In 1834 Robert Campbell and William Sublette built the first “Fort Laramie” near the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers. Officially named Fort William, the small post measured 100 by 80 feet. Hewn cottonwood logs 15 feet high formed its palisade. It enjoyed a near monopoly on the buffalo trade here until 1841 when a competing trading post, Fort Platte, was built a mile away. The rivalry led Fort William’s owners to replace their own aging fort with a larger, adobe-walled structure named Fort John.

Trappers lived hard lives, spending months wading in cold mountain streams trapping beaver and other fur-bearing mammals. Beginning in 1825 and continuing for 16 years, trappers met at an annual “rendezvous” to exchange their year’s catch of fur for supplies and trade goods and celebrate a successful trapping season. The heyday of the beaver trade lasted only about 45 years. Each spring caravans arrived at the fort, laden with trade goods. In fall tons of buffalo hides and other furs were shipped east. Throughout the 1840s, however, as the take of buffalo robes declined, Fort John’s role changed. In 1841 the first of many westward-bound emigrants arrived. Over the next two decades tens of thousands stopped at the fort en route to Oregon, California, and the Salt Lake Valley. Traders at Fort John did a brisk but seasonal business catering to the emigrants’ needs.

Relations between Indian tribes and the army deteriorated as the number of emigrants on the overland trails swelled. As conflicts grew, the army launched major campaigns from Fort Laramie against the Northern Plains tribes, who fiercely defended their homeland against further encroachment by a nation moving west. With the end of the Indian Wars, Fort Laramie’s importance diminished. In 1890 the US Army abandoned the post and sold it at public auction.

As the 1800s began, the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes dominated the Fort Laramie region. Through the 1830s and 40s relations between tribes and traders were for the most part friendly. By the 1850s, after Fort Laramie had become a military post and emigrant traffic on the overland trails had collapsed, relations with Northern Plains Indian Nations. Fort Laramie hosted several treaty negotiations with Northern Plains Indian Nations. Most famous among these treaties were the Horse Creek Treaty of 1851 and the Treaty of 1868 (see below), which remains controversial and contested to this day.
In 1888 Fort Laramie looked almost like a frontier town (illustration). But for many years its unadorned military buildings occupied a stark and treeless setting. Like most frontier posts, it had no palisades or walls. Early plans for a log or stone wall with block-houses were never funded.

Fort Laramie Today

Fort Laramie’s riverside setting on the approaches to the Rocky Mountains looks much like it did when the post was active. Buildings from its military period, some dating to 1849, survived intact because homesteaders bought and lived in them and public agencies later worked to preserve them.

Eleven structures are now restored and refurnished to their historic appearances.

The national historic site is three miles southwest of the town of Fort Laramie, WY, off US 26. There are no camping facilities. Nearby towns offer RV parks, motels, and restaurants.

Accessibility: We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Call or check our website.

The visitor center in the old Commissary Storehouse (tour stop 1) is open 8 am to 4:30 pm daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1, with longer hours from early June to Labor Day. (The parking lot and walkway do not appear on this historical illustration.) The visitor center offers historical information and literature, or visit our park website (below).

Safety and Management Concerns
Don’t let an accident spoil your visit. Be careful on footpaths and stairs and stay alert to hazards. Your safety is your responsibility. Historic ruins are fragile. You can help us preserve them by not walking or climbing on them. Possession, removal, or disturbance of any artifact is prohibited. For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

More Information
Fort Laramie National Historic Site 956 Gray Rocks Road Fort Laramie, WY 82212 307-837-2221 www.nps.gov/fola

Fort Laramie is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America’s communities, please visit www.nps.gov.

Touring the Fort

1 Commissary Storehouse (1884) This lime-concrete building served as a food warehouse for the army. It now houses park offices and the visitor center.
2 Old Bakery (1876, left) and New Bakery Ruins (1883) Bread was a staple of the soldier’s diet. Here, in big double-brick ovens, bakers made up to 700 18-ounce loaves daily.
3 Infantry Barracks Foundation (1867) This one-story frame building housed three companies, with mess halls and kitchens for each in the back.
4 New Guardhouse (1876) After many complaints by the post surgeon, this new guardhouse replaced an unhealthy, overcrowded older one. It held both major and minor offenders.
5 General Sink (Latrine) Ruins (1886) To protect the post’s drinking water supply, a privy or general sink was built for four companies, with sewage channeled to the Laramie River.
6 Two-Company Infantry Barracks Foundation (1866) Ruins are all that are left of this big adobe barracks building.
7 Old Guardhouse (1886) Fort Laramie’s second guardhouse, built to house 40 prisoners, often held more. The upper story had quarters for the guard and the Officer of the Guard. The first floor had the general confinement area and two small solitary-confinement cells. Prisoners had no furniture, heat, or light.
8 Administration Building Ruins (1885) Headquarters and the post school were moved here in 1885. Concerts, religious services, dances, plays, and lectures were held here in the post theater.
9 Captain’s Quarters (1870) Planned as the Commanding Officer’s quarters, this building became a duplex for company-grade officers.
10 Fort John Site (1841–62) The American Fur Co. built Fort John here of adobe brick reinforced with wooden beams. It had 15-foot walls and blockhouses on two corners. Abandoned and in ruins by 1858, it was demolished in 1862.
11 Officers’ Quarters Ruins (1882) The first building south of the Surgeon’s Quarters on “Officers’ Row,” a mix of frame, adobe, concrete, and stone, was built from an existing powder magazine.
12 Magazine (1850) The stone magazine, restored to 1850-62, held post weapons and ammunition, except large field pieces.
13 Post Surgeon’s Quarters (1875) Post Surgeon Louis Brechemin and his family normally lived in half of this duplex from 1865 to 1889. His study held his scientific collections, and most patients were treated there before being sent to the hospital to recuperate.
14 Lt. Colonel’s Quarters (Burt House, 1884) Lt. Col. Andrew Burt, a 7th US Infantry officer, and his wife Elizabeth lived in the home 1887–88. They liked relatively plain furnishings rather than the ornate decor used in most officers’ houses during the Victorian period.
15 Post Trader’s Store (1849) and Complex Built and run by a civilian licensed by the army, the post trader’s store did a profitable business with soldiers, Indians, gold seekers, and emigrants. The north section, built of stone in 1852, was the sutler’s headquarters and, for a time, post office. An 1883 addition housed the officers’ club and an enlisted men and civilians’ bar. The store is restored to its 1860s appearance.
16 Post Trader’s (Sutler) House Foundation (1863) Owned by the post trader/sutler at Fort Laramie, this house was among the more ornate at the post.
17 Cavalry Barracks (1874) Fort Laramie’s largest building was built to add housing during the Indian Wars. Soldiers slept in two large squad bays upstairs. The kitchen and mess room were downstairs.
18 Hospital Ruins (1873) The 12-bed facility had a dispensary, kitchen, dining room, isolation rooms, and surgeon’s office. This was the first lime-concrete building at Fort Laramie.