 5 re: Hieb's "Orientation Report, Old Bakery"; memo of September, 1949 Merriam to the Director; RMNP files.

61 - Ed Alberts, Park Naturalist, RMNP, was Executive Secretary of the Association. He was later Regional Naturalist in Omaha.

62 - Memo April 16, 1948, Baker to Canfield; Hagen memo to the files, August 24, 1948 re: Fort Laramie visit with Mattes, and Chief Historian Ronald F. Lee; memo of February 28, 1949 Mattes to the Regional Director; memo August 5, 1949, Merriam to the Director, RMNP files. Fort Laramie and the Forty-Niners was re-born as Chapter XV in Mattes' book, The Great Platte River Road, published by the Nebraska State Historical Society, 1969.

63 Superintendent's Monthly Report, August, 1949; "Souvenir Program of Old Fort Laramie Centennial Celebration," August 9, 1949, in FLNHS research files (Rymill folder).

64 - Custodian's Report for July, 1947; Centennial Caravan (Salt Lake City, 1948) Preface, pages 120-124. in FLNHS Library. Interview with Dave Hieb, op. cit.

65 - Custodian's Report for August, 1948. Clarence S. Jackson, Pageant of the Pioneers: the Veritable Art of William Henry Jackson (Minden, Nebraska, 1948). W. H. Jackson was interviewed by Mattes at Scotts Bluff in 1936 and 1938, and at Cheyenne in 1941 where Jackson was in a hospital, recuperating from a fall. The Scotts Bluff wing was financed by \$10,000 donated by Julius F. Stone of New York City, supplemented by public contributions by citizens in the Scottsbluff-Gering area. Here is the prime collection of original 1866 sketches of Oregon Trail scenes by Jackson as a young bull-whacker.

66 - The Waters contribution had been obtained earlier by Ed Hummel of the Omaha office. Memo of October 22, 1957 Mattes to Hieb, Regional Historians File (hereafter MJM/RH file). This is the Fort Laramie section of a very of correspondence, reports, photographs, research materials and miscellany accumulated by Merrill J. Mattes in 20 years as Regional Historian in Omaha, 1946-1966. The bulk of this collection, by agreement between the Midwest and Rocky Mountain Regions, has been donated to the manuscript and photo collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society; the Fort Laramie material may be donated to FLNHS.

67 - John F. McDermott, editor, An Artist on the Overland Trail: the 1849 Diary and Sketches of James F. Wilkins (San Marino, California, 1968). See also Mattes' articles on Fort Mitchell at Scotts Bluffs, an outpost of Fort Laramie, in the April 1943 and March 1952 issues of Nebraska History.

68 - Custodian's Report for October, 1948; Hieb's comments on the Mattes-Borreson report on "Historic Approaches," by memo of January 11, 1948 to Superintendent, RMNP; letters of October 11 and November 1, 1948 T. L. Green of Scottsbluff to Mattes; letter of October 22, Paul Henderson of Bridgeport to Mattes; memo of November 3, 1948 W. E. Robertson, Acting Regional Director to Superintendent, RMNP. MJM/RH files. Interviews with Dave Hieb, op. cit.

69 - Data in this chapter is largely derived from Superintendents Monthly Narrative Reports; general correspondence between Hieb and Regional Office in Omaha and Washington, D.C., 1950-1957, too numerous to itemize. RMNP files and MJM/RH files. Mattes recollections and Hieb interviews, op. cit.

70 - The format of a detailed typed Completion Report with photos superseded the former 5 x 8 Card File. (Though Dave called these "Preliminary Reports" they turned out to be "Final." The only thing that could have been done further would be to provide detailed drawings clearly identifying and distinguishing between old original work and new work. Clearly, Dave had no time for this refinement.) In addition to the set of Hieb's Completion Reports in the FLNHS Library, as of 1978 there is also a set in the Library of the Midwest Regional Office, notwithstanding the fact that the Rocky Mountain Region now has jurisdiction. Dave Hieb also has a personal set.

71 - Hieb, "Orientation Report, Building Number 10" (June, 1949). Hieb, "Stabilization of Old Bakery," (December, 1950). Beaubien, "Old Bakery Excavations," (1949).

72 - Hieb notes on Card Numbers 4 and 5, "Sutler's Store, 1951-1954," in 5 x 8 Card File; Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Rehabilitation of the Sutler's Store, 1952-1953." Memo of November 6, 1952 reprogramming and funding for project. MJM/RH file.

73 - Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Restoration of the Cavalry Barracks Verandas and Windows, 1953-1954," (July 1, 1954).

74 - Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Rehabilitation of the Commissary during 1952-1953" (May 17, 1954).

75 - Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Restoration of the Magazine, 1954" (April, 1954).

76 - Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Rehabilitation of Officers Quarters F, 1954-1955" (March, 1956).

77 - Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Rehabilitation of Officers Quarters E, 1955-1957"(February, 1958). The author was unable to find a copy of this at FLNHS: Dave Hieb obligingly wrote this paragraph.

78 - Hieb, Notes on Card Numbers 5 and 6, Officers Quarters A, 1956-1958 in 5 x 8 Card File; Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Rehabilitation of Officers Quarters A" (1958).

79 - Hieb, "Preliminary Report on Rehabilitation of the Old Guard house, 1955" (December, 1955).

80 - Hieb, Notes on 5 x 8 Card File.

81 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports, April and May, 1958; memo of December 4, 1957, Hieb and Mattes to the Regional Director, MJM/RH file.

82 - Paul L. Beaubien, "Preliminary Report of the Archeological Investigation at Fort Laramie, 1950" (April, 1951).

83 - The phenomenon of the Hospital being built on top of the early Cemetery poses a historical dilemma. It is scarcely conceivable that the Post Commander and Staff did not know the cemetery was there; on the other hand, if they knew it was there, it is scarcely conceivable that they would deliberately build on top of it without first relocating the remains elsewhere!

84 - Beaubien, "Sutler's Store Excavations, 1951" (April, 1953); memo, May 3, 1951, Beaubien to Mattes, analysis of museum collection.

85 - Because of its location at the junction of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers it would be reasonable to expect to find other pre-historic sites within or near the park area. There has been no systematic search for such sites because the entire archeological preoccupation of the NPS has been with 19th century historic sites. Whether other significant undiscovered prehistoric finds exist or not seems "relatively irrelevant" in view of the prime focus of the area on American frontier history.

86 - Memo May 19, 1950 Baker to the Director; memo May 16, 1950 Dr. Porter to Baker; Mattes trip report, June 20, 1950; memo April 28, 1954, Mattes to Hieb; memo July 26, 1954, Hieb to Regional Director; memo January 27, 1955 Historian Appleman, Washington, D.C. to Regional Director; memo January 19, Regional Director Baker to the Director; memo February 7, 1956, Mattes to Hieb; Letter February 17, 1956 Mattes to Dr. T. R. Schellenberg, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; letter April 26, 1956, Schellenberg to Mattes. MJM/RH files, and Research files, FLNHS.

87 - A detailed audit or inventory of the FLNHS Research files is recommended to determine whether all research items mentioned in correspondence and reports have been incorporated into these files; and to inventory old correspondence and reports accordingly.

88 - In a letter of March 21, 1950 L. G. Flannery advised Dr. Charles W. Porter of the Washington Office, NPS re: the John Hunton diaries, as follows: "I want to complete study of contents before relinquishing them to the National Park Service." MJM/RH files. Volumes I through V of the Hunton Diaries were published by Flannery himself, Volume VI by the Arthur H. Clark Company of Glendale, California. See Footnote Number 15, Part I of this History, "The Crusade to Save Fort Laramie."

89 - Memorandum June 25, 1953, Mattes to the Regional Director; memo December 15, 1953, Acting Regional Director Lloyd to the Superintendent, FLNM; memorandum April 5, 1954, Regional Director Baker to the Superintendent, in MJM/RH files. Hieb's report entitled "Tentative Summary of Rooms to be Refurnished in Buildings Restored or Proposed to be Restored" is mentioned in memo of June 7, 1954, C. R. Swartzlow to the Director. This was in response to Museum Chief Ralph Lewis' request of February 10, 1954.

90 - Memorandum February 1, 1950 and February 14, 1950, Hieb to the Regional Director; memo February 16, 1956, Raymond Gregg, Chief of Interpretation, to Hieb; Report of Hieb as Executive Secretary, Fort Laramie Historical Association (FLHA) December 20, 1956. MJM/RH files. Hieb indicated in this first report of the FLHA that 20 publications were handled. At the end of the first year there were 31 active and seven honorary members.

91 - Hieb interview, op. cit.; Mattes recollections. Specimens of proscribed pictures of Old Bedlam in the condemned genuine 1949 California Gold Rush framing survive at least in the personal possession of these two individuals.

92 - Among references to this delicate subject, including words of praise for Hieb's many achievements, are the following: memorandum of May 9, 1952, Regional Director Baker to the Director; memo of February 19, 1953, Regional Historian Mattes to Baker; memo of June 16, 1955, Mattes to Baker; memo of May 23, 1956, Hieb to Baker; memo of June 30, 1956, Mattes to Hieb. MJM/RH files, and Hieb interviews, op. cit.

93 - Memo of June 23, 1955, Regional Historian Mattes to Regional Director Baker; memo of July 8, 1955, Baker to Hieb; memo of December 9, 1955. Associate Regional Director George Bagglely to Superintendent Hieb. MJM/RH files.

94 - The nation-wide Superintendents conferences were omitted for several years, after the Williamsburg conference of 1960 which Ringenbach attended. Recently the trend has been to Regional Superintendents conferences. In October, 1977 there was once again a general Superintendents Conference, at RMNP.

95 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports. Correspondence between Hieb and Joe Weppner, Secretary of the HLCW, is to be found in HLCW files as well as FLNM files.

96 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports. Memorandum June 25, 1953 Regional Historian Mattes to the Regional Director, MJM/RH files. DeVoto suggested that the Ford Foundation or the Rockefeller Foundation be approached refunding the completion of Fort Laramie restoration. Mattes had written a book review of DeVoto's prize winning book, Across the Wide Missouri, in which he pointed out a few errors; this also led to some spirited discussion at the Fort Laramie meeting. Mrs. Porter told the writer in 1957 that she paid less than \$1,000. for the Miller sketches, which she had bought in Baltimore from descendants of the artist. She received something like \$135,000. for them from a New York art dealer. The Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha bought the lot, plus some Catlins and Bodmers for \$650,000. and placed the collection with the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha.

97 - Memorandum of February 27, 1953. Canfield had reference to matters brought up by memorandum of February 27, 1953, Chief Landscape Architect Carnes, Washington Office, to the Regional Director, referred to in Mattes memo of June 25, 1953, Ibid. MJM/RH files. Dave Canfield, who died at Santa Fe in 1977 at age 72, could never be accused of being bashful about speaking his mind, a trait possibly not unrelated to the fact that he was independently wealthy. (His wife, Helen, was of the Stanfords of California.) He could be abrasive to subordinates, equals, and superiors alike, but he was basically a very affable gentleman and a totally dedicated Park Superintendent who gave a lot of time and thought to Fort Laramie's problems and their solutions. He should be remembered for his prime role in keeping FLNM afloat during its very lean early years, and sponsoring the basic Master Plan that the NPS has always come back to after frequent digressions; as of 1978 it still the basic plan despite up-to-the-minute concerns by a new generation of planners.

98 - Mission 66 was designed to produce a major goal of achievements by 1966, which would be the 50th anniversary of the NPS. Of course Fort Laramie history is so chock-full of exciting and colorful events that

almost any year between 1934 and 1990 could be made to serve a Centennial of something or other! (One hopes that the Canfield Plan will be implemented by 1990, or it will be too late to tie it in with any kind of Centennial!) Baker's comment seems to downgrade Hieb's restoration achievements, but these were phrased only for dramatic effect.

99 - Scoyen's comments could not be located in the files but the specifics are clear from the responsive comments of the Region and Park,

100 - Memorandum of February 15, 1956 Baggley to Hieb; memo of January 24, 1956, Historian Appleman to Chief Historian Kahler; memo February 20, Scoyen to the Superintendent; memo May 26, 1956, Baker to the Director; memo August 27, 1956, Scoyen to the Regional Director; memo March 25, 1957, Superintendent Hieb to Regional Director. MJM/RH files; Hieb interview op. cit. If there hadn't been so much wrangling over the Master Plan at this time the new Visitor Center - Headquarters complex across the river might have been built by 1966.

101 - Data in this chapter not otherwise specifically documented was derived from Superintendent's Monthly Reports, general correspondence in FLNM files and MJM/RH files.

102 - Memo March 8, 1957, Baker to Chief, WODC; memo January 7, 1958, Hieb and Mattes to Regional Director; memo May 6, 1958, Baker to Superintendent; memo November 12, 1958, Ringenbach to the Regional Director; memo December 15, 1958 Assistant Director M. H. Harvey to Director re: unwarranted criticisms in Appleman trip report; memo July 24, 1959, Mattes and Roberson to the Regional Director; memo of July 27, 1959, Regional Director Baker to the Director; Mattes to Chief Architect Dick Sutton and reply of August 31, 1959. MJM/RD files.

103 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports; memo September 16, 1958, Regional Director Baker to the Director, FLNM files.

104 - Memo October 27, 1958 Ringenbach to Regional Director; memo June 12, 1959, Gann to the Superintendent; memo May 19, 1959, Baker to Chief, WODC; memo July 1, 1959 memo Mattes to Ringenbach and undated reply. MJM/RH files. Superintendents Report for August, 1959.

105 - Ray Ringenbach, "Survey Report, Stabilization of the Sawmill" (March, 1960). Bob Gann, "Completion Report, Rehabilitation of Sawmill Ruins" (undated). Bob writes, "While called a Sawmill, it actually housed a steam boiler, water pump, and steam for the sawmill engine", presumably outside the structure.

106 - Memo Mattes to Chief of Operations, April 28, 1959. Baker to Ringenbach May 8, 1959. MJM/RH files.

107 - Memo October 24, 1958 Mattes to Superintendent, MJM/RH files. The photo of the 1876 Guardhouse, viewed from across the parade ground, in possession of the Wyoming Historical Department, was from the Signal Corps Collection in the National Archives. By letter September 12, 1958 Mattes asked Josephine Cobb, National Archives for "a good clean photo enlargement," which revealed sufficient detail to warrant

roof reconstruction.

108 - Memo October 27, 1958, Ringenbach to Regional Director; memo, December 3, 1958, Harvey to Superintendent; memo March 27, 1959, transmitting "Report on Stabilization and Limited Restoration of the New Guardhouse" by Ringenbach and Gann; memo August 6, 1959, Bagglely to Director, addenda to Historic Structure Report re: Original (1850) Guardhouse; memo October 14, 1959, Baker to Superintendent; memo October 20, 1959, Lyle Bennett, WODC to the Regional Director. MJM/RD files.

109 - Superintendent's Report for July, 1959; memo September 28, 1959 Sanford Hill, Chief, WODC to Superintendent.

110 - Memo of September 28, 1959, Chief, WODC to Superintendent; memo Regional Historian to Regional Director October 15, 1959 re: area visit October 5 to 7. MJM/RD files.

111 - Memo Mattes to Regional Director, February 26, 1959; memo Baker to the Superintendent, March 16, 1959. Ditto.

112 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports; memo December 1, 1960, Joyner to the Superintendent. Ditto.

113 - Ringenbach, "Archeological Salvage Project, Water System" (July, 1958) Superintendent's Monthly Reports. No archeological report as such was written on the Original Guardhouse foundation exposure. There has been some stabilization of these remains, a portion of which lay open to weather.

114 - Memo December 5, 1958, Harvey to Robert Stephenson, Smithsonian Field Office, Lincoln, Nebraska. Charles H. McNutt, "Excavations at Old Bedlam" (1958). Although there seems to be a contrary opinion, the writer finds no evidence that there was any archeology at Bedlam except at the original kitchen wings. If there had been comprehensive archeology, both inside and around the perimeter of Bedlam, some interesting discoveries might have been made. See Footnote 186.

115 - Memo October 6, 1958, Raymond Gregg, Regional Chief of Interpretation to the Superintendent; memorandum December 11, 1958, ditto; memo August 28, 1959, Superintendent to Regional Director, MJM/RD files. Superintendent's Report for February and March, 1959, FLNM files.

116 - Mattes recollections. Copy of the Mattes report which led to the Hill donation is in MJM/RH files and FLNM files. Regional correspondence and record of phone calls are missing.

117 - Sally Johnson, "General Furnishing Plan, FLNHS" (June, 1960).

118 - Elizabeth Burt's memoirs in the Library of Congress are the principal source of information for Indians, Infants and Infantry, but there was woven into it capsule histories of Forts Bridger, Sanders, and Laramie in Wyoming, Fort Omaha in Nebraska, and other stations where the Burt family resided. Mattes was asked by General Reynolds Burt to write the book, which he did on off-duty time. Correspondence on the subject, partly in Mattes' personal file, and partly in S. Johnson correspondence, would fill a whole file drawer.

119 - Sally Johnson, "Revival at Fort Laramie," Dude Rancher, May, 1960.

120 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports; miscellaneous correspondence in Regional Historians (MJM/RH) files. The Nebraska History article is distributed in covered reprint form by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

121 - Superintendent's Report for July, 1960. Mattes recollections. Files of the National Pony Express Centennial Association, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.

122 - Ernst letter of January 4, 1960; memo March 1, 1960, Ringenbach to Regional Director; memo December 13, 1960, Mattes to Regional Director, re: trip report of November 28-30; memo November 4, 1960 John F. Aiton to Superintendent. MJM/RH files.

123 - Data given in this chapter, not otherwise documented, is derived from Superintendent's Monthly Reports through June, 1966; reports and general correspondence in FLNHS files., and MJM/RH files. Mattes interviews with Superintendent Sharp, early November, 1977, and Mattes recollections.

124 - The Old Bedlam "log" given here, while primarily derived from Sharp's Monthly Reports, include a few inserts from correspondence in the MJM/RH files, including the Regional Director's memo of April 4, 1961 to WODC rejecting recommendations by Lyle Bennett and Lada Kucera that Old Bedlam be dismantled and reconstructed.

125 - Official tabulation of building costs are provided with the usual Completion Report forms. When a job is spread out in several stages, it is not always possible to establish the grand total with precision. The writer believes that more effort should be made in the interpretive program to provide visitors with data on interesting architectural details of the various restorations, such as the following from Sharp's Completion Report on Old Bedlam: "No nails, spikes or bolts were used in the framing of the original structure. Structural reliance was placed on unique systems of notching, dapping, mortises, and dowels. At a few critical joints, a staple-like device of heavy iron bars had been forged and used to tie the joints together. From early days there were complaints that the roof sagged; nevertheless the roof never collapsed and in the restoration this sag was stabilized in position. . ." Perhaps a special booklet on this aspect, illustrated with details of restoration work, would be warranted.

126 - Data on Bob Gann is derived from personal knowledge of Sharp, Mattes, and Roberson, as well as official reports and limited correspondence in FLNHS and MJM/RH files. "Slim" Warthen is alive and well in Lingle, and was interviewed by Mattes during a tour of his old projects, in early November, 1977.

127 - C. Sharp, "Survey Report on Stabilization Measures to Hospital Ruins" (August, 1962); Warthen, "Completion Report, Rehabilitation of Historic Structures, Hospital Ruins" (1964).

128 - C. Sharp, "Historic Structure Report, Old Guardhouse, Altered to 1866-1868" (January, 1963); Warthen, "Completion Report, Restoration of Old Guardhouse" (June, 1967).

129 - C. Sharp, "Historic Structure Report for Stabilization and Rehabilitation of Old Army Bridge" (October, 1962); C. Sharp, Four Completion Reports for intermittent work on Old Army Bridge, 1964-1969.

130 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports; A. Lewis Koue, "Part II, Historic Structure Report, Officers Quarters E" (May, 1971)

131 - Robert A. Murray, "Part I, Historic Structure Report, Officers Quarters B, C, and D" (December, 1964); ditto, Part II (July, 1965). Anon., "Completion Report", ditto (1966); Anon., Division of History Studies, Washington Office, "Part II, Historic Structure Report, Administration Building"; Anon., "Completion Report", ditto, undated.

132 - James W. Sheire and Charles Pope, "Part II, Historic Structure Report, the 1876 Bakery" (May, 1969); Lewis Koue, "Specifications for Restoration of 1876 Bakery" (March, 1970); C. Sharp, "Completion Report, Restoration of 1876 Bakery" (November, 1971).

133 - James W. Sheire, "Part I, Historic Structure Report, 1883 Bakery" (November, 1968); Charles W. Pope and James W. Sheire, "Part II, Historic Structure Report, 1883 Bakery" (June, 1969). C. Sharp, "Completion Report, Repair and Conservation of 1883 Bakery" (November, 1971).

134 - Superintendent's Report for June, 1961; letters of May 18 and 25 Regional Historian Mattes to General R. J. Burt; letters of May 24 and June 12, 1961 Superintendent Sharp to Virginia Hill; memo June 8, Baker to Sharp re: program and escort.

135 - General correspondence in MJM/RH files. Mattes recollections. Complete records of the Furnishing Project with both Sally Johnson and Nan Carson are at FLNHS.

136 - S. Johnson, "Furnishing Plan for the Sutler's Store" (June 1960); ditto for Officers Quarters F (June, 1961); ditto for Officers Quarters A (November, 1961).

137 - Superintendent's Report for July, 1962. Extensive correspondence in MJM/RH files, between Mattes, S. Johnson and C. Sharp, January to June, 1962. Sally hosted a banquet for Fort Laramie and visiting Regional Office employees in honor of Mrs. Hill, in Torrington, the evening before the banquet.

138 - Mattes recollections. Correspondence in MJM/RH files, including Carson report of November 6, 1962 on her Fort Laramie orientation trip, October 2 to 28.

139 - Superintendent's Reports for July and August, 1964. Nan V. Carson, "Furnishing Plan for Old Bedlam" (April, 1964). The Old Bedlam historic house museum is Nan's masterpiece, as the Sutler's Store and Officers Quarters F are Sally's.

140 - Nan V. Carson, "Furnishing Plan for Post Surgeon's Quarters" (July, 1963). Other research reports of permanent value by Nan are "Guide to Interpretive Maintenance, Old Bedlam, Collins' Quarters" (May, 1965), and "Revision of the General Furnishing Plan." (1963)

141 - The official visitor count at Fort Laramie, as is the case with so many other NPS areas, does not represent an exact head count, which would require employees at the entrance gate during all visiting hours to tally everyone except employees and others on official business. What technique of obtaining the visitor count in early years is not known but presumed to be that of simply counting those visitor who showed up at the information counter, wherever that happened to be. Currently (1978) we were informed that it was a total based on a factor of 70% for all visitors counted entering the Commissary Museum. We are not in a position to judge if it is a valid assumption that 30% of all visitors now do not visit the museum. In any event this technique obviously gives the official count the benefit of the doubt.

142 - Superintendent's Monthly Reports. Miscellaneous correspondence and reports, MJM/RH files. Interviews with Sharp, November, 1977.

143 - A checklist of all research contributions since 1938 by various NPS employees appears in a "Historic Resource Management Plan", by the Historic Preservation Team, Denver Service Center, May, 1973. But it is really not complete. It should be revised and updated, part of a general review of the status and future needs of a Fort Laramie Research Program.

144 - The well must have been a functional part of Old Bedlam prior to the construction of the lime-concrete kitchen lean-to. Whether it had an earlier history remains an open question.

145 - Wilfred M. Husted, "Archeological Test Excavations at Fort Laramie" (1963). The Midwest Archeological Center of the NPS at Lincoln, Nebraska replaced the old Smithsonian Institution field office there, set up in 1946 to implement the archeological program for the Missouri River Basin Surveys. . . A biography of Seth Ward, fur trader, Fort Laramie post sutler, and Kansas City millionaire, by Merrill J. Mattes appears in Volume III, Mountain Men of the Fur Trade (Glendale, 1963). Before he became the Fort Laramie sutler, Ward had a succession of trading posts at points between Scotts Bluff and Register Cliff, all of which were more significant than the post briefly occupied on the right bank of the Laramie.

146 - Wilfred Husted and James W. Moore, Jr., "Archeological Test Excavations at Fort Laramie, Circulating Roads, Utilities, and Residences 1969"(February, 1970). In 1973 Adrienne B. Anderson of the MWAC performed "Test Excavations, Proposed Entrance Roadway." These test yielded nothing of special significance.

147 - From 1969 through 1972 historical and archeological research in parks in the Western United States was handled by the Branch of History and Historic Architecture, Western Service Center, and the MWAC and the Southwestern Archeological Center were requested to do the field work. Prior to that date park archeology had been coordinated by Regional offices; since 1973 the tendency has been for Regional offices and archeological centers to handle such projects, with DSC coordinating programming.

148 - John Ehrenhard, "The Rustic Hotel, FLNHS" (May, 1972) issued by the Midwest Archeological Center.

149 - Memo January 10, 1962, Mattes to Regional Director Baker. Memo January 15, 1962, Sharp to Baker.

MJM/RH files.

150 - Report of Fort Study Team (Washington, D.C., 1966), FLNHS Library.

151 - "Interpretive Prospectus, Fort Laramie," approved by Midwest Regional Office, May 15, 1972. Contrary to the thinking that prevailed for years, the Rickey plan would eliminate museum exhibits in favor of a movie and, to judge from its title the indicated movie itself eliminates the fur trade and Oregon Trail migration episodes. How is the visitor to get a balanced perspective on these major aspects of Fort history, or to see the wealth of Fort Laramie artifacts and early photographs?

152 - Data on "non-historic improvements" in Sharp's time is derived from construction project files at FLNHS, plus helpful explanation by Charles Sharp in interviews, November, 1977.

153 - While all of the land acquisition data and commentary given here is to be found, in one form or another, in FLNHS files, this section could not have been put together in coherent form without the cheerful volunteer assistance of Charles C. Sharp of Torrington, Wyoming who came out to the Fort with Mattes for several days in November, 1977, to sort out the tangle.

154 - The Mattes-Gann report on Forts Fetterman and Bridger seems to be missing from the NPS records, but copy is believed to be with the Wyoming Historical Department in Cheyenne. When the Wyoming Recreation Commission was formed by legislative enactment, taking over functions formerly handled by the State Landmark Commission, it took over management and restoration of state historic sites; however, the Wyoming Historical Department has been given responsibility for historical exhibits in these areas. Bob Murray's resignation is a rare instance of a career NPS employee quitting the NPS to go into park-related business for himself, for which he deserves commendation for bravery. His business, called Western Interpretive Services, was based first in Billings, later in Sheridan.

155 - The old Western Museum Laboratory exhibits at Guernsey included several fine water color sketches pertaining to Fort Laramie history, such as overland migration scenes, and the Grattan Massacre. The NPS built the Lake Guernsey Museum with CCC funds and provided the museum exhibits, for the Bureau of Reclamation as work relief projects in the 1930s.

156 - Fortunately, by the time the valuable Superintendent's Monthly Reports were irrationally abolished in mid-1966, most of the major restoration work and major celebrations had already been reported. To put it another way, it seems that relatively few significant events have occurred during the NPS decade, 1967 to 1977, so the loss of the monthly reports was not as serious as it might have been earlier. The history of the last ten years reported in this work seem, at least, to be more of a settled routine, with few noteworthy new developments.

157 - Superintendent's Reports for 1964, FLNHS files.

158 - Maeder's personnel records. Data in this chapter obtained primarily from Superintendent's Annual Reports, a compilation of recent correspondence in various categories, and information and leads supplied by Acting Superintendent McChristian, Administrative Officer Woodard, and other staff employees as of

1977.

159 - Except for the Custodian/Superintendent category, no effort has been made to keep up with the constant and bewildering changes in job titles. Neither has an effort been made to identify everyone on the present staff, or everyone who ever worked at Fort Laramie.

160 - Interviews with Kenneth E. Weber, September and October, 1977.

161 - FLNHS files and Superintendent's Annual Reports.

162 - An example of a historic building that has been jeopardized by mechanical overkill is the Governor Nelson House at Yorktown, Colonial National Historical Park.

163 - This is a re-write of McChristian's summary of "The History of Living History" at Fort Laramie, supplied by Doug McChristian at the author's request, November, 1977.

164 - Superintendent's Annual Reports, FLNHS files.

165 - The annual pilgrimage of Colorado State University classes to the Fort under Professor Wilcox began in Sharp's time.

166 - Memorandum, October 7, 1976, Maeder to Regional Director, Denver.

167 - It is difficult to comprehend how a limited theme movie in the theoretical new Visitor Center will be an adequate substitute for the fine "old-fashioned" Commissary museum. Retention of the Commissary museum after building the Visitor Center would seem to be incompatible with the philosophy of "separation of old and new" and would require extra manpower. The best idea is to re-think the Interpretive Prospectus.

168 - Interviews with Curator Warren J. Petty at Fort Laramie, September-November, 1977.

169 - Historic Site Archeology in the future may be jeopardized by a policy of "getting rid of" artifacts yielded by such archeology.

170 - It is understood that a new storage building for the museum collection is to be part of the future headquarters complex. Presumably the Museum Laboratory, i.e., where the Curator operates, will be in the future headquarters building. The wisdom of separating the collection from the Curator seems questionable. . . The present Curator's duties, aside from handling accessions, cataloguing, and other forms of record-keeping (and occasional assisting in interpretation with school groups) involves actual curatorial work, that is, giving preservative treatment to the historic objects in the collection. Regional Curator Ed Jahns has a lot to say about the latter activity in a trip report of April 4, 1974.

171 - The primary purpose of valuation, presumably, is to impress all concerned with the preciousness of the objects in question, so they will get maximum care and protection. (Certainly it is not for insurance

purposes, since no Government property is insured.) We can only assume that the guidelines for the disposition of that major portion of the collection engineered by the three Boards of Survey included the belief that the disposable items bore price tags of zero. But there is a lot of difference between historical items of "little value" or "no value" in monetary terms, and outright junk that one would normally have to pay a junkman to get rid of. Theoretically, if its disposable its "junk" and the NPS should not have acquired it in the first place.

172 - Interview with Tom Lindenmier and W. J. Petty, November, 1977. Virginia Hill Donation files. The question of what to do with the Commissary Building itself in the future has not yet been resolved. Full restoration? Storage?

173 - Superintendent's Annual Reports, 1973-1976, FLNHS [files](#).

174 - Interviews with Lew Eaton, June - November, 1977. Also, statistical data kindly compiled by Eaton.

175 - There has been no complete and up-to-date analysis of holdings to ascertain if all valuable research items are fully identified and incorporated in the Research Files. For more about the perennial Fort William puzzle, see Footnote 186.

176 - Data on recent restorations in [file](#) folders, FLNHS. Data re: plans and schedule for full restoration of the Cavalry Barracks obtained from George Thorson, Historic Preservation, Denver Service Center, December, 1977. The cost estimates make the usual allowance for inflation.

177 - Construction project [file](#), FLNHS.

178 - [Letter](#) of November 17, 1977, Acting Superintendent McChristian to Mattes.

179 - An example of how cyclic maintenance of historic structures can drift away from authentic restoration was cited by Dave Hieb in interviews, [op. cit.](#) Since his original, authentic restoration of Officers Quarters E by artificial graining of interior woodwork, patterned after original treatment, this wood was repainted in such a way as to conceal the historically correct artificial graining.

180 - There seems to be an inherent legal contradiction in requiring the Federal preservation proposals to be cleared by the State Preservation Officer. NPS restorationists working in-house should have the exclusive responsibility for NPS restoration projects except when conflicts develop between them. In that case matters should be resolved by the President's Advisory Council. The NPS has problems enough getting everything cleared within their own organization.

181 - McChristian letter, [op. cit.](#)

182 - [Files](#), FLNHS, and Superintendent's Annual Report. It seems doubtful that the 1973 flood was the worst on record. Although hydrographic records of Army days are lacking, there is ample evidence of severe floods during the 1880s that took out several Fort buildings.

183 - Files, FLNHS. Some landscape compromises are warranted. Encouragement of grass on the parade ground, for example, gives a park-like appearance instead of the dusty, trampled condition of historic times, particularly at the height of the Indian wars; but this is a park now for public use and enjoyment, and not an actual military post. The parade ground trees, on the other hand, have little to do with any important Fort Laramie history, and even less to do with public convenience. At Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site there is and will be no tree-planting to provide an artificial adornment. There a strenuous effort has been made, on the contrary, to preserve primitive conditions, including a long hike over a rough stretch of road from the parking area to the reconstructed Fort, with no shade, no benches, and no comfort stations. The idea, vigorously upheld by planners, was that the modern visitor should be forced to have a taste of a harsh frontier experience. It's all one Park Service. Does it have two different philosophies for the operation of its western historical areas?

184 - An attitude that the NPS should not concern itself with what happens to the terrain outside of established NPS boundaries would be disastrous to Fort Laramie's future. It is not an exaggeration to say that at Fort Laramie the setting is as valuable to interpretation as the historic buildings themselves. Consider, for example, the \$5,000,000. reconstruction of 1775 Fort Stanwix in the middle of modern Rome, New York. The result is artificial, an expensive curiosity. . . This is not to say that Superintendent Maeder did not exert himself to monitor threats to the Fort Laramie environment, such as the Gray Rocks project eight miles up the Laramie River. This was a grave concern with him. But is the NPS conditioned to make the necessary studies and Congressional recommendations necessary to ensure that the Fort Laramie environment all of it is not impaired by this or other energy or water control or commercial proposals?

185 - Letter of August 14, 1977 Mattes to Lynn Thompson, Regional Director, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Denver, with attachments, offering comment on "Draft Environmental Analysis, Visitor Center, Administration Building with Associated Developments and Boundary Adjustments, FLNHS" by Planning and Resource Preservation, August, 1977. The writer is an NPS retiree and has no official standing, but the NPS welcomes in-put from the public and he is now part of the general public.

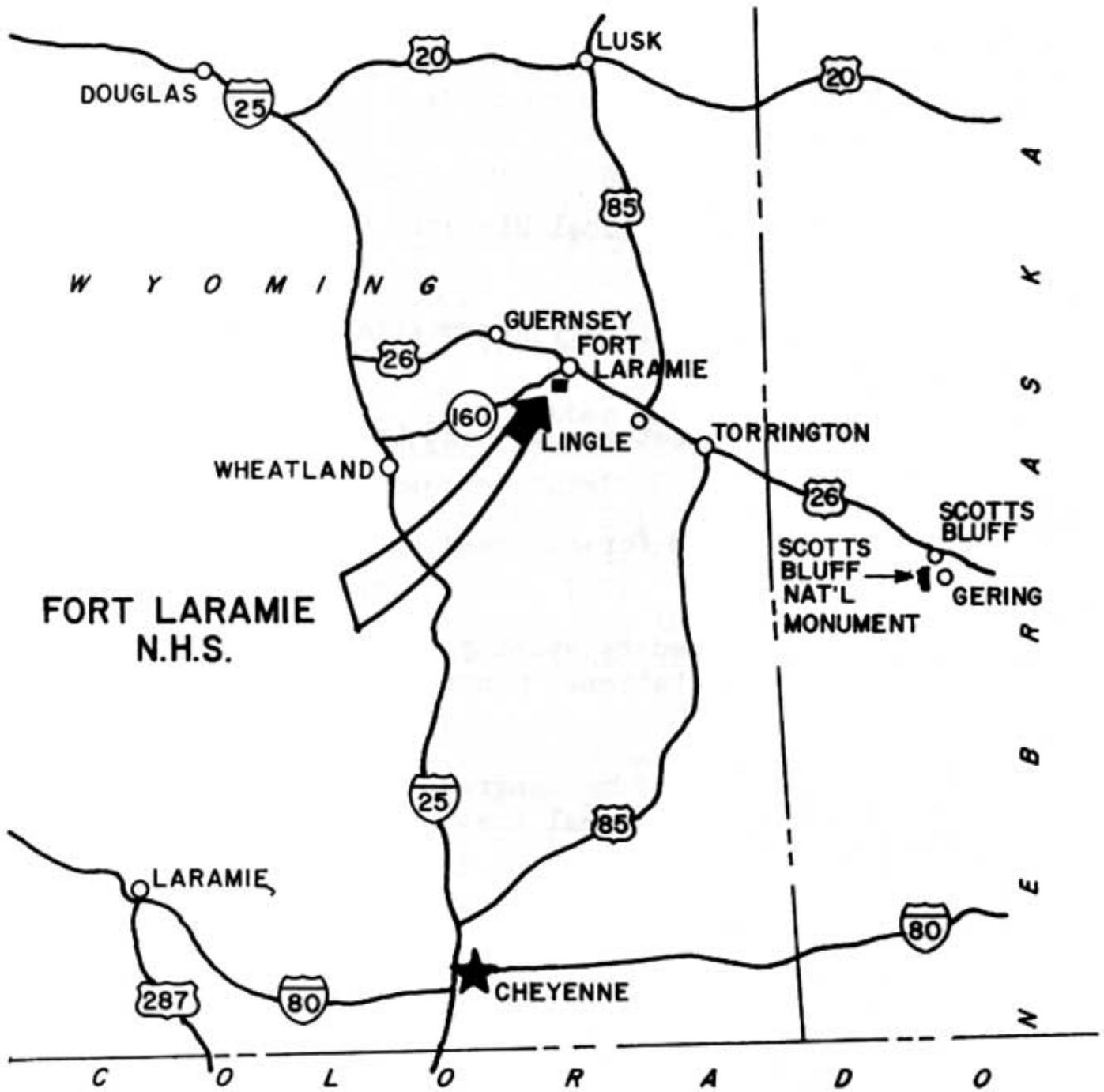
186 - Although the writer has fulfilled his contract obligations with the completion of this History, there are three items of business left over in the Fort Laramie research department to which he hopes to make a personal contribution: (1) to assist the Superintendent and staff in an inventory and re-organization of research facilities and resources; (2) to research and write a history of John Hunton at Fort Laramie, both before and after 1890, if needed source materials can be released from present restrictions; and (3) to research and write a history of Fort William, including an analysis of the location problem as a preliminary to a full-scale archeological search for the site. The possibility that it is in the military parade ground area after all, despite the writer's earlier convictions to the contrary, arises from a recent disclosure to him by Earl D. Warthen of Lingle that he saw underground evidence of an earlier structure of some kind to the immediate rear of Old Bedlam in 1961, which went unreported because the architect, Bob Gann, was afraid the project would be held up if the archeologists had to investigate! A separate report on project No. 1 above will be made directly to the Superintendent. Project No 2 will be on the writer's own initiative. Project No. 3 will be the subject of a separate report made by the writer to the Regional Director and the Superintendent.

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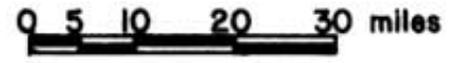
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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

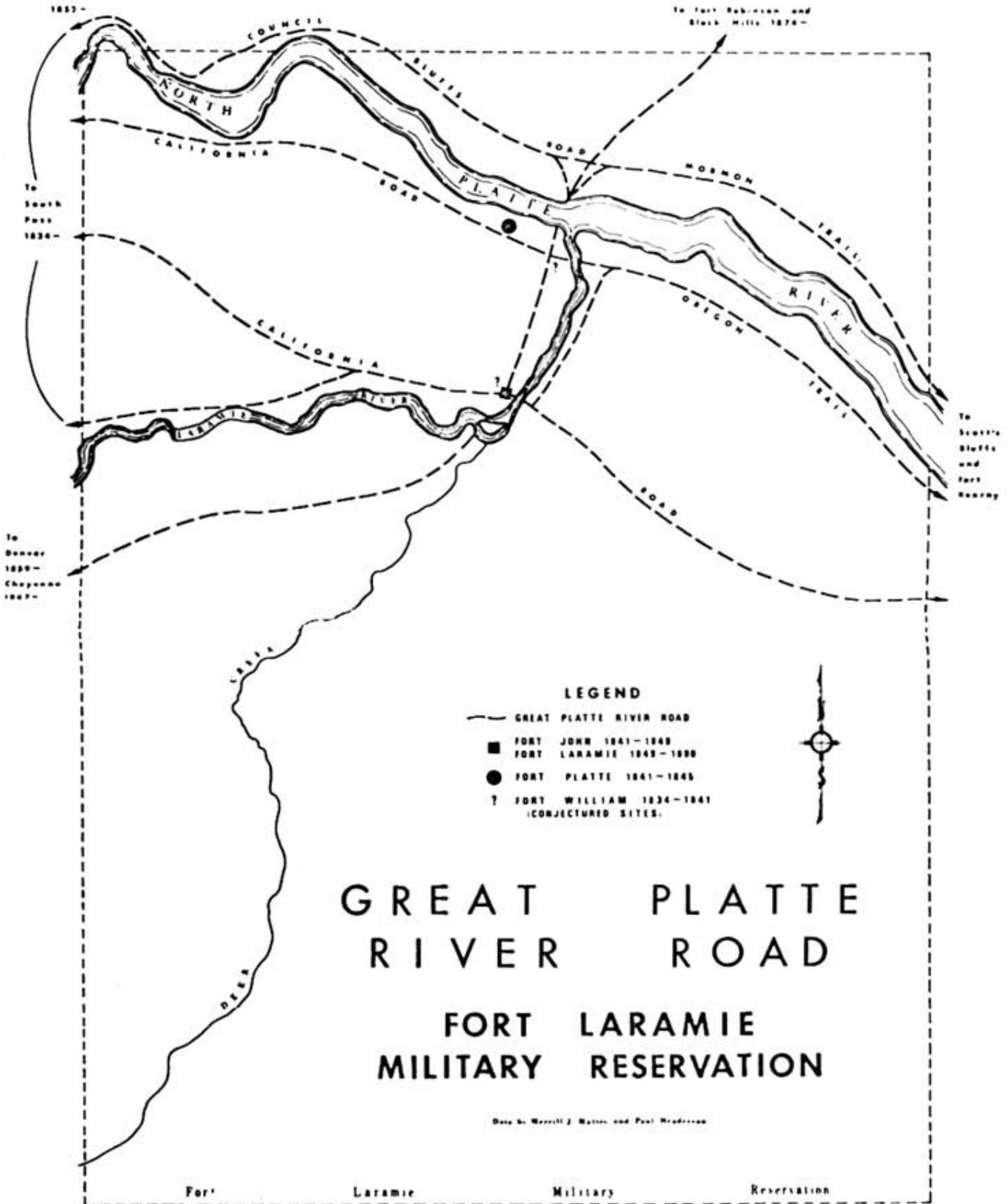


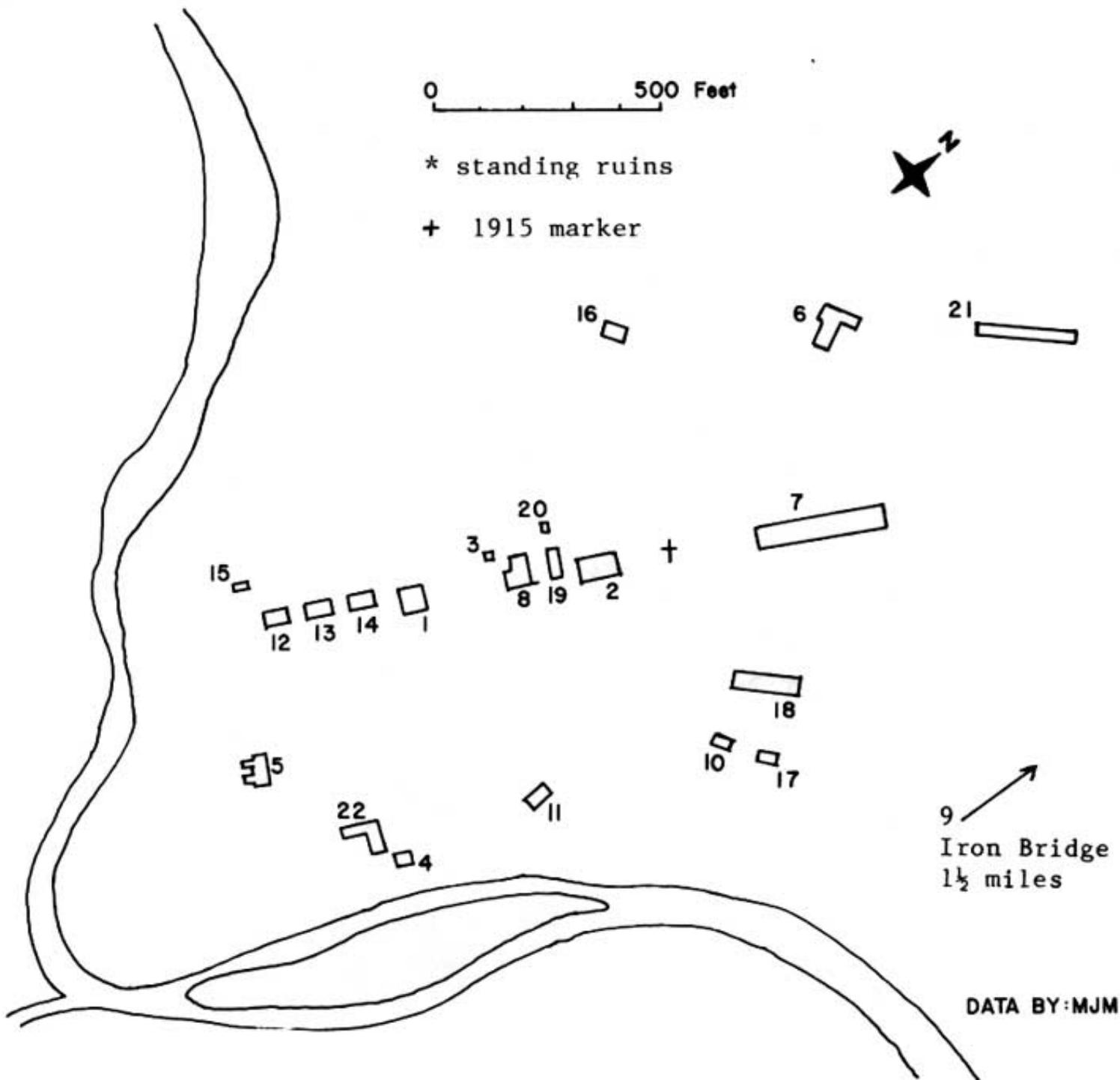
LOCATION MAP

FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
WYOMING





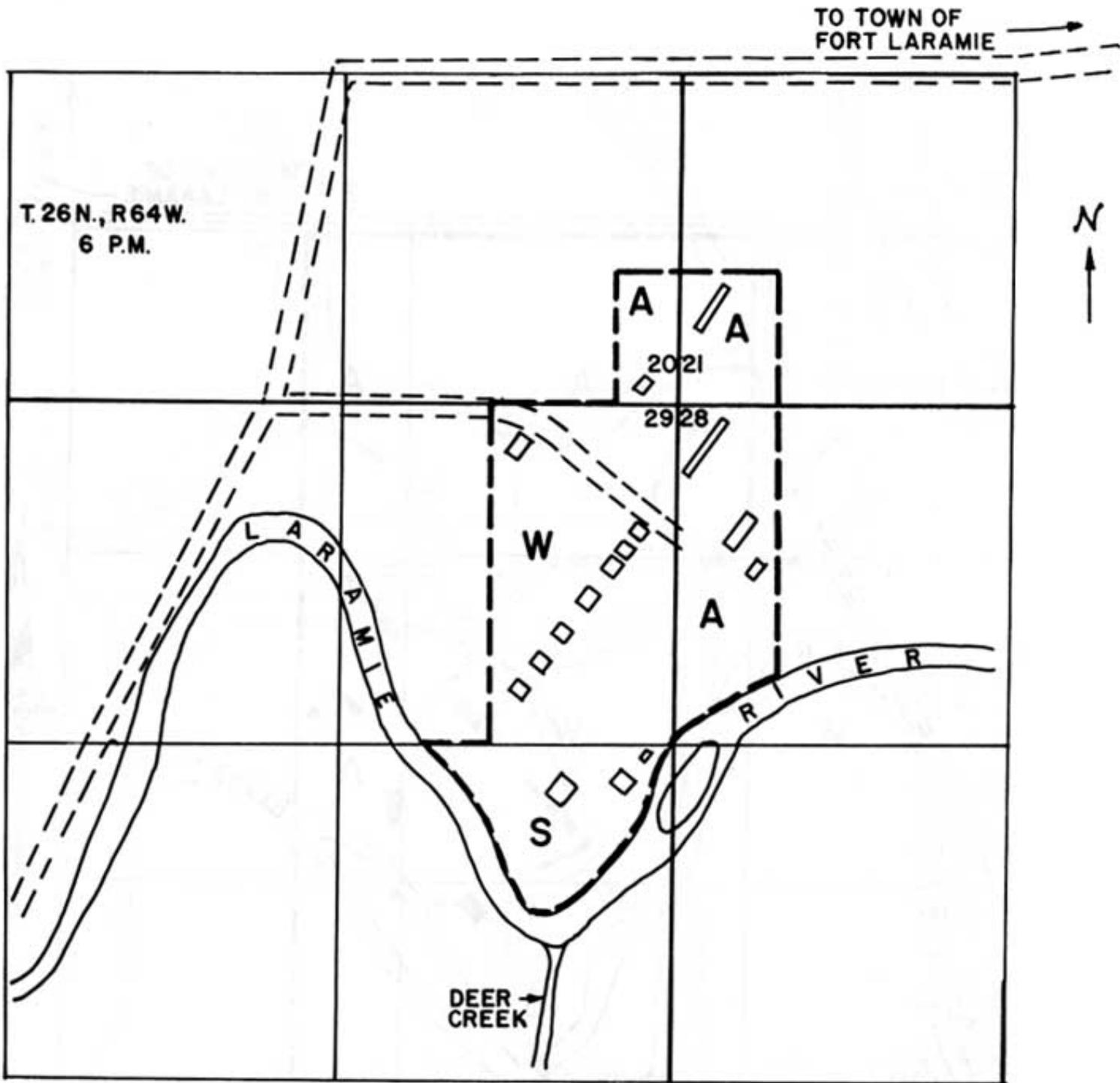




REMAINING BUILDINGS AT OLD FORT LARAMIE 1915-1937

1	Old Bedlam	1849-1850	frame
2	Sutler's Store	1849-1883	adobe, stone, concrete
3	Magazine	1850	stone
4	Old Guardhouse	1866	stone
5	Officers Quarters A	1870	frame
*	6 Hospital	1873	concrete
	7 Cavalry Barracks	1874	concrete
	8 Officers Quarters E	1875	concrete
	9	1875	1877

8 Officers Quarters E	1875	concrete
9 Platte Bridge	1875-1876	iron
10 Old Bakery	1876	concrete, brick
*11 New Guardhouse	1876	concrete
*12 Officers Quarters B	1881	concrete
*13 Officers Quarters C	1881	concrete
*14 Officers Quarters D	1881	concrete
15 Chickenhouse	1881	concrete
*16 Sawmill	1882	concrete
17 New Bakery	1883	concrete
18 Commissary Storehouse	1883	concrete
19 Officers Quarters F	1884	concrete
20 Privy	1884	frame
*21 Non-Com Quarters	1885	concrete
*22 Administration	1885	concrete



Proposed Park Boundary -1931 ---
Roads - - - -

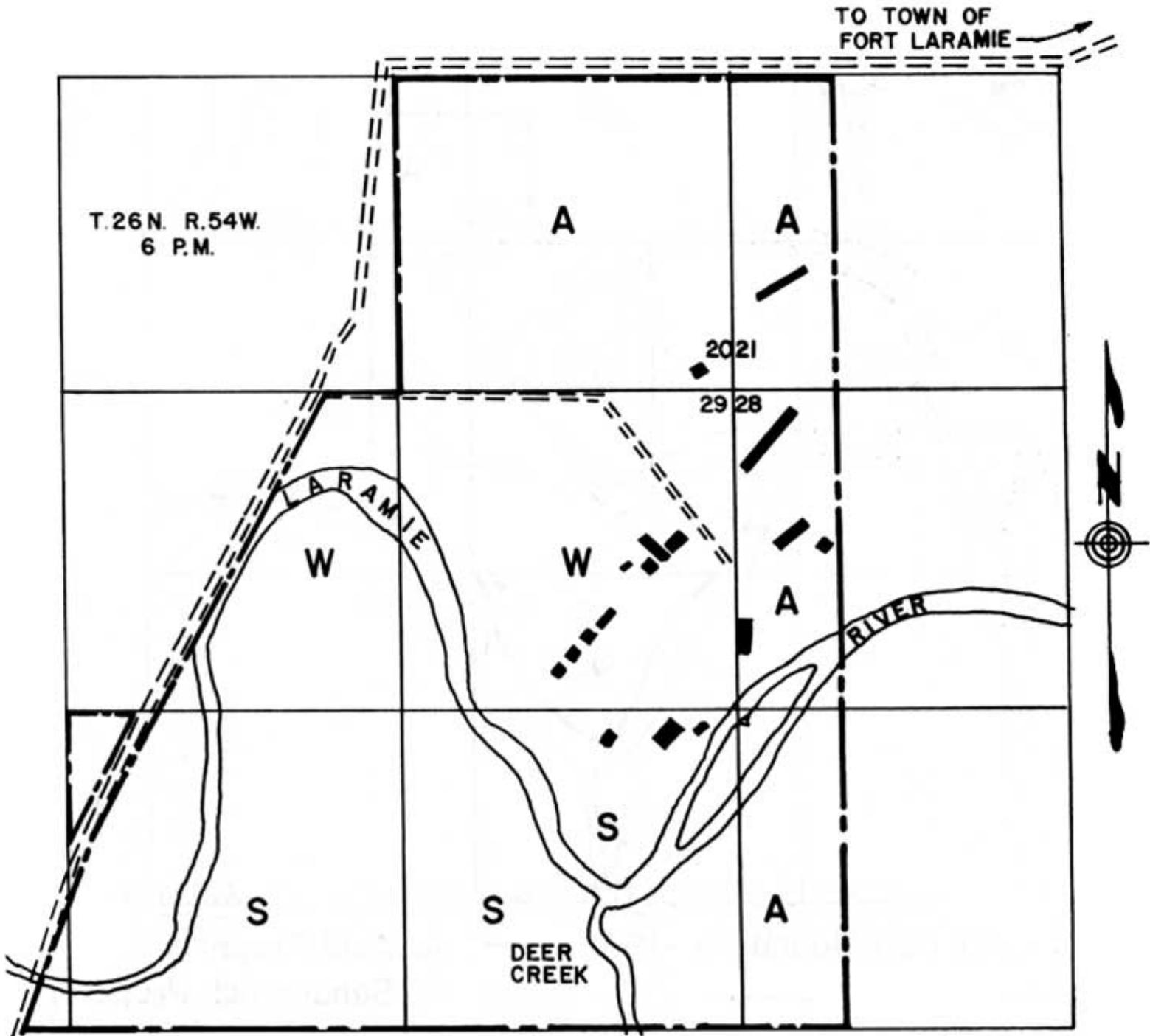
A...Auld Property
S...Sandercock Property
W...Waters Property

OLD FORT LARAMIE

Original Purchase Proposed by

Original Purchase Proposed by Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming

DATA BY: M.J.M.



--- State Purchase 1937
 National Monument 1938

A... Auld Purchase
 S... Sandercock Purchase
 W... Waters Purchase

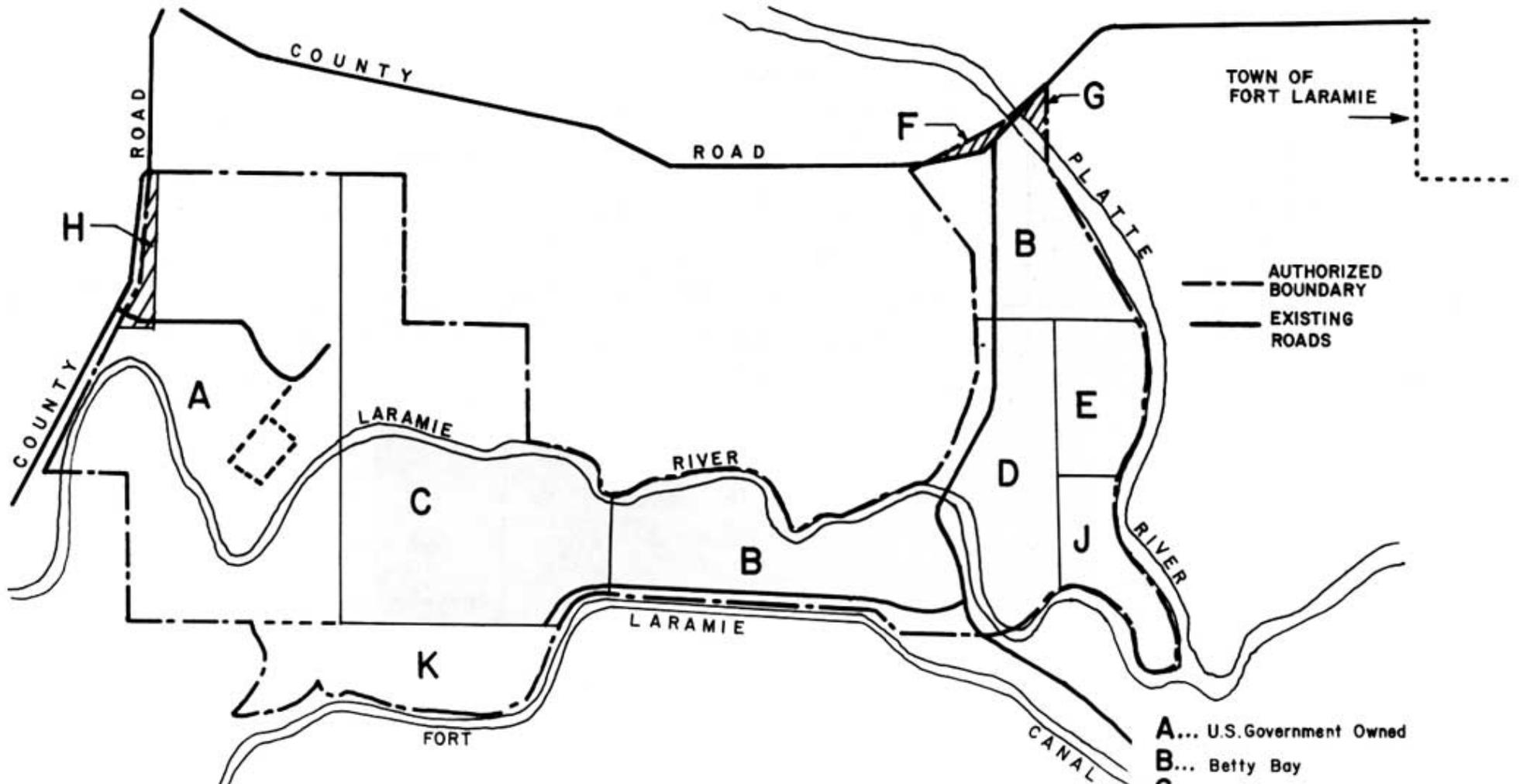
OLD FORT LARAMIE

As Purchased For Park Purposes By:
 Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming,
 and Originally Established as a National Monument

and Originally Established as a National Monument by Presidential Proclamation

HISTORICAL DATA BY :M.J.M.

DRAWN BY :R.A.M.



**Lands authorized in 1960 for inclusion in a new
 FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
 Replacing the 1938 National Monument**

- A... U.S. Government Owned**
- B... Betty Bay**
- C... Sophia Foote**
- D... Jack F. Gregg**
- E... Charles Oliver**
- F... Bernice Urbach**
- G... B.G. Shoemaker**
- H... L.G. Flannery**
- J... Byron G. Paules**
- K... Gurney Gregg**

DATA BY :MJM

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



ILLUSTRATIONS

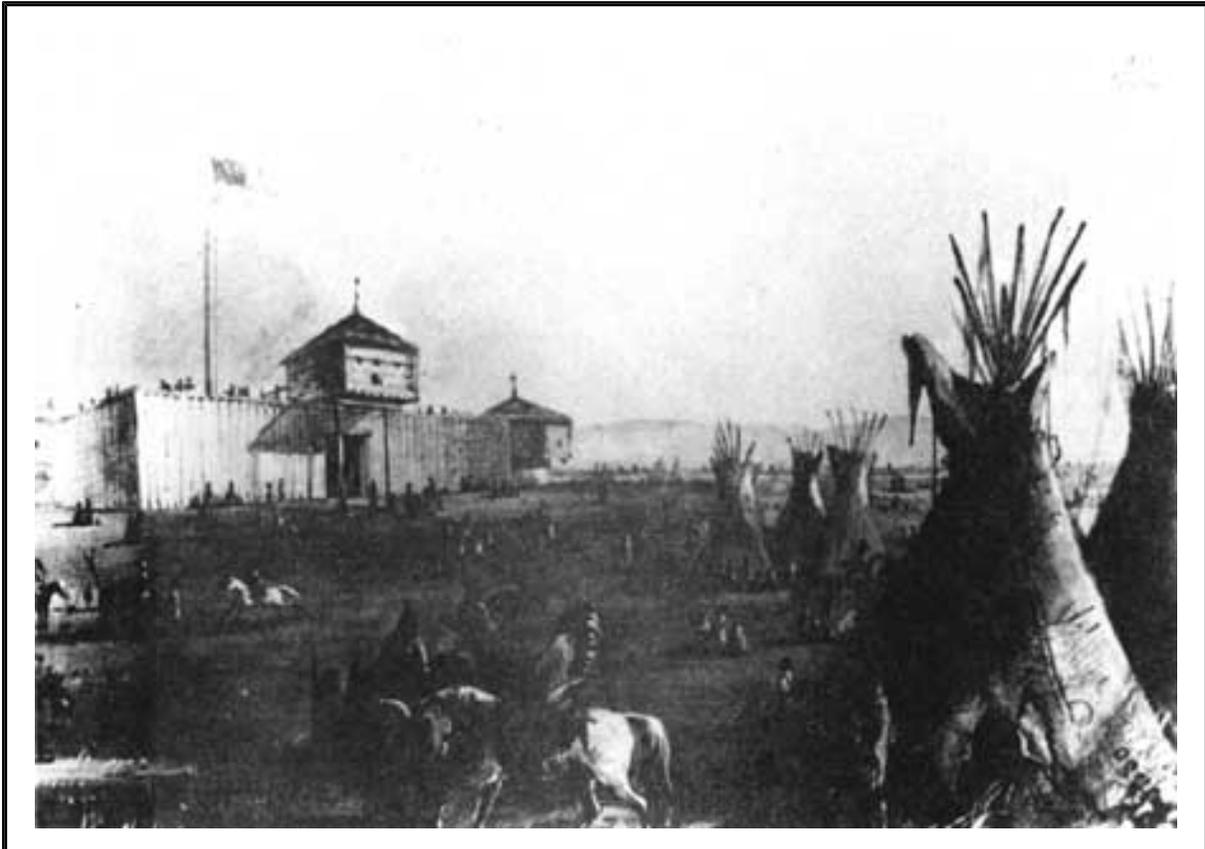


Figure 1. Fort William, a log stockade built in 1834, was the first Fort Laramie. It was sketched in water color by A. J. Miller in 1837. (Photo courtesy of the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.)

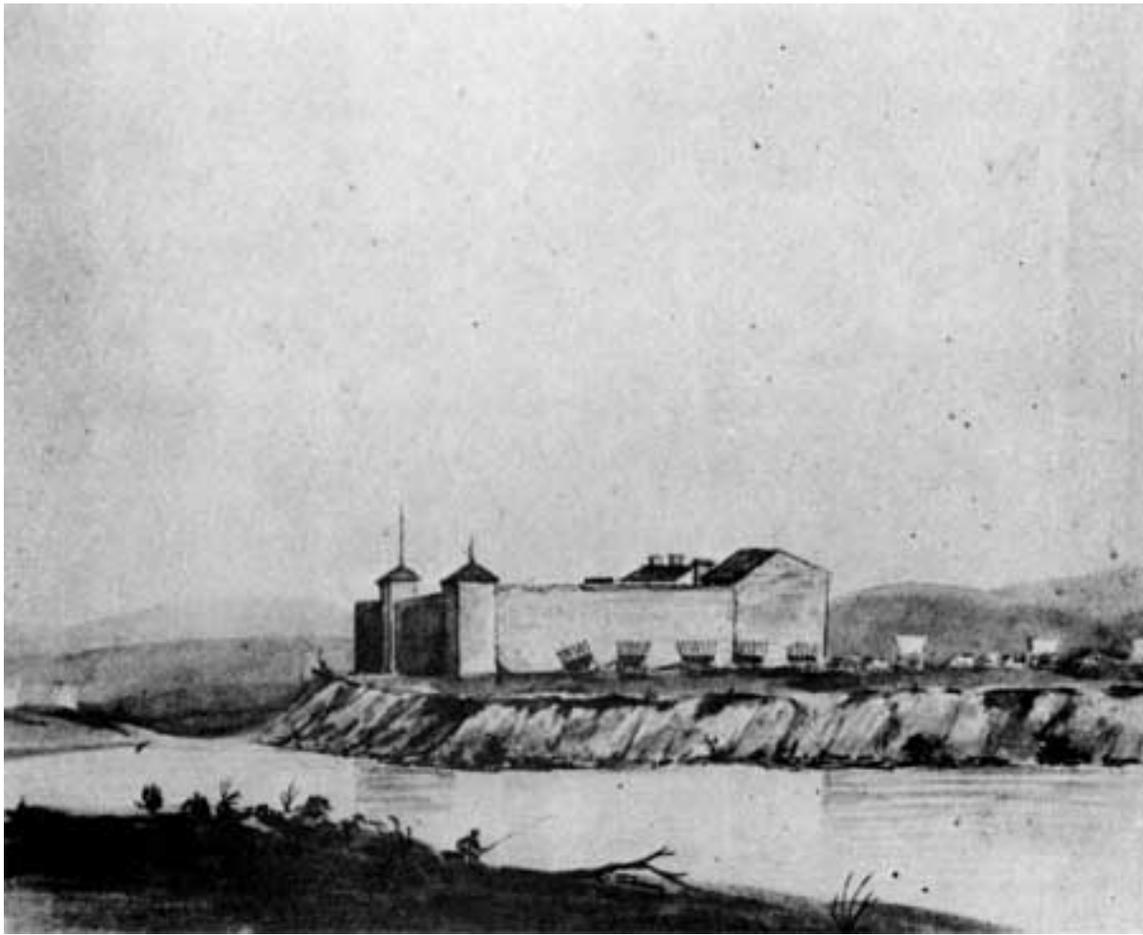


Figure 2. Fort John, the second Fort Laramie, was an adobe structure built in 1841 by the American Fur Company. It was sketched in 1849 by emigrant James F. Wilkins. (Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.)



Figure 3. This sketch by Merritt Houghton in the Signal Corps Collection of the National Archives, Washington, D.C., shows Fort Laramie just before abandonment in 1889.



Figure 4. Bachelor officers were quartered in Old Bedlam, shown here in an 1889 photograph. It was the setting for Captain Charles King's famous novel, Queen of Bedlam. (Photograph courtesy of E. A. Brininstool.)

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Last Updated: 01-Mar-2003

Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART I: FORT LARAMIE, 1834 - 1890

Chapter IX: OVERLAND TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Military events of 1857-1859 gave urgency to the need to strengthen the garrison and its facilities. Fort Laramie now became a vitally important supply depot and staging area for troops on campaign. It also became a major link in the vital life-line of rapidly expanding transcontinental transportation and communications.

No sooner were the Sioux subdued than the Cheyenne were antagonized by the imprisonment and death of one of their number at the fort, and vowed revenge. Minor clashes with troops were followed by murderous attacks on travellers. In the summer of 1857 Colonel E. V. Sumner with troops from Forts Leavenworth and Laramie tracked the Cheyenne down in western Kansas where he scattered a battle line of braves by a spirited cavalry charge, and destroyed their lodges.

Meanwhile Fort Laramie was caught up in the so-called Utah or Mormon War, launched on the basis of complaints by "Gentiles" about the high-handed tactics of the "Saints." Though a military fiasco, the Utah Expedition did ensure the pacification of the alleged rebels, taught the Army valuable lessons about the logistics and magnitude of a large-scale western campaign, and brought about a revolution in frontier transportation that helped bridge a continent.

In October, 1857 an expedition of some 2,500 troops under Colonel A. S. Johnston advanced from Fort Laramie toward Salt Lake City. The Mormon strategy of harassing and burning the long supply trains, coupled with snow and zero weather which decimated the animals, caused the failure of this monumental effort, and the troops were compelled to spend a bleak winter of near-starvation at Fort Bridger, which also had been put to the torch by the zealous Mormon legions. To quell this obstinate rebellion Congress authorized more regiments, and heroic efforts were made to dispatch more equipment and supplies via Fort Laramie. Before the aggrieved and reinforced Army could move once more, behind-the-scenes diplomatic maneuvers brought about a peaceful settlement.

An impressive consequence of this abortive campaign was the spurt in growth of oxen-powered freight trains up the Platte. The dominant factor in this booming business was the firm of Russell, Majors and

Waddell, which operated out of Leavenworth and Nebraska City. To fulfill their contract with the Army in 1858, they had to round up some 4,000 wagons, 45,000 oxen, "two acres of ox-yokes," and some 5,000 teamsters or "bull-whackers." The typical freighter was the classic big sway-backed prairie schooner or Conestoga wagon which could hold 2-1/2 tons, and was served by 6 to 8 teams. William H. Jackson's sketches vividly portray scenes from ox-team days. Another important innovation in cross-country transit was the development of overland U. S. mail service. The Platte-South Platte route was the earliest of all transcontinental routes, serving first Utah and later California until the advent of the Union Pacific Railroad to the south. Fort Laramie was the principal station and guardian of this vital service on the High Plains.

The Army always had its own courier service, but the public mail service across the Plains and Mountains began in 1850 when S. H. Woodson was awarded a contract to carry mail between Independence and Salt Lake City. Primitive conditions prevented dependable service until 1854 when W. Magraw got the contract and started the first chain of manned stations along the Platte, but the Sioux raids that followed the Grattan affair soon disrupted his efforts. In 1858 the Hockaday line was able to bring mail from Missouri to the fort, by mule cart, in just 12 days.

In 1858 the first official mail route to California followed the Southern route via Fort Smith and Tucson, but in 1861 this was switched to the Central route, and then stayed there as the result of two melodramatic happenings the Pony Express experiment, which demonstrated the geographical superiority of the Central route, and the Civil War, which killed the Southern route politically.

Russell, Majors, and Waddell, the entrepreneurs of overland freighting, launched the Pony Express in a calculated effort to get the mail contract for the Central route by proving that it offered speedier service than the longer Southern route and that this service could be maintained through all seasons. The terminals were St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California, with intermittent stations for changes of mount at approximate intervals of 15 miles, and "swing stations" for changes of riders at intervals of 100 miles. The first west-bound rider galloped into Fort Laramie on April 6, 1860, just three days out of St. Joseph. It took 20 riders and 75 horses an average of 10-1/2 days, over 2,000 miles, to reach Sacramento. The great gamble paid off but not, ironically, for the three partners. Early in 1861 Congress authorized a daily mail by stage and semi-weekly Pony Express via Fort Laramie, but the \$1,000,000 contract went to Ben Holliday who had pioneered the Southern route. By this contract also overland mail coaches carrying passengers 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 line were stretching out across the land. The telegraph reached Fort Laramie in September, 1861, and was completed to Salt Lake City, connecting with a line from the West Coast on October 4. This date, making possible instant communication between the East and California, marked the end of the Pony Express. Though a financial failure that bankrupted its originators, it was a meteoric achievement that would forever symbolize American enterprise.

From 1855 to 1860 covered wagon migration to Utah and California continued, though at a moderate level, on the order of 30,000 for the period. The year 1856 seems to have been the most populous one. That year also saw the first of the Mormon handcart companies, composed mainly of English converts who pushed their strenuous way west without benefit of draft animals.

The decline in travel up the North Platte may be attributed in part to the Pike's Peak Gold Rush of 1859-1860, following the discovery of gold in 1858 on the South Platte near Cherry Creek, a site which soon became the boom city of Denver. The old trappers' trail between Fort Laramie and Bent's Fort on the Arkansas now became a busy Denver-Fort Laramie Road. For a brief time the fort served as the nearest post office to the new Eldorado.

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE

PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE (continued)

Though the Winter "campaign" to have Forts Laramie and Bridger set aside proved to be but another flash in the pan, more effective efforts were in the mill. First among these was the organization, in New York City, of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association, with the venerable Ezra Meeker as nominal President. Among members were the equally venerable ex-cowboy William Hooker and ex-bullwhacker and artist, William H. Jackson, the latter being one of the most effective apostles of this new movement. To help finance the enterprise Congress authorized the coinage of memorial 50-cent pieces. Another money making idea was that Meeker, with the assistance of journalist Robert Bruce, would write "a book surrounding old Fort Laramie which he hoped would have a large circulation," but which seems not to have materialized. If it were financially successful, "the Association would like to help in preserving the Old Fort as a Historical Landmark." Although most of its philanthropies were engaged in helping to finance Oregon Trail and Pony Express markers, in time the OTMA would play a significant role in promotional events that helped keep the Fort Laramie torch aflame. [24]

In June, 1926 Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard gave the dedicatory speech at a new marker for the Mary Homesley grave near the Fort, with a vibrant ode to heroic pioneers. [25] While attention was still riveted on this inspirational theme, the Fort Laramie neighborhood had an unusual visitor, a Mr. Bell, a Pathe News photographer, to make a motion picture of scenic and historic attractions for the Guernsey Chamber of Commerce, which was subsequently shown at theatres up and down the Valley. The production, including artistic shots of the Fort ruins, marking "the most famous outpost of the Old West," was rated by the Guernsey Gazette as a "stupendous attraction." The Scout reported that the movie included action shots of Hunton and Wilde in their historic habitat. After the showing Chief Yellow Calf of the Arapahoes addressed the audience in sign language. Hunton's attendance at this movie, an exception to his long-standing rule to avoid such sybaritic entertainment, and his open dialogue with the Chief in the Arapahoe tongue, generated further historic interest among Valley communities. [26]

Another development that summer was the much-publicized Fort Laramie encampment of the Fourth U. S. Cavalry from Fort D. A. Russell, en route in September to the State Fair in Douglas. This was billed as "the first time since Fort Laramie was abandoned by the Government that U. S. troops are encamped on the old

parade ground, and the notes of the bugle resound once more and echo back from the ancient walls." The Regiment, under Colonel Osnum Latrobe, composed of 250 men and 300 horses, "pitched camp in the shelter of the old buildings," where motion pictures of the nostalgic camp amidst historic surroundings were taken by Pathe News and distributed nationwide. [27]

While these events were keeping the Fort in the limelight, newspapermen were thumping the tub for preservation at a rising tempo. When the Cheyenne Tribune-Leader asked for suggestions as to what should be done with the "John Higgins Trust" donated to the State, George Houser was ready with a novel idea that the State, rather than the Federal Government, might after all be the most logical protector of the Fort:

One very appropriate way of using the bequest of this fine old man would be to purchase the site of Old Fort Laramie as a state park, restore the old buildings and grounds to something of their former appearance. Fix up one of the old buildings for an historical department and move the old records and curios from Cheyenne where they are now seldom noticed, to this beauty spot where these things would become a great attraction.

We talk about the federal government setting aside this old post as a national monument, but the State of Wyoming should not relinquish it and should need no further urging to make a beautiful state park.

The old place is dear to the heart of every Wyoming citizen. . . it revives in the archives of our memory the trials and tribulations of the early pioneers. . . Our citizens, for who else can we lay it to, should be put to shame for any further neglect in preserving this fine old Fort, the most famous outpost of the old West. [28]

Meanwhile Pat Flannery reported a rising tide of enthusiasm for the preservation project elsewhere in the state, citing pledges of support by the Wheatland Times and the Cheyenne Tribune, as well as various chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Suggestions were made that there be a campaign of public subscriptions to supplement a basic appropriation by the State Legislature. While not opposed to State ownership, if that were the only alternative, Flannery editorialized in favor of national monument status, so that the Federal Government could reclaim its own. He asserted, "It is in truth a national monument whether we have it or whether we forget it, but wouldn't it shock and scandalize the nation to see the Washington Monument in a state of neglect or the grave of the Unknown Soldier overgrown with weeds!" He continued, "The movement to honor Old Fort Laramie will indeed be glad tidings to those who find repugnance in the destruction or commercialization of ancient and holy things." [29]

This last enigmatic statement was an oblique reference to the Omaha entrepreneur who had bought the best part of the Fort, and who had announced forthcoming improvements. This had elicited the skepticism also of the D.A.R. ladies of Wheatland who asked Mr. Waters to reassure them that "he did not intend to permit the old buildings to be obliterated." Despite Waters' promises to this effect, Flannery was disturbed by the proposed "remodeling of the fort for resort purposes." To him this "seems like an ignominious end for this place." [30] However, for all the talk, no actual "remodelling" was begun in the summer of 1926, as advertised, giving the preservationists cause to hope that something could still be done publicly before the private moratorium was lifted.

At a late August meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the North Platte Valley, in Torrington, attended by Governor Nellie Tayloe Ross, a resolution was passed, "to endorse the movement to make a national park of old Fort Laramie." Commented Flannery:

This is one of the strongest endorsements that this movement has yet received, and should give it much impetus. The Old Fort undoubtedly contains possibilities that could make it into the most interesting national monument of the nation. Aside from its great value to historians and writers, Fort Laramie as a national monument would have a strong appeal to all classes of Americans, for it is symbolical of the most romantic period of our history. . . [31]

As it turned out, in 1926 the key to Fort Laramie's future was in the hands of two men attending the Annual Pioneer Reunion held in Guernsey August 27-28. Among those present was William H. Jackson of Washington, D.C., who first followed the Oregon Trail in 1866 as an employee of the freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell, who made the first photographs of the scenic wonders of Yellowstone Park, in 1872, and whose sketches of Scotts Bluff, Fort Laramie and other landmarks would make him one of the premier salesmen of the Old West. Accompanying the aging but spry Mr. Jackson was Robert S. Ellison, vice-president, Midwest Refining Company, Casper, a man of vision dedicated to preserving historic reminders of pioneer virtues. [32] The strongest and most perceptive case presented to date for Fort Laramie appeared in a guest editorial by Mr. Ellison in a special edition of the Guernsey Gazette gotten up for the Reunion. His views are of prime importance in the light of his subsequent activist role as first chairman of the Landmark Commission:

Wyoming is fortunate in having two of the three great out-fitting points on the Oregon Trail between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean. Of these Fort Laramie in southeastern Wyoming possesses an even greater wealth of historic values than Fort Bridger in southwestern Wyoming, and outranks in the history of the west any other trading or military post . . .

I realize full well the need for most of us to make a livelihood and not dwell too long upon our past, no matter how heroic and glorious, but I also believe that no people can be truly great and hope to endure without due regard for the knowledge of the worthy deeds and sacrifices of our ancestors. . .

It is therefore, a matter of no mean importance, in my opinion, that we secure and preserve as best we can the site and ruins of old Fort Laramie. . . Just how this can be done best is not easy to outline, but we must first resolve and want it done.

Mr. Ellison revealed that a formula for the preservation of Fort Laramie and other major historical properties as well had been given to him by Horace Albright, then Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park, and soon to become the second Director of the National Park Service. [33] He quotes Mr. Albright:

. . . unless the private ownership of these landmarks can be extinguished the Federal Government would feel that it would be futile to try to handle them as national monuments. . .

It seems to me that the first step would be to get the Legislature to pass an act authorizing condemnation of the properties, and at the same time authorizing the acceptance of private donations for the purchase of historical landmarks. The law ought also to contain authority to transfer such landmarks to the Federal Government.

Mr. Albright also suggested the formation of a state landmarks commission to serve without pay in implementing this procedure, advice that would be followed quickly. Mr. Ellison was among the first to recognize that acquisition alone would not solve the problem, that the expenses of restoration, protection and maintenance would be formidable; accordingly, the virtue in Federal ownership was that these expenses could be shared by taxpayers nationwide, not solely those of the State. That failing, his only suggestion for State revenue was to provide "simple cabins and accommodations for visitors" whose payment for such facilities might cover management costs. Looking beyond that awkward hurdle he envisioned "a suitable library and museum building where manuscripts, books and evidences of pioneer life could be assembled by gift or purchase, and be available to writers and the general public for all time to come." The Fort, he envisioned, would become a mecca for millions of Americans who "seek lasting inspiration" from such shrines. [34]

After such clairvoyant flights of imagination, getting back to mundane reality was a real jolt. At this point this took the form of Mr. Waters, the well-intentioned man from Omaha. In April 1926 he had formed a partnership with M. S. Hartman, executive of the Fairmont Creamery of Omaha, to embark on his proclaimed Fort restoration project. In May the Fort Laramie Scout quoted Lewis A. Snell, local contractor, as saying that the partners, "plan to start work by restoring the exteriors of the old buildings to their original state, as nearly as possible, beginning about June 15 of that year. However, it appears that, whatever plans there were, there was little or no work on the premises until December. The January 6, 1927 issue of the Scout reports that Mr. Snell "had been engaged for the past two weeks in reshingling and remodelling the old Sutler's Store. Other old buildings are being reshingled and it is reported that the owners plan to refloor the old buildings." The January 13 issue revealed that it was the intention of Mr. Hartman "to make use of the sutler's store as a museum. Mr. Snell was invited to "come to Omaha, with all expenses paid, that he may look over Mr. Hartman's collection of mounted wildlife, old coins, etc., and thus get a better idea of the cases, stands, and other fixtures that he will be required to build." The September 1 issue summarized the season's accomplishments:

Messrs. Tom Waters and M. S. Hartman. . . have made a commendable start toward the preservation of the more historic buildings, and plan to continue this work over a considerable period. The services of Lewis Snell. . . have been engaged for a year with this end in view.

The crumbling walls of the old adobe "sutler's store" have been patched and strengthened with concrete, new floors laid, and its sagging roof is now supported by a series of new concrete pillars. . .

The next work to be undertaken is that of restoring "Old Bedlam", a two story frame building renowned (sic) in history and fiction. . .

Mr. Waters has given instructions that the old material is to be salvaged and reused wherever

feasible so that the buildings may be restored as nearly as possible to their original condition. He states that the only object of the work being done now is to prevent further deterioration.

That seems to have been the extent of the Waters-Hartman private restoration project, and we can only speculate that they ran short of funds or had second thoughts about the money-making potential of their investment. [35] Later Government restorationists shed tears over the drastic treatment of the adobe Sutler's Store, with concrete pillars in lieu of the original west wall, and the disappearance of almost all shelving, ledgers, and miscellaneous articles once reported to have survived in quantity. To the extent that the store and other buildings were actually re-shingled, the partners must get credit for thus retarding worse structural dangers from radical leakage and possible collapse. In summary, whatever their deficiencies as restorationists, the partners destroyed no buildings and should get credit for preservation efforts that no government agency would be able to undertake for another decade. [36]

In 1927 the good news was the creation by the Wyoming State Legislature of a Historical Landmark Commission (HLCW), pretty much along the lines recommended by Horace Albright to Robert Ellison. This independent agency would play a central role in repeated efforts to acquire Fort Laramie.

The Commission was created by an Act approved February 26, 1927. It consisted of 3 members appointed by the Governor. The initial appointments were Robert S. Ellison of Casper, Chairman; Warren Richardson of Cheyenne, Treasurer; and Joseph Weppner of Rock Springs, Secretary. There was a small recurring appropriation for reimbursement of travel expenses, printing Biennial reports, and the preparation and placement of historical markers, but no funds for the acquisition, improvement or operation of historic sites. The broad powers of the Commission included authority to evaluate any or all historic sites in the State, to provide for roadside monumentation, and to recommend sites for State acquisition. Anticipating resistance by landowners, the law authorized condemnation proceedings to acquire in fee simple with funds appropriated specifically for the purpose, "any real estate which in the opinion of the Commission is of sufficient historic interest as to require that the same be set aside and preserved for the public welfare." Anticipating the strain on state budgets which such acquisitions might entail, the statute also gave the Commission the power to arrange by contract or otherwise with the U. S. Government or its constituted agencies for the preservation and care of state-owned sites. A final major provision, to augment the efforts of the 3 Commissioners operating on donated time over a vast region, was authority to appoint an "interested, capable and working advisory committee in each county." [37]

The Commission's First Biennial Report issued in 1928 expressed its sense of high purpose: "Few states possess as many outstanding historic sites identified with the upbuilding and bringing of civilization into the West as does Wyoming. Our wealth in this respect should be regarded as a sacred heritage and a priceless asset." In this report the Commissioners gave Fort Laramie prominent billing as "the first permanent establishment in what is now Wyoming, and easily the most famous post in the entire West." The Chairman noted that he personally "has attempted at different times since January, 1925, in connection with the Honorable John Hunton, to secure the cooperation of and definite prices from the owners, but it has been impossible to secure same, and the acquisition of the fort will probably have to be handled along different lines." While Ellison had previously mentioned "public subscriptions" and "public-spirited contributions," he had little faith in that kind of solution. His formula would be condemnation if necessary, and appropriation of land acquisition funds by the State Legislature when confronted with a hard choice. Fort

Bridger, the state's first historical acquisition, in 1929, became available without such recourse, but Ellison knew that Fort Laramie would be a tougher nut to crack. [38]

While the Commission was getting squared away to take some kind of action, the initiative was seized by George Houser, who thought that it might be worthwhile to have another try along the Congressional route and save the State a lot of money. At his instigation, in August, 1928 the proposition of "having Old Fort Laramie set aside as a national monument, or in some way of having it preserved for posterity," was presented by the Miller-Rebillet Post of Guernsey to the State Convention of the American Legion in Cheyenne. The Legion was, of course, delighted to support this patriotic move. Early in 1929 Houser, now a member of the State House of Representatives from Platte County, introduced "House Joint Memorial Number 1, memorializing Congress to purchase, restore, and preserve old Fort Laramie, and set it aside as a national monument." The Act approved February 14 reads in part as follows:

WHEREAS Old Fort Laramie. . . is the most noted frontier post in the West, where thousands upon thousands of immigrants paused for protection and supplies, as they trekked their way westward across the Plains of the Great West, to establish a new empire; and

WHEREAS, this old Fort, to which there is more historic sentiment attached than any other spot in the West, is fast decaying, and should be preserved for posterity, in order that future generations may see it and be inspired to emulate those sturdy pioneer who passed this way. . .

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that in order to accomplish this purpose, Congress be requested to appropriate a reasonable sum to purchase the Old Fort and grounds, and preserve this noted spot in the West. . .

Be it further resolved that the House of Representatives of the 20th Legislature, the Senate concurring, do hereby strongly urge favorable action by Congress. . . and that copies of this Resolution be submitted to the Interior Department of the United States, to the National Parks Commission, and to each of the members of the Wyoming delegation in Congress. [39]

The bill was introduced in Congress, but died still-born in the House Interior Sub-Committee. Approaching the matter more realistically, the HLCW, on October 18, 1929, at a special meeting in Cheyenne, acted to set up an advisory committee representing Goshen and Platte Counties "with the primary object of acquiring and maintaining the site of Old Fort Laramie." Houser and Flannery accepted invitations to serve and they in turn were empowered to name 5 others: Charles L. Bruce of Fort Laramie; Fred Burton, Guernsey; Dr. G. O. Hanna, Lingle; Hon. Thomas G. Powers, Torrington; and Rev. E. L. Tull, Wheatland. This committee met at Torrington November 6 and elected Houser as Chairman, Flannery as Secretary. Also, two independent volunteer teams of appraisers were designated to examine and report on their evaluation of the 3 coveted properties, held then in the names of Thomas Waters, J. M. Auld, and George Sandercock. [40] At a meeting in Fort Laramie town on December 1, the 2 teams of appraisers came up with combined valuations of \$10,650 and \$15,650 respectively, for a total of slightly under 50 acres north of the Laramie River, which just barely encompassed the visible structural remains. While this would impose severance problems for all 3 parties, the appraisers gave the opinion that "the restoration of Fort Laramie would neither benefit or damage" the rest of the private holdings. [41]

The Second Biennial Report of the Commission (1929-1930) confessed to no definite progress on the Fort Laramie front "other than having a plat made of the historic properties described, together with appraisal of fair value by local realtors and ranch owners." It could only express hope for "some definite proposition" for the next session of the Legislature. Flannery believed that the situation was critical. He reported early in 1930 that the local committee had received a visit from J. W. Auld of Red Cloud, Nebraska:

Mr. Auld. . . states that unless some action toward acquiring the property is taken soon it may be necessary for him to tear down the historic old barracks, as they are beginning to require extensive repairs, which their value to a private owner for commercial purposes does not justify. . .

The undaunted spirit of the pioneers still hovers there among those ruins of its former greatness and if Wyoming permits those ruins to utterly perish, we shall truly be ungrateful of what they did for us. . . Their memory will reproach us and future generations will will reproach us if the scene of old Fort Laramie is permitted to pass and fade, unhonored. [\[42\]](#)

While negotiations languished the project promoters sky-rocketed with plans for a mammoth public celebration on the Fort grounds, the "Covered Wagon Centennial" commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Smith-Jackson-Sublette wagon caravan of 1830 from St. Louis to the Rocky Mountain rendezvous, on Wind River, the first wheeled vehicles up the Platte River Road. The memorable event of August 15, on a scale similar to the one held on July 4 at Independence Rock, was inspired by the Oregon Trail Memorial Association and a Presidential Proclamation observing the Centennial. It was coordinated by the local advisory committee of the HLCW spearheaded by Chairman Houser and Secretary Flannery. Estimates of attendance that day vary wildly, from 7,500 to 23,000, but whatever the correct figure, it was alleged by Flannery to be "the largest crowd ever assembled in the North Platte Valley." The unparalleled success of the celebration was due to the enthusiasm with which community organizations up and down the Valley, from Scottsbluff to Douglas, participated. The massive turnout certainly demonstrated "widespread interest in the movement to preserve and restore the birthplace of Western history as a state or national monument." The demonstration of support was all the more convincing because the celebration was held despite some of the most adverse weather and road conditions on record. Flannery paints the vivid picture:

After weeks of fair weather, unusually heavy rains set in the week previous to the Covered Wagon Centennial Observance at Old Fort Laramie. All day Thursday, all night Thursday, the downpour continued. And early Friday morning the leaden skies still dripped, making it appear that the ceremonies would be impossible, and flood waters from the north came tumbling down upon the town of Fort Laramie, inundating its streets and sidewalks under a foot or more of water, sending traffic over the highway to the Old Fort on a wide detour. But rain and flood could not dampen the ardor of those thousands who came from near and far to pay tribute at this shrine of western history and Old Neptune himself finally gave up the job, the battalions of clouds gave way and the sun came out from his retreat to usher in a beautiful day.

Although the weather eliminated a pageant and several other programmed events, and the muddy roads

became a quagmire, by 2 P.M. there were an alleged 5,000 automobiles parked in the vicinity. (The Mayor of Torrington had issued a proclamation of his own, and virtually that entire city migrated to the Fort on that day.) Chairman Ellison of the HLCW presided over the formal program, with addresses by Governor Frank C. Emerson of Wyoming and Congressman Robert Simmons of the Sixth District, Nebraska. Telegrams from President Herbert Hoover and other dignitaries were read, and old-timers were introduced. Prominent among these were William H. Jackson, James H. Cook, Finn Burnett, and Mrs. Harry English, daughter of a former post commander.

Local color was provided by a Sioux Indian encampment, and an attack by masked bandits on a genuine Deadwood stagecoach. More excitement was generated by the appearance of an emigrant wagon train which had to fight off an Indian attack before crossing the swollen Laramie River in a very realistic re-encatment of covered wagon days. The emotional climax came with a battalion of infantry and a 75-piece band from Fort Francis E. Warren, staging a retreat ceremony, posting guards, and playing patriotic music to evoke mystic memories of the once-great military post amid its present ruins. Fox Movietone motion picture crews recorded these scenes, complete with sound effects. [43]

While the celebration demonstrated plenty of enthusiasm, and the new Fort Laramie Historical Society signed on 200 new members at \$1. per head, after everyone had gone home the same old acquisition problem was still there. There was no money in sight and the land-owners, though agreeable to permitting the jubilee, had little interest in forced sale. [44]

The local advisory committee of the Landmark Commission next thought to check out the War Department, having heard that they had something to do with "monuments." The committee contacted Senator Kendrick and Congressman Carter who requested a military inspection of the forsaken Fort. Accordingly, in September, 1930 a Colonel Landers was dispatched to make a survey of the remains. Evidently the upshot of this polite exercise was a suggestion that, in accordance with its custom of marking selected old sites and battlefields, the War Department might contribute a monument of some sort if suitable land could be donated, However, this would be merely another stone monument, not the historical park kind of a "national monument" that Ellison and others envisioned. [45] Needless to relate, the Lander investigation was not fraught with portent or consequences. The Interior Department which had inherited the Fort in 1890, not the War Department which had abandoned it, would become the Fort's ultimate redeemer.

In 1931 there was one more abortive proposal for returning the Old Fort to military status. Officers of the National Guard, then encamped at Pole Mountain, publicly announced "that Old Fort Laramie is practically the unanimous choice of the officer personnel as a site of future camps." Editors Flannery and Houser were all for the proposition. [46] In retrospect, however, it is difficult to imagine how the Old Fort could actually have survived such usage. Fortunately the permanent National Guard camp was eventually located at Guernsey.

On June 7, 1931 the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming (HLCW) held a special meeting at Fort Laramie at the instigation of Committee Chairman Houser "to discuss the acquisition of the fort by the Commission as a historical landmark." Ex-Governor Bryant B. Brooks of Casper was now Chairman, (and) vice (president) Ellison who had moved to Oklahoma to pursue his career in oil. Also present were Dan W. Greenburg, new Publicity Director of the Commission; John C. Thompson of the Cheyenne Tribune; several

prominent Nebraskans; the entire advisory committee; and Fort Laramie old-timers Malcom Campbell (1867); Bert Wagner (1869); George L. Wilson (1873); and Deadwood Stagecoach alumni Fred Sullivan and Ernest Logan. After a tour of the premises led by knowledgeable Paul Henderson of Bridgeport, Nebraska, the party of over 100 were "guests of the advisory committee at a delicious chicken dinner served by Mrs. George Sandercock" on the rambling porch of the old officer's quarters which was her home.

After the feast the Commission got down to brass tacks with Mr. Waters who had come out from Omaha, the Commission now being fortified with the knowledge that the State Legislature had just appropriated \$15,000 "for the purchase and preservation of Fort Laramie." [47] Waters took the position that he had always hoped to make his home there. Nevertheless "he had no desire to profit at the expense of the State or to capitalize upon the sentimental value of Old Fort Laramie," and he would sell for an amount sufficient only to protect his investment. This would be \$22,500 for all of his 640 acres. Brooks explained that the Commission had authorization only to dicker for the 20 odd acres containing Waters' share of the Fort grounds in question, and then explained the Commission's right to exercise eminent domain. This evidently terminated the discussion. Subsequently it was decided that, just to be on the safe side, the local committee should conduct a re-survey for an alternate boundary enclosing around 100 acres, "including the old graveyard," which would double the size of the hypothetical park. [48]

Later in the year, when the Commission met at Torrington to dedicate an Oregon Trail marker there by the Burlington depot, they considered letters from J. W. Auld and M. S. Hartman offering to sell their land at the offered prices, but action had to be deferred in the absence of a similar offer from Waters, Hartman's co-owner. [49]

In view of Waters' intransigence, early in 1932 at the Commission's request the State Attorney-General instituted condemnation proceedings against the several owners. This move had the endorsement of the Fort Laramie Commercial Club, the Fort Laramie Mayor and Council, and the State American Legion. [50] A new Board of Appraisers appointed by the Court now came up with a firm figure of \$11,600 for a proposed area of 55 acres, or about \$250. per acre, well within the \$15,000 set aside for the purpose, the balance to go for sundry expenses. [51] The turn of events prompted the Scout to rhapsodize:

. . . In spite of its ravishment, Old Fort Laramie can still be made the nation's most outstanding and interesting monument to early western history, and if the present movement to bring that about is successful, it will be an achievement for which the Wyoming Historical Landmark Commission and the last session of the Wyoming legislature will probably be remembered long after most of the other acts of those august bodies have been forgotten by posterity. [52]

Though court proceedings were delayed through 1933, the Commission and its local committee also exuded optimism, primarily because of the slump in land values resulting from the Depression, and a conviction that the owners would come around to settling out of court. In December Dan Greenburg, anticipating victory, suggested that the Commission "take it up with Mr. Cameron [sic], Director General of the National Parks, making a letter proposition of deeding the Fort to the Government, providing they would rehabilitate it as soon as possible to its original condition when abandoned, and to tie it in with the regular park service." Invited to their deliberations Governor Leslie Miller said he was personally acquainted with Mr. Cammerer and would be glad to do all he could to "promote the proposition." He also admonished the Commission to

"take it up with Senator O'Mahoney and Congressman Carter." [53] These rosy thoughts were quickly dispelled by events in Torrington, and evidence is lacking that the Park Service was actually contacted at this time.

The unhappy outcome is summarized in minutes of the meeting held at the Trail Hotel in Torrington February 23, 1934. The Commission and Attorney-General Ray Lee met with the owners' attorneys to clarify the point that the Commission would go no further than the appraised value, regardless of a court decision:

. . . After many hours of discussion the attorney for Jessica Auld, part owner of the tract, and the attorney for Molly Sandercock, were willing to accept the proposition. But the attorney for Waters and Hartman, who owned the major part of the property, said he would get in touch with his clients and let us know their decision before the day was over. The Commission, however, did not hear from him, as his clients asked for a jury trial, and this trial was held. . . the following week. . . The jury after some deliberation brought in a verdict of an appraised valuation to the owners of \$500. an acre. This, of course, eliminated the purchase in any form by the Historical Landmark Commission. [54]

While no one came up with a theory as to why the jury doubled the appraised value (from around \$12,000 to \$25,000) one might speculate that the jury itself was made up of land-owners who, when the chips were down, preferred to see actual land values at a higher rather than a lower rate. However, Chairman Brooks pointed out that the original appropriation bill called for \$25,000, afterwards reduced by the Governor to \$15,000; the owners knew of this switch and were thus encouraged to "set up an exorbitant price for their holdings." [55]

Given the resounding success of the 1930 celebration at the Fort one would have supposed that 1934 would see another such affair, perhaps on an even larger scale, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the first Fort Laramie, the log stockade called Fort William by its founders, William Sublette and Robert Campbell. Indeed, Dr. Driggs of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association urged that something like this be promoted, and the idea was seriously entertained by the Fort Laramie Advisory Committee. But as it turned out there was no 1934 celebration of any kind, presumably because spirits had been dampened by the outcome of the condemnation proceedings. [56]

Though discouragement was probably at a record low at this time, coinciding with the severely depressed state of the national economy, a new ferment was beginning to bubble, a thrust of Government which promised somehow to rescue Fort Laramie from its threatened oblivion. This was the phenomenon known as the New Deal, the beginning of a still-dominant paternalistic trend by Congress and the Federal bureaucracy reflecting a philosophy of direct Government action to remedy all economic ills. Beginning in 1934 there was a series of Government programs calculated to promote public works and relieve unemployment. Although as it turned out Fort Laramie couldn't be brought under any of these emergency umbrellas, the continuing effort to do so kept hope alive during the critical three-year period, 1934-1936, before a real break-through could be achieved. During this period the indefatigable L. G. Flannery and other ardent advocates took the initiative away, temporarily, from the Historical Landmark Commission.

The earliest work relief programs of interest to Fort defenders were tied in with the National Park Service and Scotts Bluff National Monument, about 50 miles east in Western Nebraska. While the origins of the concept of tying various North Platte Valley historic sites together for park purposes may be traced back to the abortive Congressional proposal of 1925 aforementioned, the idea gained momentum with a visit to the region in September, 1932 by Horace M. Albright, Director of the Park Service. After meeting Nebraska civic leaders at Scotts Bluff National Monument to outline development plans there, Albright met with Wyoming newspapermen in Guernsey. According to Flannery,

The purpose behind Director Albright's visit and these meetings, as we understand it, was to forward a movement to include Scottsbluff Monument, Old Fort Laramie, Lake Guernsey, the famous Spanish Diggings, and many other interesting historical places of the community in the national parks system, and thus receive federal aid in their development. [57]

In July, 1933 a similar pilgrimage was made by H. C. Bryant, Assistant Director, National Park Service, in charge of "Education," He echoed the current party line for a catch-all historical park:

Mr. Bryant indicated that the proposition is looked upon with favor by the parks service, and that Scotts Bluff might be the central headquarters of the area.

He said the reconstruction and employment relief programs of the national government will probably make considerable money available for roads and park construction, and that the national parks service is paying more and more attention to the historical and educational side of national parks development and from the historical viewpoint this valley is truly a rich field, with Old Fort Laramie outstanding. [58]

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Fort Laramie

Park History, 1834-1977



PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE

PART II: THE CRUSADE TO SAVE FORT LARAMIE (continued)

Early in 1934 rancher-paleontologist Harold J. Cook of Agate, Nebraska, son of the noted scout, James H. Cook, was placed in charge of a Civil Works Administration project headquartered at Gering, Nebraska, the post-office town for the Scotts Bluff Monument, to make a survey of historic and archeologic sites in the North Platte Valley. In his report on Fort Laramie Cook emphasized its historic importance and the deplorable condition of its remains. [59] The report went to Washington, D.C. where it was swallowed up in a paper mountain, but at this time the Park Service took steps in another direction which galvanized the Fort Laramie brigade. Partly pursuant to Cook's report of the richness of Oregon Trail sites and remains up and down the North Platte Valley, and partly to satisfy the Nebraska clamor for work projects, the Washington D. C. office of the Park Service announced the simultaneous launching of two related projects: an Oregon Trail Museum at Scotts Bluff National Monument, and the study of an "Oregon Trail National Parkway" to encompass a beaded string of historic sites all the way from Ash Hollow to Register Cliff, a distance of about 175 miles. The latter project was a "dream-boat" proposition which had first surfaced in 1925, and would surface every so often for the next 50 years. [60] In 1934, certainly, it never got off the ground. In contrast, the first wing of the Oregon Trail Museum did materialize in 1935. But in 1934 the official announcement bracketed these objectives, leading to some excited reaction in Wyoming. While finding the NPS ideas "laudable" ringleader Flannery proclaimed:

There is one part of the program with which the News believes the people of Wyoming should take prompt and emphatic exception and that is concerning the location of the proposed Oregon Trail Museum. . . The construction of [it] at the foot of Scottsbluff monument, instead of Old Fort Laramie, strikes us as a matter of letting the tail wag the dog. . . It is one part of the proposed national park development that strikes us as entirely misplaced. . . There are perhaps a thousand reasons for the building of such a museum at Old Fort Laramie. . . to one reason that can be suggested for such a museum at Scottsbluff.

Flannery urged that the citizens make their displeasure known. Subsequently resolutions objecting to the Oregon Trail Museum in Nebraska were passed by local groups and the American Legion. The Torrington Rotary Club thought "the plan to establish a museum at the foot of Scottsbluff is not well advised or logical

from a historical standpoint." Responding to the furor, Senator O'Mahoney visited NPS Director Arno B. Cammerer to urge reconsideration. Mr. Cammerer's reply was polite: "You may be sure that this matter is receiving our best consideration. I have always been interested personally in Fort Laramie and hope that something may be developed along the lines you are interested in." Of course the hard truth was that Scotts Bluff National Monument was in existence and, despite the low rating given it by Flannery, it was a bona fide famous Oregon Trail landmark, whereas Fort Laramie, though of undisputed importance, was still in private hands. Mr. Cammerer didn't say so but a museum at Scotts Bluff would in no way inhibit proper development of the Fort as, if and when it could be acquired. [61]

Early in 1935 the idea of a strung-out Oregon Trail Park up and down the North Platte Valley was revived by the National Park Service on the strength of a New Deal scheme to develop recreational and historic parklands on "sub-marginal lands," meaning either unoccupied public lands or unproductive private lands that could be acquired at sub-marginal prices. Verne Chatelain, Chief, History Division, NPS, advised H. J. Dollinger of the Scottsbluff Chamber of Commerce that the implementation of this scheme required the appointment of a Commission "to work for acquisition by the NPS of historic sites along the old trails." In Nebraska such a commission chaired by Mr. Dollinger was promptly appointed by Governor Cochran under the imposing title, "Nebraska Old Oregon and Mormon Trails National Park Area Commission." With little hesitation Wyoming's Governor Miller reacted by the appointment of an "Old Fort Laramie National Park Area Commission," which was empowered to coordinate matters with the Nebraska group, but to set as their own Number One goal "the proposition of restoring Old Fort Laramie as a National Monument." In addition to the three members of the Landmark Commission, plus the ever faithful Houser and Flannery, the new Commission included such notables as Charles O. Stafford, Manager of the State Department of Commerce and Industry, Dr. Hebard, Dr. G. O. Hanna of Lingle, and Dan Greenburg. On February 10 the group met at Torrington sworn to do something about "the outstanding place in history between the Missouri River and the West Coast," even though "not much is left but a pile of ruins." At later joint meetings with the Nebraskans at Torrington and Guernsey the conferees agreed that a budget of \$150,000 might get the ball rolling toward establishment of an "Oregon-Mormon-California Trails National Park Area." Other than that they were at a loss "to ascertain the proper course for us to pursue."

At this point Flannery thought it best to ask Senator O'Mahoney to confer with Cammerer and Interior Secretary Harold Ickes to provide guidelines for their next move. Although Cammerer advised that "we will be glad to cooperate in every possible way in helping to make this worthwhile project a success," neither guidelines nor money was forthcoming. The only tangible result of this nebulous plan was a variety of bills submitted to Congress to set the goal of some kind of an Oregon Trail Park involving mainly Nebraska and Wyoming. However, one such bill framed by Wyoming's Representative Paul Greever, this time labelled "Western Trails National Park," went beyond the two states to include all eleven states involved in the California Trail as well as the Oregon and Mormon Trails, presumably in an effort to develop broad support that would somehow get Fort Laramie sanctified. Governor Miller wrote to the governors of all these states seeking their support. Whatever it took to save Fort Laramie, even if it was incidental to the creation of a rambling legal monstrosity, was worth a try. [62]

This particular bubble burst when Congressman Greever disclosed that "due to its purchase price it was hard to interest Park Service officials in Fort Laramie." After all the bother it seems that Fort Laramie was too expensive to be eligible for the sub-marginal land purchase program. With that disclosure, as far as Wyoming was concerned, the idea of an Oregon Trail or Western Trails Park was so much window dressing

and it could go down the drain. The scheme faded in Nebraska too, when none of the pretentious bills reached the floor of Congress, but of course Nebraska did get individual attention with the extensive development of Scotts Bluff National Monument, complete with museum, a paved road to its summit, and other goodies, including a full-fledged Civilian Conservation Corps Camp. Flannery was therefore understandably bitter, even though unfair, in his assertion that "this happens when we join Nebraska in a project. We are being jobbed. Any national park in the North Platte Valley that does not include Fort Laramie is letting the tail wag the dog." Using a somewhat different metaphor Robert Ellison (who, though now an Oklahoman, followed Fort Laramie's fortunes with great interest) confided to Joe Weppner that now instead of federal ownership he would rather see the State of Wyoming seek and keep ownership of Fort Laramie even if it took 10 years to accomplish, and "even if nothing remains excepting its site, than it become the tail to the Scotts Bluff National Monument kite." Ellison seemed obsessed with the idea that any effort to link Fort Laramie with the Nebraska monument would be demeaning, if not fatal. [63]

While these gentlemen apparently needed a scapegoat for their frustrations, there is no way that Nebraska's own aspirations to beef up recognition of the Oregon Trail, or the Park Service program at Scotts Bluff, could have been harmful to Fort Laramie. Actually, there was destined to be a close working relationship between personnel of that national monument and Fort Laramie over the next 10 years. This was primarily the result of a keen interest in the Fort Laramie project by Merrill J. Mattes, the first full-time Custodian and Historian of Scotts Bluff. [64] When he arrived on that scene in October, 1935 the history wing of the Oregon Trail Museum had been completed, the Scotts Bluff Summit Road was under construction, a CCC camp was in full operation, and the situation was ripe for a full-scale program of interpretation and public use there, after 16 years of neglect as a national monument in name only. Despite his intensive involvement in Scotts Bluff affairs, Mattes found time to visit and research numerous other Oregon Trail sites and landmarks in the Valley, including repeated visits to Fort Laramie, and correspondence and visits with Flannery, Houser, and other Fort protagonists. With nation-wide implementation of the Historic Sites Act of 1935, Mattes was frequently called upon by the new Regional Office in Omaha to provide data on Western Nebraska sites. Anticipating eventual recognition of Fort Laramie he initiated an extensive research file on the subject, and with the aid of citizen historian Paul Henderson of Bridgeport he assembled a set of historical maps and plans of Fort Laramie as well as other military posts. [65]

In one of their exchanges Flannery complained:

For some 15 years I have been interested in seeing the preservation of Fort Laramie accomplished, realizing it is the outstanding place of historical significance in this part of the West. During this same period I have seen this development delayed and deferred for other developments of incomparable less historical significance. I consider it a blot on our historical record. . .

In reply Mattes commended Flannery for working to preserve Fort Laramie for posterity, but explained that "it has not been by design but by accident that Scotts Bluff has received attention, whereas Fort Laramie has continued to waste away." The "accident" was the fact that there had been no problem in creating Scotts Bluff National Monument in 1919 out of public domain, at no cost to anyone, whereas Fort Laramie had long been privately owned and occupied. Mattes conceded that, "although I am stationed at Scotts Bluff I will admit it is of less historical significance than Old Fort Laramie." In effect, the Fort Laramie proponents

had gained an articulate ally within the ranks of the Park Service, living close by. From this point on he preached Fort Laramie to his superiors in the History Divisions of both Omaha and Washington, D.C. offices, and volunteered to work up a comprehensive report on the Fort for their consideration. [66]

Before tracing the chain of events that led directly to "the final solution" of the Fort Laramie dilemma it is necessary to report on one last effort to secure the property by a Federal relief program.

Flannery, who was now residing in Cheyenne as chairman of the Democratic party of Wyoming, expressed his disgust over the collapse of the Oregon Trail National Park idea by presenting Governor Miller with a "small wooden casket filled with earth from Fort Laramie," in which was imbedded an Indian arrowhead. It is not known if Governor Miller was amused by this gesture of mourning, but it is known that the irrepressible Flannery thereafter contacted the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Cheyenne and the Resettlement Administration, Land Utilization Division in Douglas to see if something couldn't still be crazy-quilted together to save the Fort which, despite all the brave schemes, was figuratively burning while the state and federal bureaucracy fiddled. Advised by Will G. Metz, Federal Emergency Relief Administrator, that Fort Laramie would be eligible for a WPA relief program if a sponsor could be found, Flannery got together with R. L. Spurlock, project manager of the Resettlement Administration in Douglas. The result was a marvellous document, dated October, 1935, proposing "the preservation and restoration of Old Fort Laramie" by the novel means of converting it into a settlement community for farm families in need of relief. The Government would buy up 4,600 acres of distressed land, including 300 under irrigation, dividing it into subsistence homestead tracts. About 20 families could be so relocated. They would live in the historic buildings, being under obligation to serve as caretakers of the property. There would be truck gardens, hay meadows, a game and bird refuge, and a recreational center. Labor for development purposes would be supplied by the WPA or CCC, and the workers could find quarters in the Cavalry Barracks. [67]

It makes one blink to imagine how all this would have worked out, and just what the fate of the buildings would have been under the dubious circumstances indicated. Flannery, who was willing to save Fort Laramie by whatever drastic means, sought to quiet the fears of O'Mahoney and Miller by assuring them that somehow the creation of this live-in Utopia "would result in the restoration and preservation of a historic spot which has been criminally neglected." Again, this thrust was blunted by National Park Service misgivings about the cost of the land. As to the availability of WPA, Associate Director Arthur A. Demaray advised Congressman Greever:

As you know this Service is greatly interested in Fort Laramie. However, from a field report just received from our Omaha office, it would appear that no WPA project has been approved as yet. . . If you see an opportunity for acquisition of the land by the State, and the inauguration through the local WPA of such a program, this Service will be glad to cooperate. . . [68]

However, it seems unlikely that the Service was very enthusiastic about preservation of the priceless remains tied at cross-purposes to a Resettlement project. In any event this would not have resulted in a park under NPS management.

When Flannery was tipped off by Mattes about the new Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) he

contacted Congressman Greever about that also, but was informed that this merely provided for unemployed architects to make measured drawings of historic buildings for the National Archives. There were no funds there to restore old buildings. [69] Flannery could not be accused of failing to leave any stone unturned in his one-man campaign. As fate would have it, however, late 1936 saw the end of catch-as-catch-can efforts to save the Fort by intermediary agencies, and a rather sudden convergence of direct NPS and State interests which led to the shining goal which had so long eluded Houser, Flannery and the Landmark Commission.

The National Park System is not a closed circle. When the Park Service was created by the Organic Act of 1916 it consisted of about 40 parks and monuments, all in the West. The number of areas has since grown to around 300 throughout the United States in several different categories parks, monuments, national historic sites, battlefields, memorials, seashores, recreational areas, etc. The Park System expands as areas deemed worthy of inclusion for their scenic, scientific or historic values are identified and their cause is pushed by interested citizens or groups with the aid of politicians who get Congress to pass a bill establishing such an area. The Director of the Service and the Secretary of Interior are routinely asked to comment on the merits of these bills, usually from the standpoint of "national significance." Seldom, if ever, has an area been identified and promoted by the National Park Service on its own initiative. The dynamic force has always been a "grass roots" or democratic process.

The only exception to the process of Congressional review and decision is the establishment of national monuments by Presidential Proclamation. The "national monument" category was authorized by the Antiquities Act of 1906, inspired by public indignation over the wholesale despoliation of prehistoric sites in the Southwest. It was concerned only with the preservation of designated "objects of historic and scientific interest" already in Federal ownership, as recommended to the President by the Secretary of the Interior. In Wyoming an excellent example of such a monument carved out of the public domain is Devil's Tower, which has the distinction of being the nation's first national monument, proclaimed by Theodore Roosevelt in 1906. Scotts Bluff was created in 1919 by order of President Woodrow Wilson. However, there was nothing to prevent the creation of a national monument by Proclamation in the case of private lands which might be acquired by the Government through donation by others. An example of this was Jackson Hole National Monument, created in 1944 as a prelude to its later incorporation into Grand Teton National Park. [70]

In the case of Fort Laramie the national monument route, or Presidential Proclamation after donation, was the only feasible one in the 1930s since it was then unthinkable that a Congress battling the Depression had money to spare to buy expensive lands for historical park purposes, especially in the thinly populated West. This was the formula clarified by Horace Albright to Robert Ellison in 1925, and understood all along by the HLCW. It was also understood by proponents like L. G. Flannery except that "Pat" was never bashful about trying any other formula as long as the national monument idea failed to jell.

It was not until 1936, when the NPS finally dropped its passive role as adviser to a series of relief agencies and for the first time actively sought Fort Laramie as a prime historical property for its own sake, that things finally began to fall into place. The time when this role reversal took place can be pin-pointed. It was on September 5, 1936 when Assistant Director Hillory A. Tolson visited Fort Laramie, was impressed by what he saw, and returned to Washington, D.C. to initiate the positive actions that, so to speak, precipitated the solution.

Mr. Tolson's visit to Fort Laramie was unpremeditated. Strangely enough, despite earlier assurances of official interest in Fort Laramie by Directors Albright and Cammerer, Associate Director Demaray, and park division chiefs Chatelain and Bryant, no NPS official from Washington, D.C. or from the new Regional Office in Omaha had ever been formally invited by the HLCW to come on out and look the place over, and none had been dispatched to do so on the Director's or Regional Director's own initiative, with the express object of an inspection looking toward the establishment of a park. [71] Even Mr. Tolson's visit was initially for the sole purpose of inspecting Scotts Bluff National Monument and its work program, which he did on the morning of September 5 with Acting Custodian Randels and Historian Mattes. His intention was to drive on directly to the Grand Teton and Yellowstone Parks, but he was prevailed upon first to visit Fort Laramie by the Scotts Bluff Historian who on his own initiative, without any official prompting from Omaha or Washington, D.C. had become a Fort Laramie researcher and preservation exponent, and was painfully aware that early action was necessary to save it. Mattes accompanied Tolson and his wife to the Fort, followed by Thomas L. Green of Scottsbluff with Randels as his passenger. Mr. Green, a retired banker, was an avid Oregon Trail historian who had shared his lore and enthusiasm with young Mattes. Meeting at the Fort the party made a thorough inspection of the premises, with Green and Mattes detailing the long epic history of the Fort, and emphasizing its crucial importance as well as the precarious condition of its remains. Tolson was primarily an administrator, not a historian, but he sparkled with enthusiasm and indicated that he would recommend immediate action. He then drove on westward and the others returned to Nebraska, elated by Tolson's reaction. [72] In 1948 Mr. Green remembered the sequence of events in this way:

He stated that about 1937 he accompanied Mr. Tolson from Scottsbluff to the old fort. He stated that after showing Mr. Tolson the area. . . Mr. Tolson said he would say officially that if the area was acquired the National Park Service would take it over. Mr. Green states further that he immediately hurried to Guernsey where Editor Houser, a power in state politics and interested in Fort Laramie, was available. Within ten days. . . under Mr. Houser's sponsorship a bill was before the Wyoming legislature for appropriation of funds to purchase the fort area for presentation to the Federal Government. [73]

Mr. Green's recollections 12 years after the fact were faulty in some details. Scotts Bluff records clearly fix the 1936 date. The visit with George Houser must have occurred some time after September 5, and legislative action did not happen quite that readily. But Green's recollections substantiate the crucial nature of Tolson's visit and its aftermath. It is clear that from this point on stock in a genuine "Fort Laramie National Monument" began to soar.

As to the sequel, every step cannot be documented since most of the key communications were verbal. That Tolson soon telephoned Demaray and convinced him that the time for action had arrived is evident in an Associated Press news item appearing in Cheyenne just one week after Tolson's impromptu inspection:

U. S. MONUMENT PROPOSED AT OLD FORT LARAMIE SITE

The National Park Service announced Thursday it would establish a national monument at old Fort Laramie in Wyoming if the site were donated to the national government.

Describing the 100-year old frontier outpost as the "most historically important fort in the

West, from the standpoint of pioneer explorations," A. E. Demaray, Associate Director of the Service, said Thursday in Washington, D.C., the government was "extremely interested" in preserving it. [74]

Having sent up this trial balloon Demaray then issued instructions to the Regional Director in Omaha to enter into direct negotiations with State officials, right at the top. This is revealed in a letter of October 12, 1936 from Governor Leslie A. Miller to Warren Richardson of the Landmark Commission:

I received a call a day or two ago from a representative of the National Park Service with headquarters in Omaha who has a great deal to do with CCC camps in National Park jurisdiction. . . He talked to me about Fort Laramie and tells me that the National Park Service is very anxious to do something about developing the site if ownership thereof could be acquired. They would expect the state to acquire this ownership and then they would find the money to make the necessary improvements.

I told the gentleman, Mr. Donald Alexander by name, that I was unaware as to the present feelings of the gentleman in Omaha who owns the larger part of the land. . . but that I would contact your Commission and see what, if anything, they knew or could do about it. Mr. Alexander said he had been told that this man's current financial situation was such that he probably would consider reducing his previous asking price. . . I will of course welcome any suggestions you may make. . . [75]

The National Park Service had always indicated a willingness to seriously consider taking over Fort Laramie, and the State of Wyoming had been trying to get that very job done for ten years. The big difference now was a matter of attitude by key officials. For the first time the NPS showed not only a willingness but eagerness to assume responsibility for the Fort. This fact, representing a dynamic opportunity, registered itself firmly in the mind of Governor Miller, who then proceeded with vigor to settle the Fort Laramie issue once and for all. It was Governor Miller and R. J. Rymill of Fort Laramie town who now teamed up, by-passing the Landmark Commission, to take the necessary action to solve the problem which had hitherto defied solution purchase of the requisite lands from private owners. [76]

While expressing pleasure that the Park Service was showing a positive interest, Chairman Brooks of the Commission was cautious: "it might be better to defer any action until after the [Presidential] election as people are very prone to raise the cry of politics on any movement started at this time." Treasurer Richardson was quoted as being "willing and able to buy from private owners, but we will not pay an exorbitant price." Secretary Weppner was bothered by the fact that the \$15,000 previous appropriation had been returned to the Treasury, which would impair their negotiating position. [77] But Governor Miller wanted no part of further delays or misgivings, and within a few days he drove to the Fort personally to discuss the problem with key local residents who would have to be relied upon to resolve the land acquisition issue. Evidently encouraged, he later wrote to Pat Flannery that, "in connection with our efforts to revive the Fort Laramie project, "give me the names of two or three people now residing at Fort Laramie who would be willing to approach the owners, to learn the price they are willing to take." Pat suggested R. J. Rymill, Marshall Sandercock, W. S. Chapman, Lloyd Glade and M. S. Fleenor, all of Fort Laramie; O. J. Colyer and D. T. Shoemaker of Torrington; and George Houser of Guernsey. On November 19 the

Governor invited Rymill to accept the chairmanship of the new committee and assured him that, "If we can secure the cooperation of all concerned, something can yet be done toward the restoration of Fort Laramie." On December 10 Rymill wrote acceptance, called a meeting of his committee, and initiated contact with the owners then of record: Mollie Sandercock of Fort Laramie, Jessica Ault represented by her attorney R. C. Cather of Casper, and Thomas Waters and M. S. Hartman of Omaha. [78]

Documentation is lacking, but there can be no doubt that Rymill had some guidelines from the Governor that gave him more flexibility and clout than his predecessors. The 1934 guidelines were for purchase of 55 acres for something less than \$12,000. In 1936 the negotiators were authorized to double that figure, but the larger figure was to be justified, not by any increase in land values over 1934, but by bringing in larger tracts of land which would make the potential park closer to 200 acres. A map which shows the original 1931 plan for 50 acres and a revised boundary encompassing about 200 acres, found in the Rymill papers donated to the park, is evidently a "worksheet" for the new proposal. [79] The data for the expanded boundary may have been supplied by National Park officials from Omaha who would be knowledgeable about what constituted a manageable historic park unit, something well beyond the immediate confines of the historic structures grouping. It is a matter of record that Omaha officials did go to Cheyenne to meet with the Governor and a Legislative Committee. The date is not given but we must conclude that it would have been sometime after the Governor's receipt of the Alexander telephone call of October 10 and his invitation to Rymill on November 19. Alexander was the leader of the Omaha delegation. [80]

The Governor entrusted his mission to the right man. R. J. Rymill would have made a great lightning rod salesman. Although he had to haggle in time-honored fashion with the three owners, the details are immaterial. On January 14, 1937 he was able to report to the Governor that he had sewed up options as follows:

Jessica C. Auld	\$4,963.75
Mollie Sandercock	3,012.00
Thomas Waters, et.al.	16,869.00
	<hr/>
	24,844.75 [81]

On January 23 all members of the HLCW convened in the Governor's office to learn of Rymill's report. The Governor then stated that,

. . . he was waiting to hear from the Department of the Interior at Washington, and assured the members of the Commission that if they purchased Fort Laramie and then deeded it to the Government, the Government would do its part in rehabilitating the Old Fort.

Mr. Richardson suggested to the Governor that if he were going to ask for an appropriation of the Legislature to take care of the purchase of Fort Laramie, that it would be advisable to ask for \$27,500, which would mean \$3,000. over and above the option price to take care of Fort Laramie until such time when the Government took it over, as the fencing of the property would have to be taken care of immediately; also, the placing of a caretaker would have to be

attended to. The Governor was in accord with the suggestion. [82]

The sequel to this meeting was entirely predictable, given the Governor's popularity with the electorate and his influence with the Democratic State legislature, whose members now vied with each other for the honor of being identified as having saved Fort Laramie from perdition. House Bill No. 136 was introduced February 1, 1937 by delegates from Goshen, Campbell, Converse, Crook, Niobrara, Platte, Washakie, and Big Horn Counties, and referred to the Ways and Means Committee, Chairman Joseph F. Replogle of Fremont County. On February 6 the bill was reported formally to the Speaker. On February 16 it passed the Committee of the Whole. On final vote the House cast 55 Ayes and one Noe. The Senate improved on this with a unanimous 24 Ayes. The bill that was finally approved on February 20, 1937 reads in part:

The Historical Landmark Commission is hereby authorized and empowered to purchase the site of Old Fort Laramie in Goshen County, Wyoming at a price not to exceed the sum of \$27,000.

For the purpose of enabling the Historic Landmark Commission to carry out the provisions of this act and to care for the site of Old Fort Laramie after it has been acquired until same shall be placed under the control of the Federal Government or otherwise provided for, there is hereby appropriated from any money the State Treasurer not otherwise appropriates, the sum of \$27,000.

This Act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage. . . [83]

Anxious to nail everything down, in March Governor Miller went to Washington, D.C. to confer with Director Cammerer to obtain a personal guarantee that "the government will establish a national monument. . . as soon as the state deeds the land to the government." Though there is no evidence of a co-signed agreement, evidently the Director had received assurances from Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, that the signature of President F. D. Roosevelt on a Proclamation would be routine, although no such Proclamation could be drawn up until the anticipated deeds had been examined and title cleared. There was one other technicality that was settled while the Governor was at the Capital. That was the clearance by the Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments that Fort Laramie was indeed "of national significance." The Governor was probably invited to the March 25 meeting of the Advisory Board when Fort Laramie was reviewed and the required clearance given. Evidently the Board had been fully briefed on the significance of Fort Laramie and the issue was never in question. [85] Satisfied on all counts, Miller returned to Cheyenne and turned the concluding formalities over to the Landmark Commission.

At the March 31 meeting of the Commission in Cheyenne, in the office of the Attorney-General, a resolution was read describing all of the subject properties, acreages, and purchase prices based on secured options, and agreeing to purchase same, subject to customary legal technicalities. This was adopted unanimously, "and the Secretary and Chairman directed to present the necessary vouchers to the State Auditor for acceptance." The total sum projected in the resolution was \$25,594.75. At its July 31 meeting in Cheyenne the Commission learned from Mr. Richardson that the Attorney-General had examined and accepted all deeds. A resolution was passed empowering the Chairman and Secretary to convey title "to the National

Park Service, representing the United States Government, the site of Old Fort Laramie, Goshen County, Wyoming," totalling 214.41 acres. [86]

Meanwhile Rymill suggested and the Commission agreed that the time was ripe for another gigantic celebration at Fort Laramie. The historic occasion made national news, but it seems appropriate that it be reported here by the faithful Fort Laramie Scout:

Old Fort Laramie was re-dedicated to public use at ceremonies Monday July 5, with many present who had spent a part of their lives on the now hallowed ground when it was in its heyday generations ago.

Thousands of men, women and children from Wyoming and adjacent states, and hundreds from other states, made up the crowd of more than 10,000 who came to see and to participate.

A bright sun above, fleecy clouds floating in the sky, hardly a zephyr moving leaves of the giant cottonwoods under which the dedicatory exercises took place, formed a fitting background for the ceremonies.

The United States flag again was raised over the fort by a military detachment from Fort Warren after abandonment by the government in 1890.

George Houser was on hand, 21 years after initiating the crusade to save the Fort. Ironically "Pat" Flannery was not present to share the fruits of victory, being stationed now in Washington, D.C. but he sent a telegram as did Senator O'Mahoney, Representative Paul R. Greever, and Arno B. Cammerer, National Park Service Director. The Park Service sent no high official, either from Omaha or Washington, D.C., but was represented, informally at least, by Merrill J. Mattes, Scotts Bluff Historian, who went over to photograph the proceedings and to visit with the old-timers drawn to the event, for this would be the last sizeable gathering of this dwindling band who knew Fort Laramie before 1890. The most distinguished member of this select group was the 94-year old patriarch William H. Jackson, who had bull-whacked his way through here in 1866. Some others are identified in a news story in the Scottsbluff Star-Herald:

A pony express rider, Ed Kelley of Guernsey, delivered a pouch of congratulatory messages from notables, among which was one from Mary Jerard, granddaughter of Mary Homesley, who in 1852 was buried [near the fort]. . . Mary Blakeman, daughter of Dick Parr who was chief army scout of the period, sang a solo.

A number of old pioneers were introduced. . . Among them was Charles Nysten of Douglas, a bull-whacker of 1873 and twice a member of Gen. Crook's expeditions. . . William Powell of Douglas was another teamster. . . of 1876.

J. C. Argesheimer. . . of Cheyenne, was the youngest soldier at the fort at one time. . . His father was commander of the post band. Fred Sullivan of Lusk, was a deputy of the county, and Capt. J. H. Cook, and Russell Thorpe were present, the latter's father being the owner of the Cheyenne-Deadwood stagecoach line.

Among speakers were Tom Wilson of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, John C. Thompson of the Wyoming State Tribune, Addison E. Sheldon of the Nebraska State Historical Society, and Dan Greenburg. Governor Leslie A. Miller was, fittingly, the principal speaker:

The governor referred to the historical significance of Fort Laramie and expressed gratification that it had been acquired by the State after years of effort and was to be transferred to the federal government. . . He forecast that doubtless it would be restored to semblance of its condition during its occupancy as a . . . military post. [87]

July 5, 1937 was a day of patriotic fervor, with a nostalgic look backward at the glorious past, and high expectations for the resurrection of historic Fort Laramie as a unique symbol of that past. It would be another year before all the technicalities could be ironed out and the Old Fort would actually become Federal property. But the long crusade was over, and a bright new era of active professional preservation and restoration was dawning.

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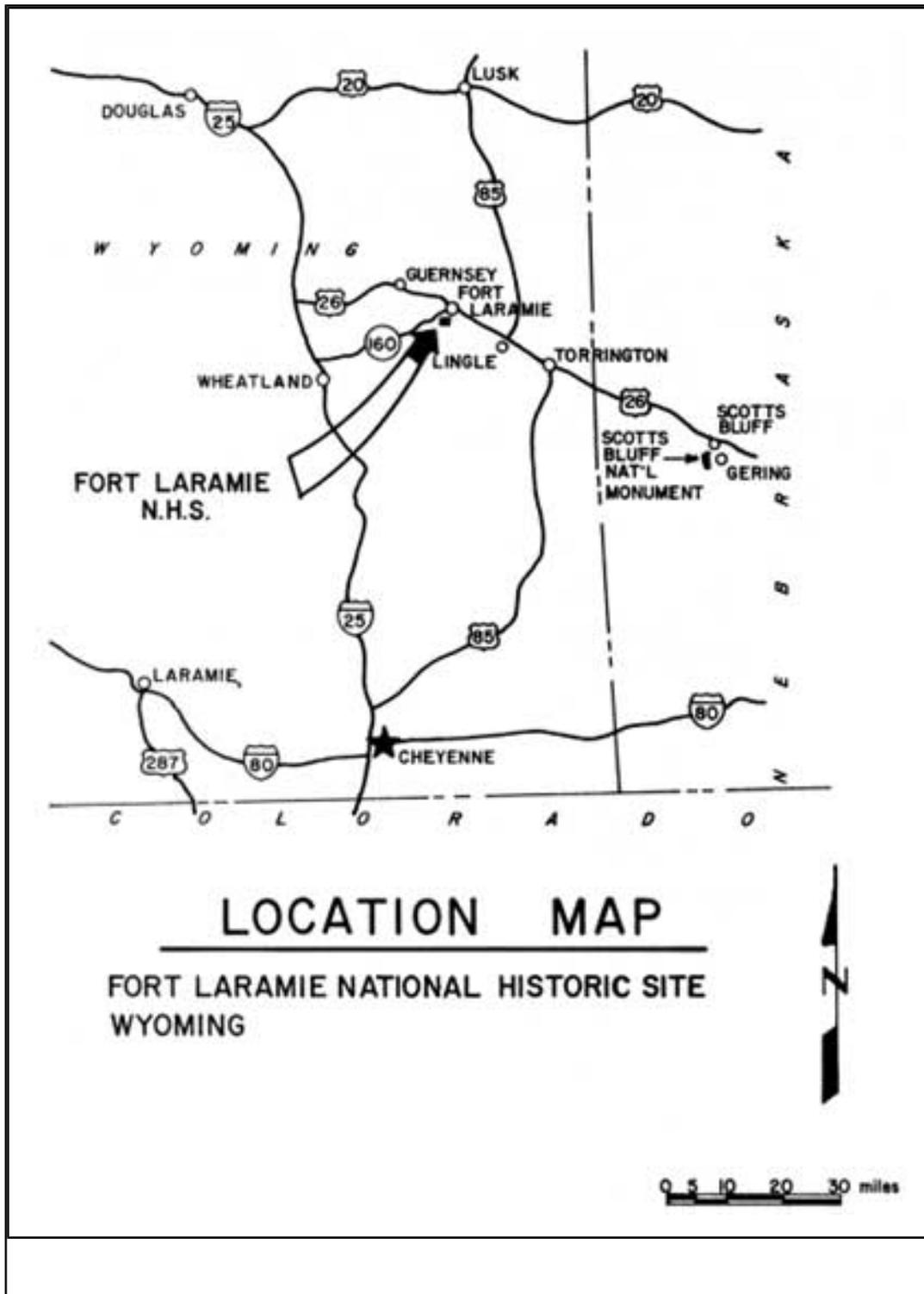
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Fort Laramie

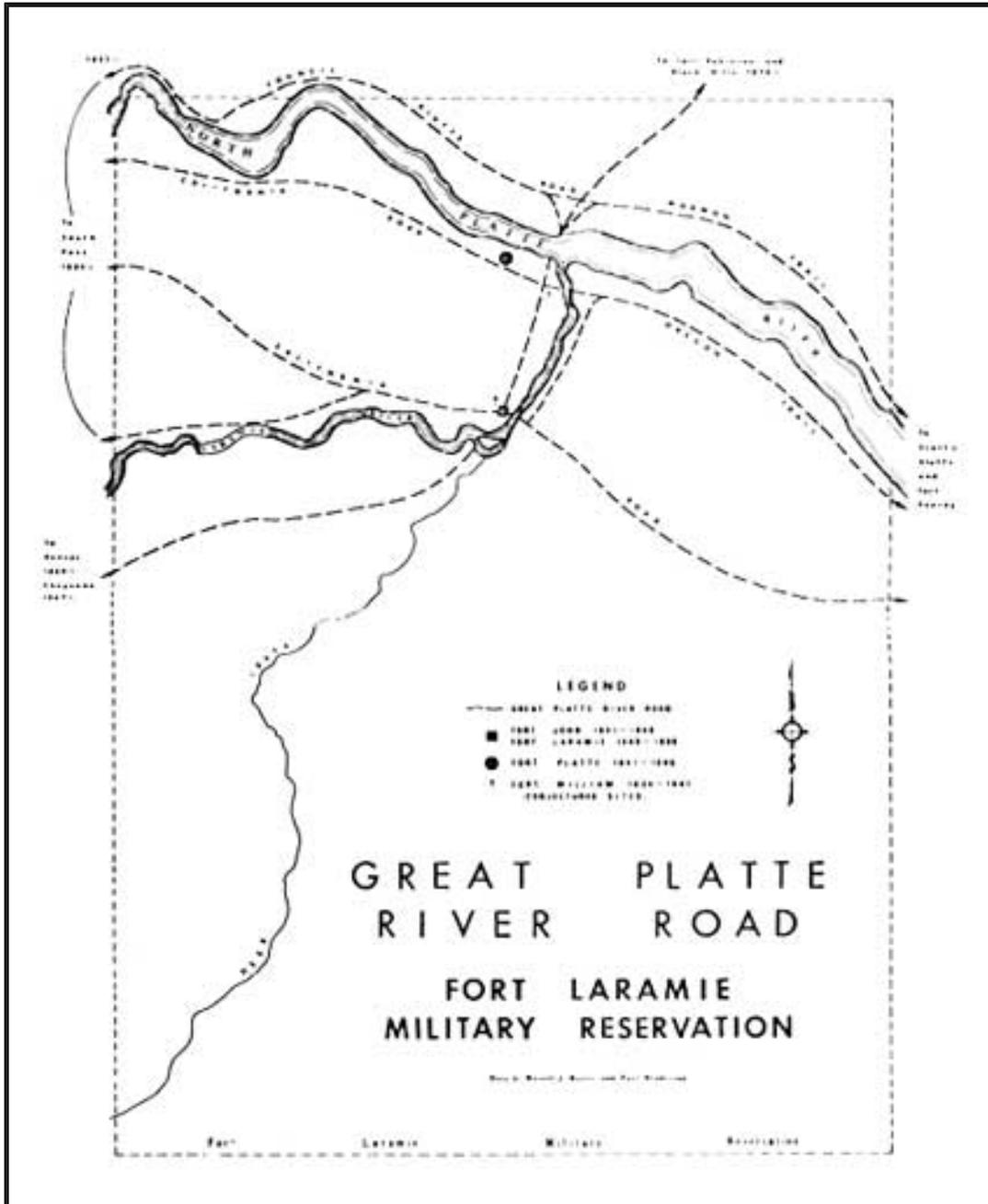
Park History, 1834-1977



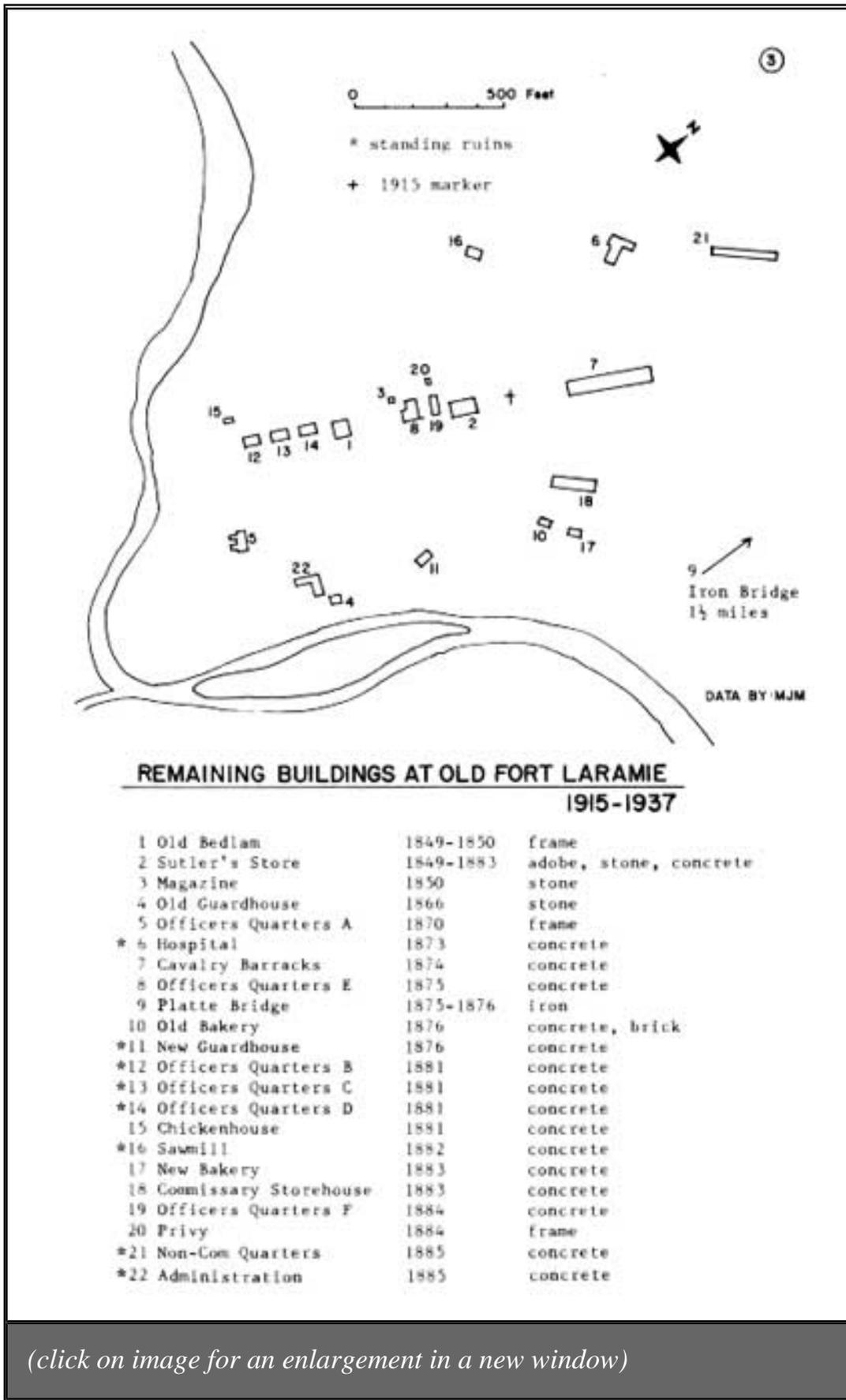
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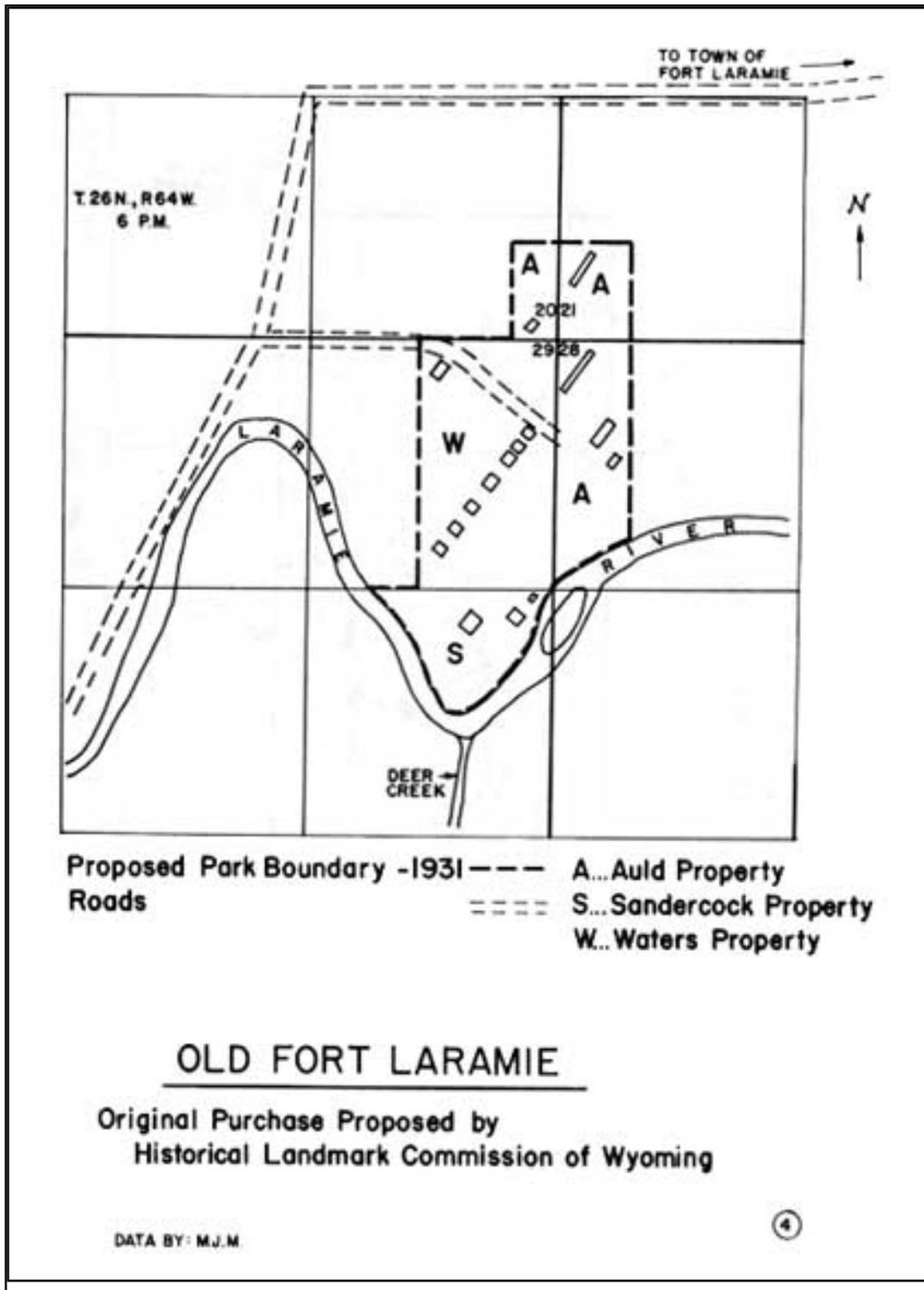
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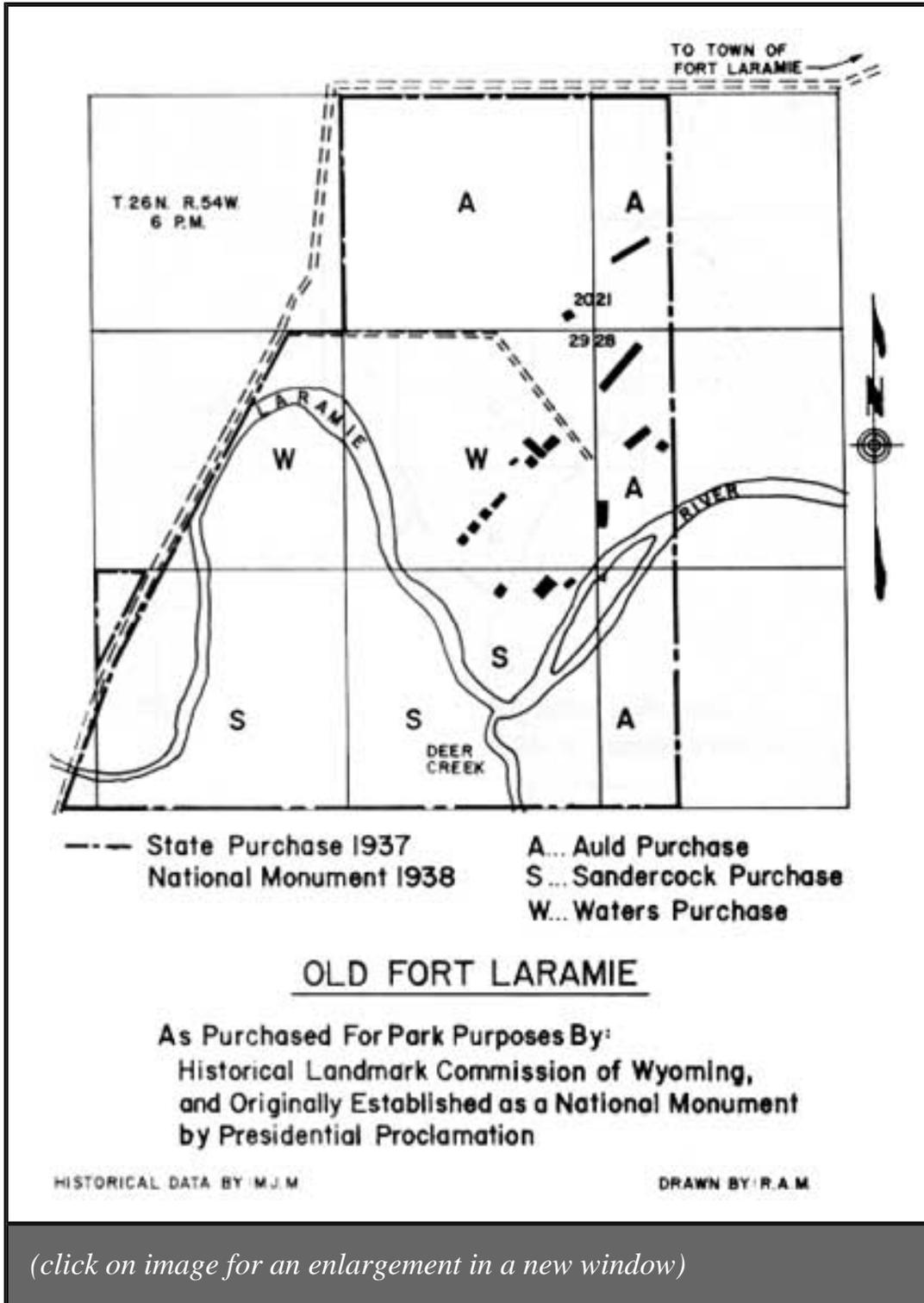
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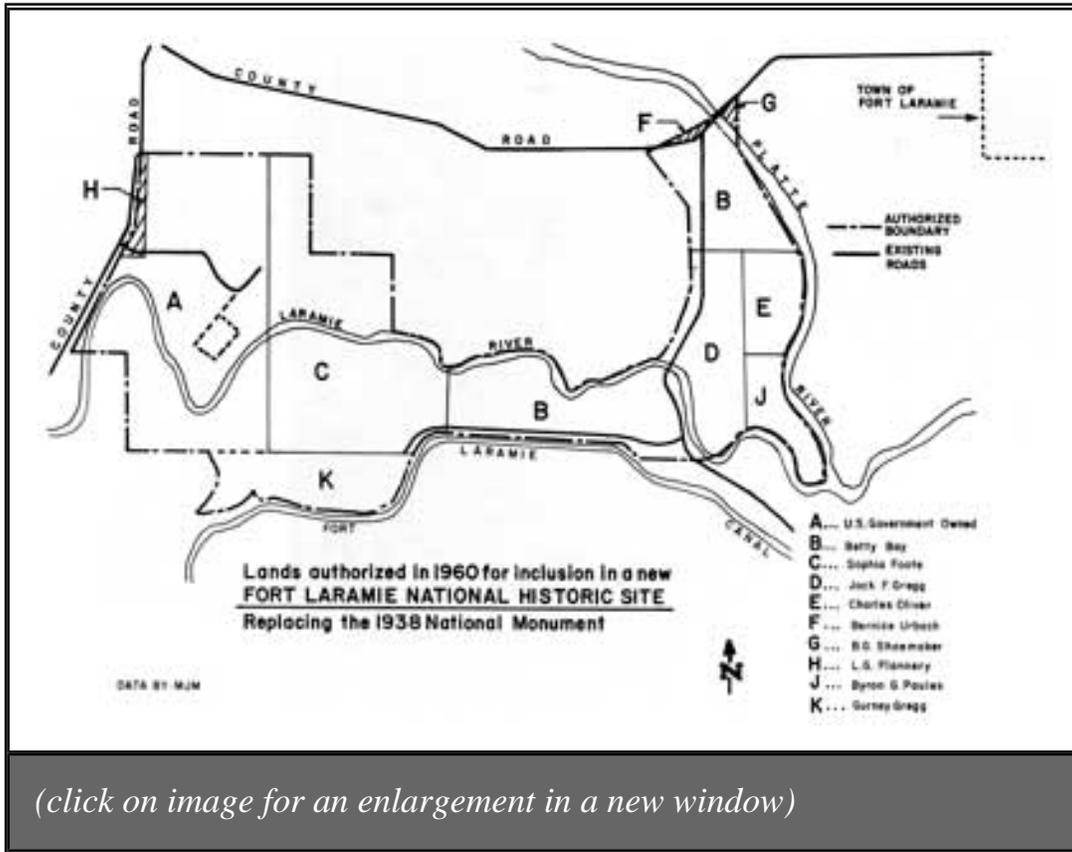
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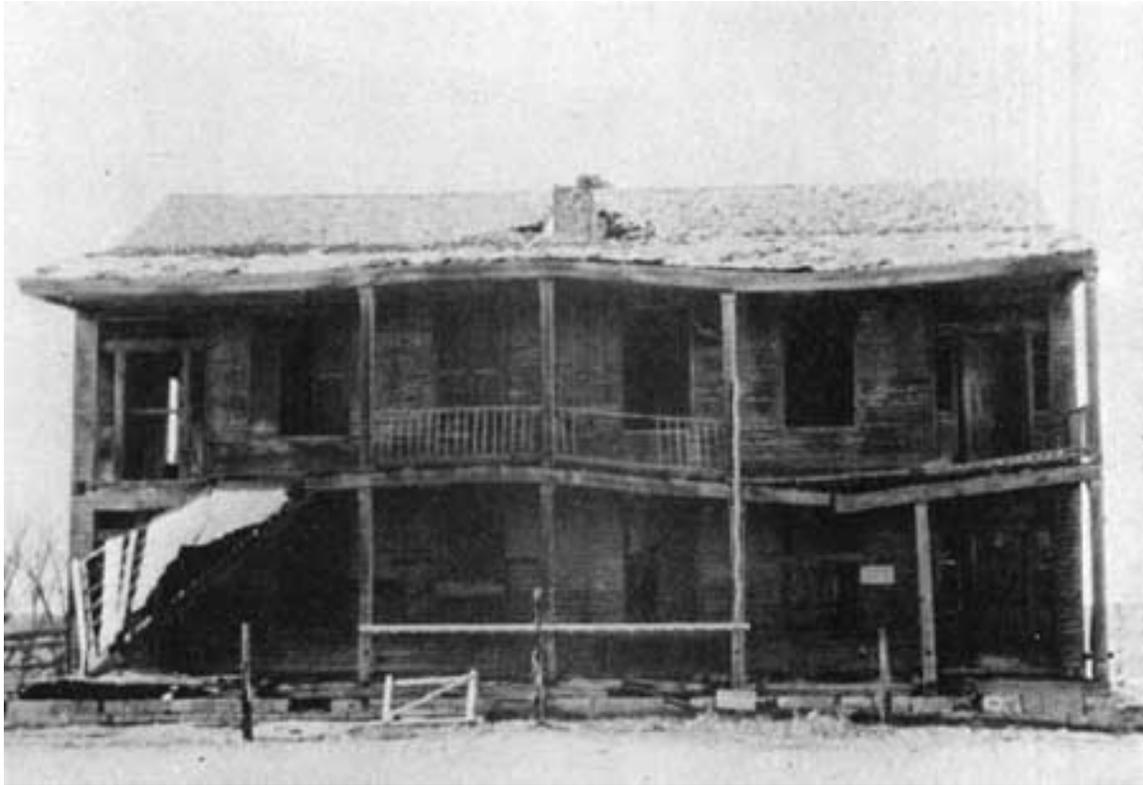


Figure 5. Old Bedlam, built by Lieutenant Woodbury (1849-1850), was on the verge of collapse when this photograph was taken by architects from the Omaha Regional Office (NPS) for the Historic American Buildings Survey.

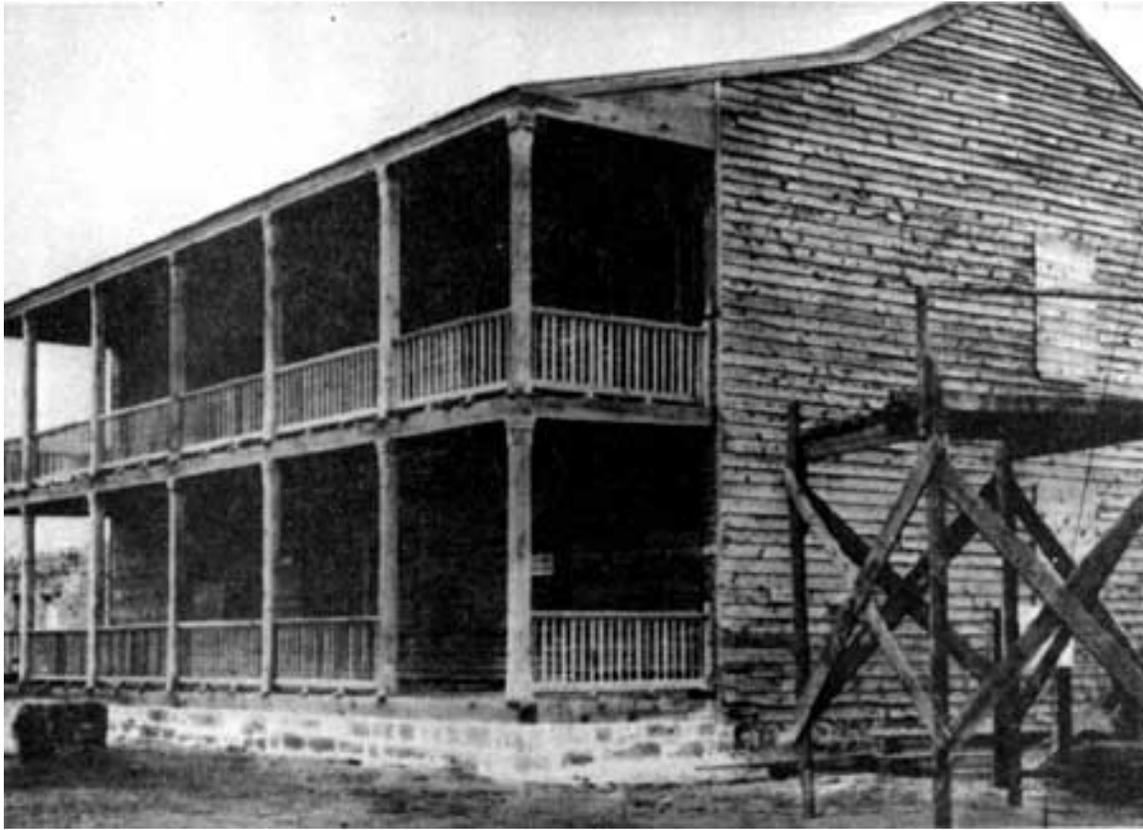


Figure 6. Comprehensive restoration of Old Bedlam by the National Park Service began in the 1960s. The work included new foundations, steel framing to reinforce ancient timbers, replacement of rotted and missing elements, and reconstruction of flared kitchen wings, verandas and exterior stairways.



Figure 7. Workers rebuild one of two chimneys on Old Bedlam. The ruins of Officers Quarters B, C, and D are shown to the south.



Figure 8. This rear view of Old Bedlam shows reconstructed kitchen wings replicating the historic scene 1849-1850.

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Figure 9. Old Bedlam, the oldest structure in Wyoming, dominates the parade ground after restoration in 1964.



Figure 10. Cheyenne Indians were among those present October 2, 1964, at the dedication of the restored Old Bedlam.



Figure 11. Bachelor officers quarters inside Old Bedlam were furnished as they probably appeared in the 1855 period.



Figure 12. The ground floor, front room in Old Bedlam was furnished as the office of Commanding Officer, Col. Collins, 11th Ohio Cavalry in the 1865 period.

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Figure 13. Restoration of the Sutlers Store, second only to Old Bedlam in historical importance, required major surgery. Never a thing of architectural beauty, the store reflected the Army's practical accommodation of Indians, emigrants, teamsters, and other frontiersmen who passed through the fort. This photo shows the finished reconstruction.

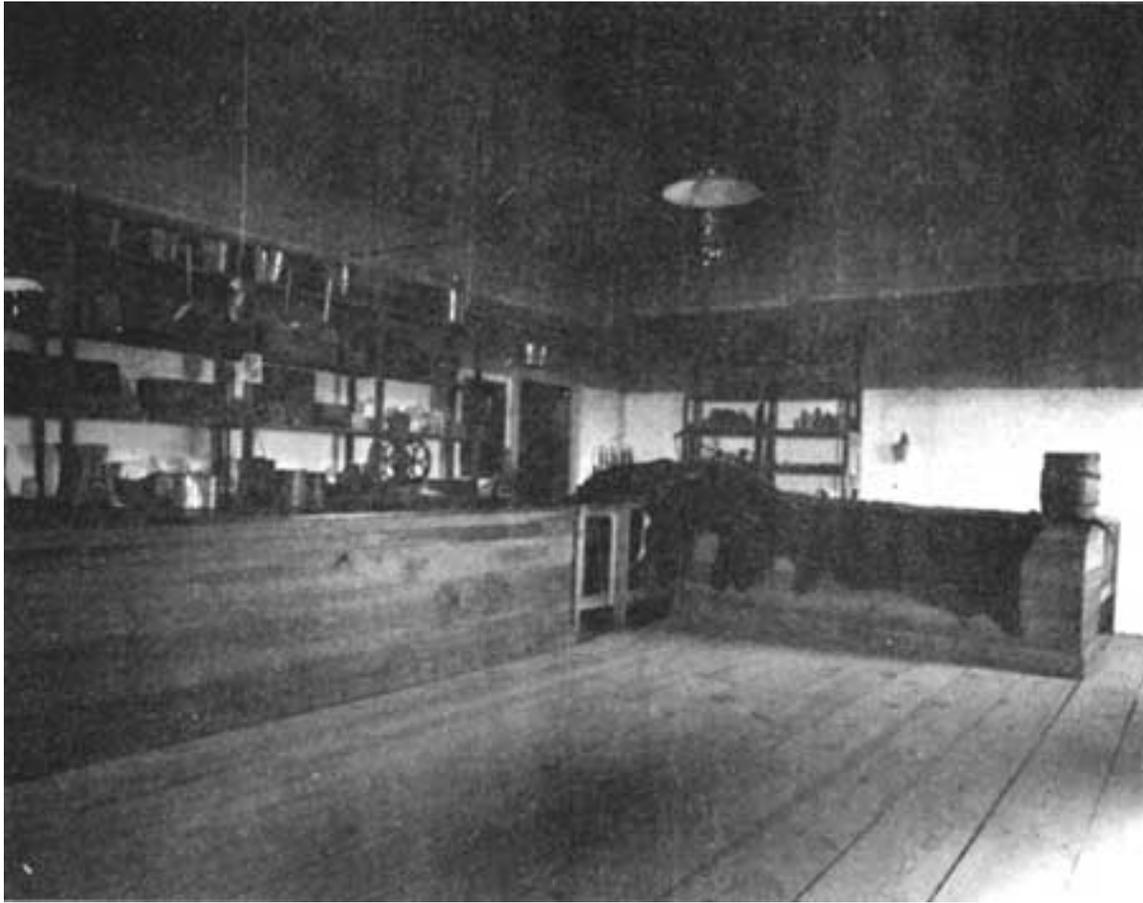


Figure 14. The sutler, who was licensed by the Army, conducted his business in the trade room shown here furnished to the 1876 period.



Figure 15. In 1883, the Sutlers Store was enlarged to include separate barrooms for enlisted men and officers. Shown here are the furnishings in the enlisted section.



Figure 16. Furnishings in the officer's section were hardly more elaborate as this photo shows.

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Figure 17. The large 1883 addition to the Sutlers store was built onto the rear of the original building as shown in this photograph of a crowded day in the park. Officers quarters row is seen in the background and restoration-in-progress on Old Bedlam.

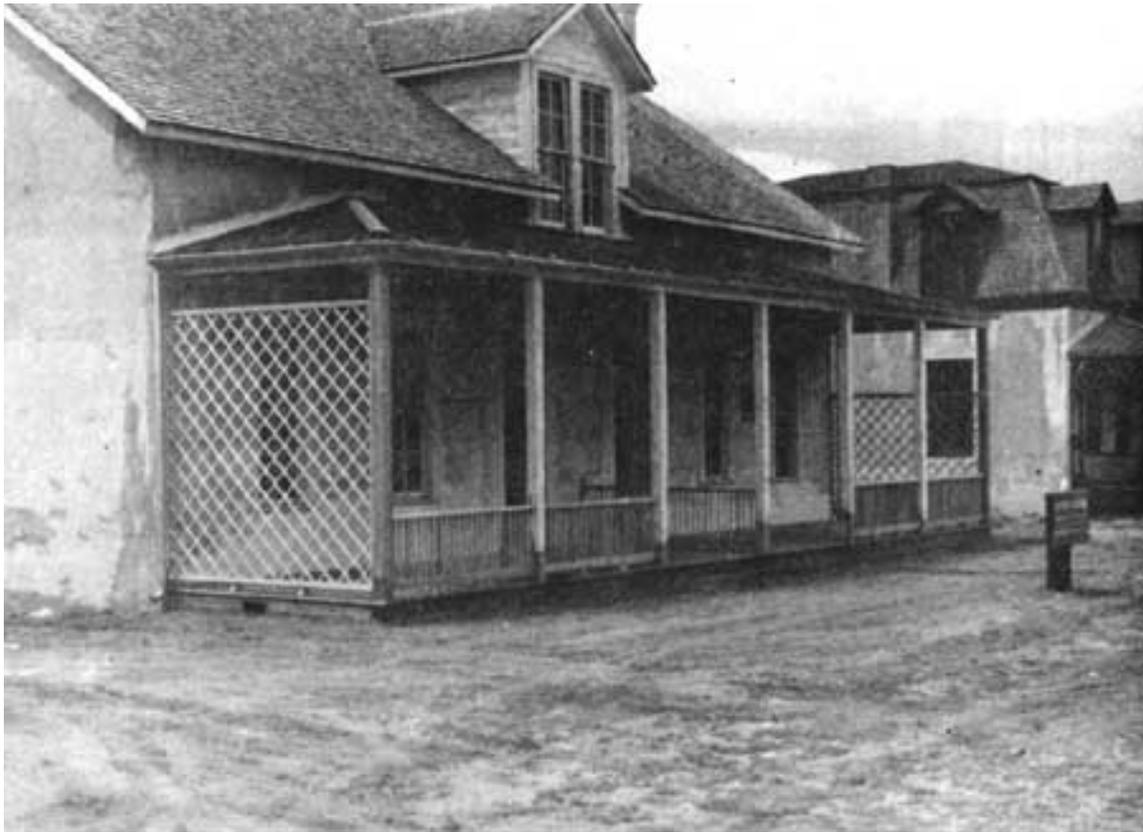


Figure 18. Officers Quarters E survived abandonment and intermittent occupation by ranchers in remarkably good structural condition. Restoration posed no serious problems. Quarters F can be seen in the background.

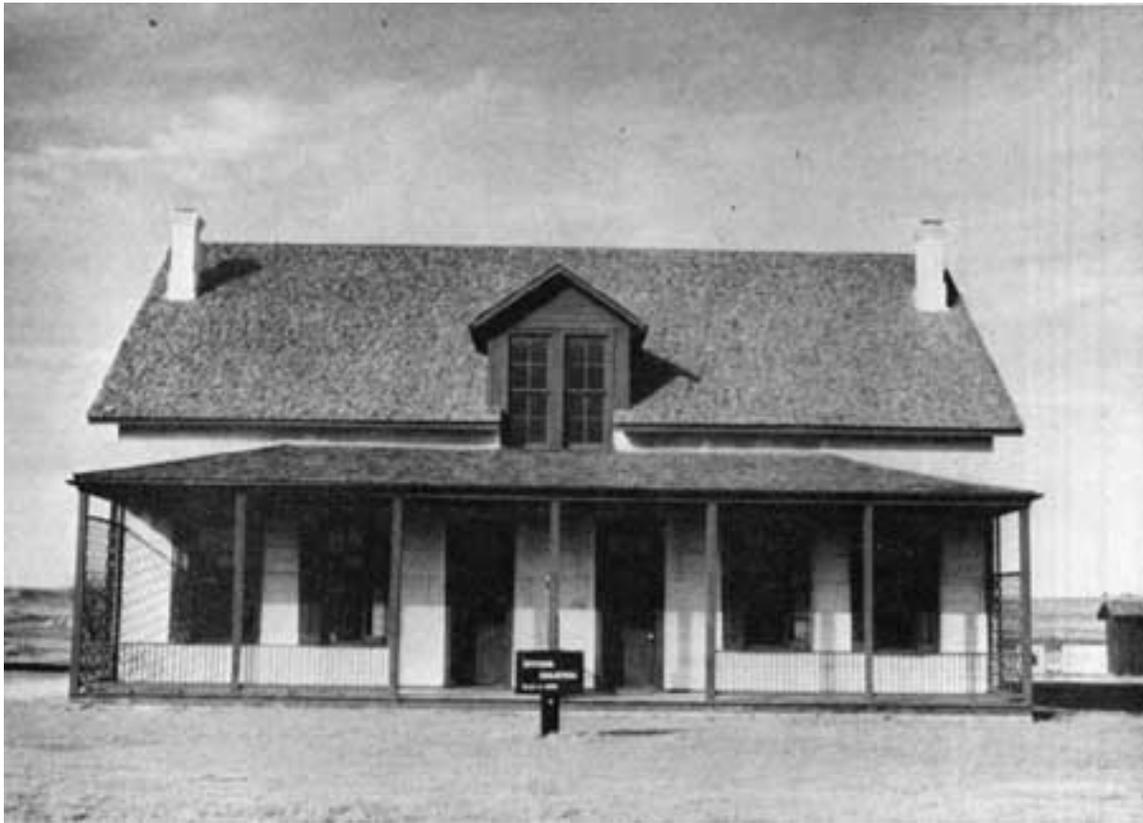


Figure 19. Quarters E was built for double occupancy according to standard Army plans for married officers quarters.



Figure 20. Following restoration, Quarters E was furnished to represent occupancy in 1880 by a hypothetical post surgeon who collected animal specimens in addition to his medical duties.

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Figure 21. Quarters F has the distinction at Fort Laramie of being furnished with personal mementoes and household items which actually belonged to one of its occupants, Col. Andrew Sheridan Burt, whose son was living at the time of refurnishing.

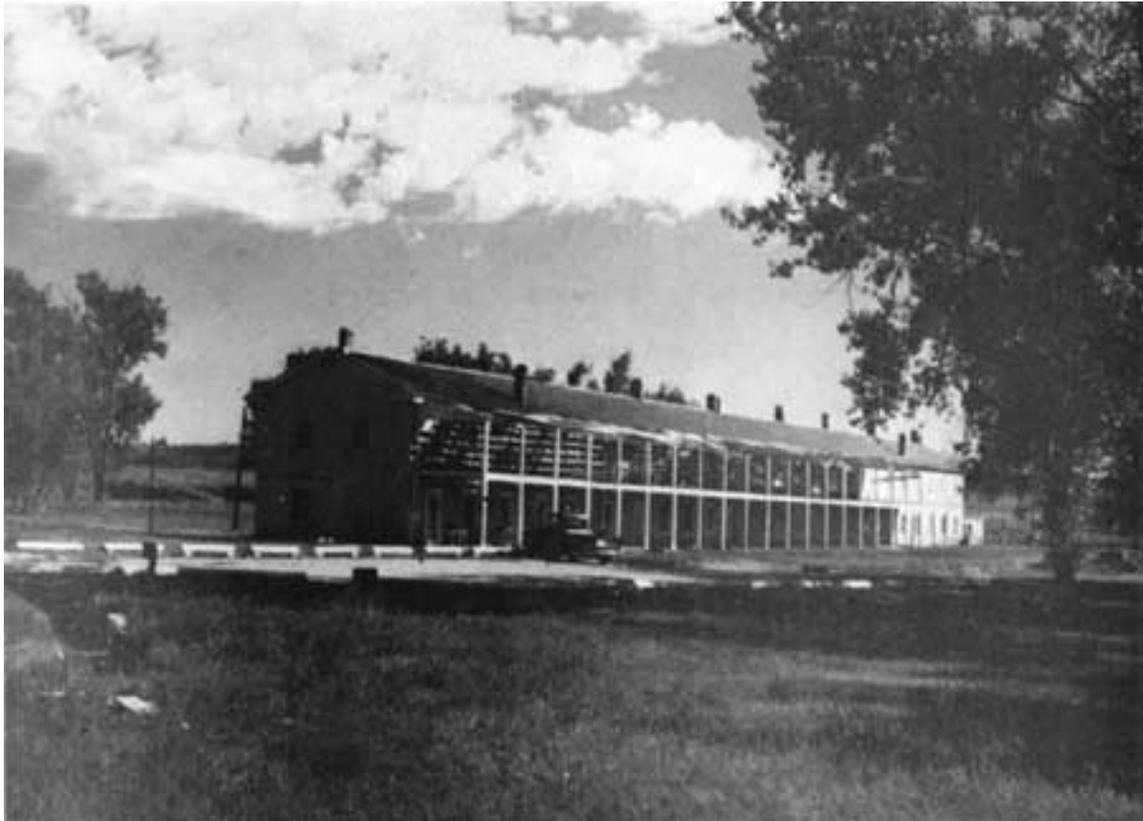


Figure 22. The Cavalry Barracks, largest of the Fort Laramie buildings, housed two companies of horse troops during the historical period.

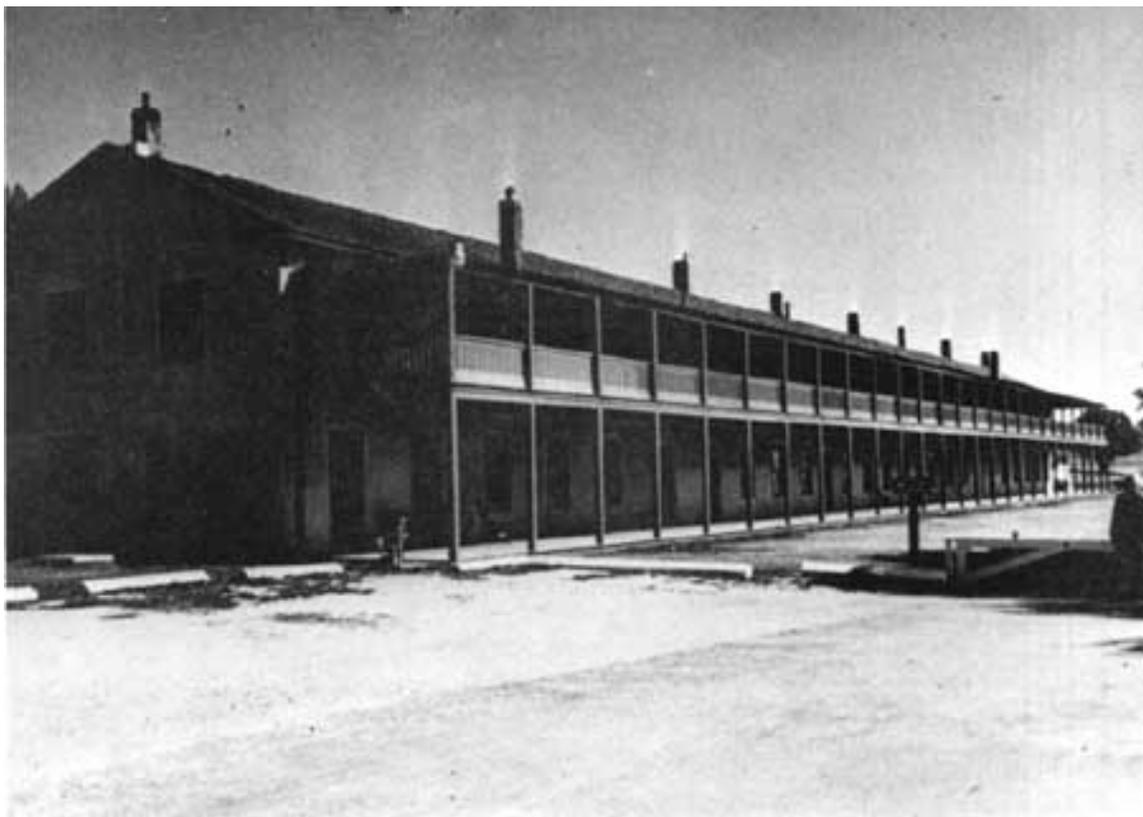


Figure 23. The verandas and roof of the cavalry barracks have been restored. Interior work and refurnishing is planned for the future.



Figure 24. Quarters A was designed originally as quarters for the commanding officer. However, it was soon converted to a double set of quarters for senior officers and their families.

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Figure 25. Restored Quarters A, standing alone in the southeast corner of the parade ground, is quite pleasing aesthetically. The veranda on three sides of the house had to be completely reconstructed.



Figure 26. This durable stone building known as the Old Guardhouse 1866 stands at the river edge of the parade ground. The building was in remarkably good condition when restoration began, despite interim adverse use.



Figure 27. When the New Guardhouse of 1876 was being restored, workmen discovered underground remains of the original 1851 Guardhouse. Archeological investigation revealed the ruins of five solitary confinement cells, shown in this photograph.



Figure 28. The completed restoration of the Old Guardhouse is to the period 1868.

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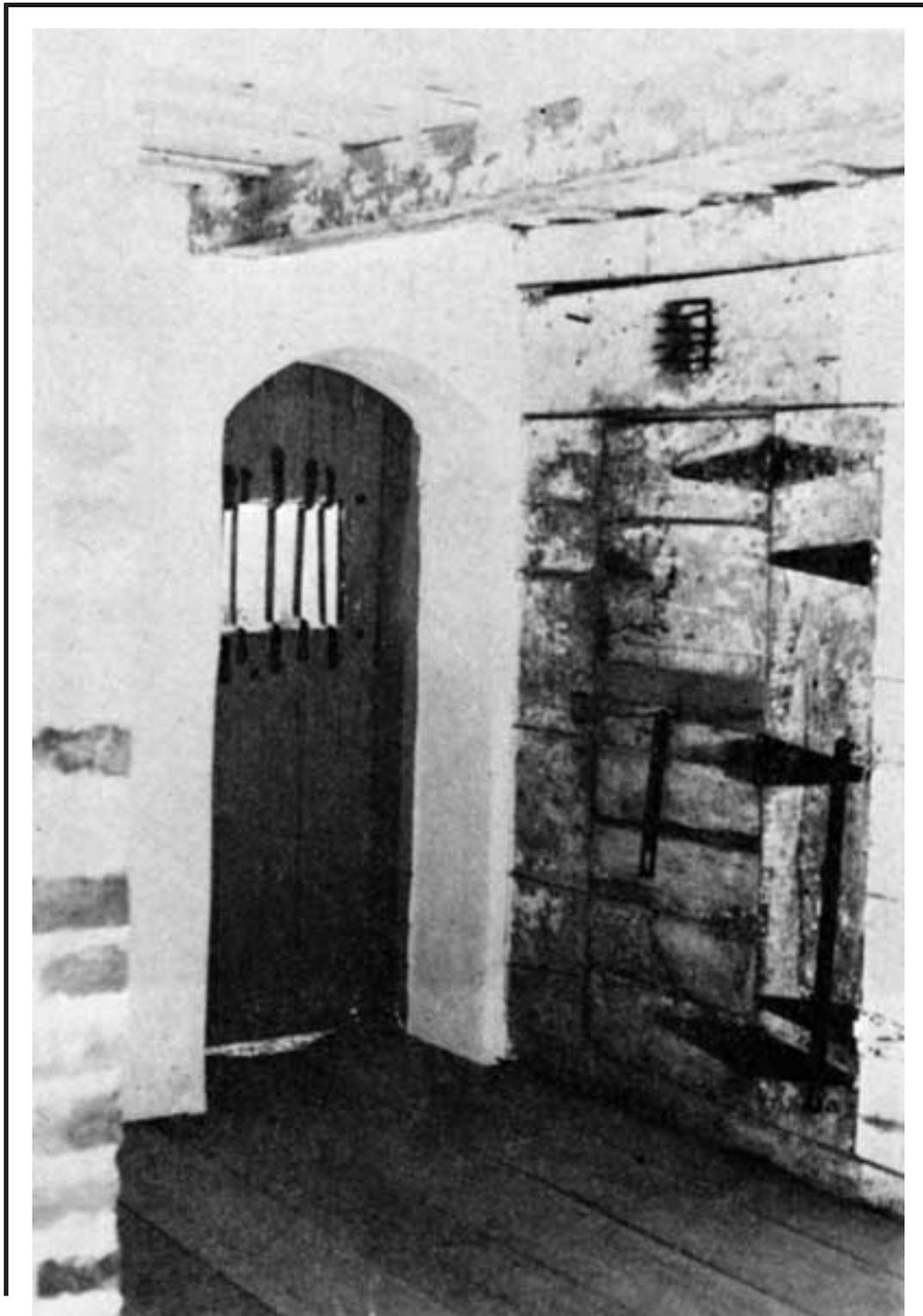




Figure 29. The grim old building displays sparse interior furnishings on the second level and a lower level of cellblocks devoid of comforts.



Figure 30. The ruins of the hospital have been stabilized against further deterioration.



Figure 31. Since this photograph was taken of the south end of the Old Bakery, the entire building has been completely restored.



Figure 32. The commissary Storehouse, 1883, stood up well despite heavy use as a store, barn, and stable during the post-Army period when it was privately owned. The exterior of the structure has been completely rehabilitated to reflect its historic use and the interior is used as a visitor center and park headquarters.

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Figure 33. An engineering marvel, the Old Army Bridge over the Laramie River rendered service to cavalry patrols and stagecoach traffic on the Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage Line. Restoration of the bridge to its pre-1890 condition required re-fabrication of piers, ice-breakers, iron superstructure, and plank roadway.

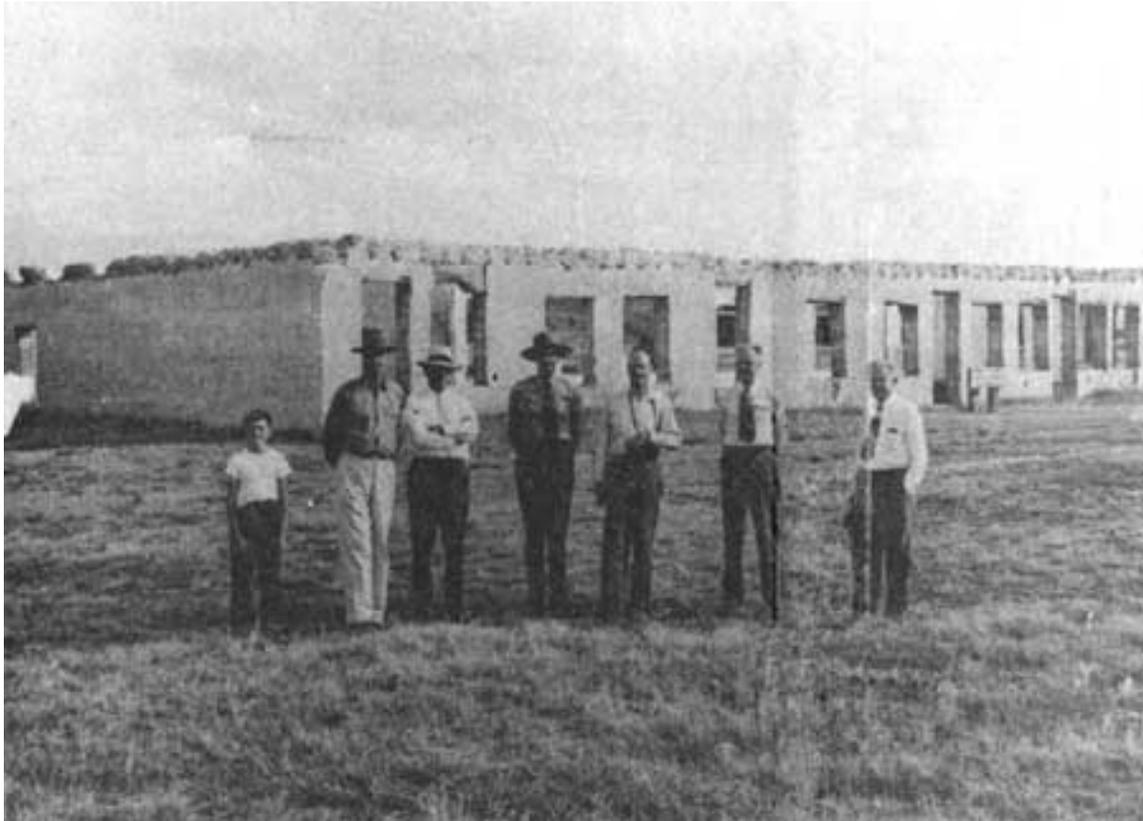


Figure 34. Officials attending a conference on Fort Laramie restoration plans about 1947. From left to right: Louis Hieb (son of Superintendent Hieb), Coordinating Superintendent David H. Canfield, Regional Director Lawrence C. Merriam, Superintendent David L. Hieb, Regional Historian Merrill J. Mattes, Museum Branch Chief Ralph Lewis, and National Park Service Director Newton B. Drury.

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