Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Fort Churchill

AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
US Highway 95-A, 8 miles south of junction with US 50 __NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

__ VICINITY OF

STATE Nevada CODE COUNTY Lyon CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	__OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	X MUSEUM
__BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	X PARK
X STRUCTURE(S)	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	X YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME State of Nevada, Nevada State Park Commission
(current: John L. Meder, Administrator)

STREET & NUMBER
Nye Building, 201 South Fall Street

CITY, TOWN Carson City __ VICINITY OF STATE Nevada

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Lyon County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN Yerington STATE Nevada

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE __FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	X RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Situated on a rise between Churchill Butte to the north and the Carson River to the south, Fort Churchill was once a series of adobe buildings around a parade ground, the company building (headquarters, quartermaster storehouse, commissary, and hospital) to the east, the officers' quarters to the north, the enlisted men's barracks and mess hall to the west, and the magazine and guardhouse to the south. Farther to the south were the horse barns and corrals. Only the officers' quarters were two-storied. As in most western posts, there was no wall.

Today the post is a collection of deteriorating adobe ruins, 15 buildings and some foundations, clustered around a sagebrush overgrown parade ground. The fort is one of the few remaining in its natural setting around which a town never grew. Seen stark against the mountains the ruins are stongly evocative of the loneliness of the intermountain frontier and its distance from anything familiar.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	X MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1860-1871 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Capts. Joseph Stewart & F.F. Flint

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fort Churchill (1860-1871), on the north bank of the Carson River, was established in the Carson Valley as a result of the Paiute War of 1860. Throughout its brief life the adobe fort provided protection for the emigrant trail to California and the lines of communication that went along with it: the Central Overland Mail Route, the Pony Express, and the projected transcontinental telegraph.

HISTORY

The first white man known to have visited the site of Fort Churchill was mountain man Jedediah Smith who crossed into California by the Humbolt-Carson River in route in 1825. As American exploration progressed more people passed through the area: Captain Bonneville, the Bidwell party, John C. Fremont, and Kit Carson (after whom Fremont named the river). With the beginning of emigration to California some of the wagon trains traveling along the Humbolt River took the Carson River route, the most famous being the doomed Donner Party, who passed about 20 miles to the north of the Fort Churchill site. The discovery of gold in California brought settlement (mostly from Utah) and government to Nevada, which became part of Utah territory. Small way stations grew up along the trail. Settlers were beginning to exploit the fertile valleys that were well watered, at least for the Great Basin. Although the early settlers lived in peace with their Indian neighbors, the rush to Washoe in 1859 and 1860 brought in many more whites of a new type--veterans of the California gold fields who had brusquely pushed aside the California Indians and who would brooke no interference in their savage quest for mineral wealth. The Carson River Paiutes soon realized that they would be pushed out of their homeland. They also resented the white's destruction of the game and pine trees necessary for their survival.

It was not economics, however, but sex, that started the Paiute War of 1860. Some ten miles northeast of the site of Fort Churchill stood Williams Station (now under the waters of Lake Lahontan), operated by James Williams and his two younger brothers. In May of 1860 while James was away on business, some Indian women were

held captive at the station. On May 7 Moguanoga (Captain Soo) and a group of Paiutes attacked the station and killed all five whites there: the Williams brothers, Sam Sullivan, James Fleming, and Dutch Phil. When James discovered the killings he hurried to Carson City with the news. Angry and frightened settlers demanded action. Two days later 105 men set out from Buckland Station, the Carson City men led by Major William Ormsby, the Virginia City men under Archie McDonald, the Genoa men under Thomas F. Condon, Jr., and the Silver City men led by Captain Richard G. Watkins. Nobody was in overall command, and the men, ill-armed and untrained in Indian warfare seemed to regard victory as a foregone conclusion. They were wrong. After burying the dead at Williams Station they got as far as Pyramid Lake forty miles to the north before they sighted any Indians. With a great shout the force charged pell-mell after the Indians, and before long the whites found themselves encircled in a cleverly constructed trap. They lost 46 men cutting out of the trap and 30 more in the rout that ensued. Major Ormsby was among the dead.

Late in May a combined force of Californians, Nevadians, and U.S. regulars under Captain Joseph Stewart moved on Pyramid Lake under the command of Colonel John C. Hays of the Nevada volunteers. This well organized force saw the Indians simply melt before them.

Concerned for the safety of the line of communications to the east, the California Army Headquarters ordered Captain Stewart to build a fort in the Carson River Valley. He chose 200 acres on the north side of the river on the Buckland Ranch. Two months after the initial defeat 207 soldiers under the command of Captains Joseph Stewart and F. F. Flint were busily constructing adobe buildings. The adobe came from the river bed, the foundation stones were local, the lumber came from the Sierras, and other supplies were shipped in from San Francisco.

The most elegant of the buildings were the officers' quarters, which contained a set of parlors, two bedrooms, two closets, a woodshed, and an indoor privy for each officer. The enlisted men's quarters were designed to house 300 men. The total cost of the fort was $178,889.

In July 1860 the fort was complete. It was named for General Sylvester Churchill, the Inspector General of the U.S. Army, under whom Stewart had served. The fort had a population of 337 men and 12 women. It was soon the eastern terminus of the telegraph from San Francisco and the western end of the Pony Express run from Fort Kearney, Nebraska. The troops at the fort attempted to protect the line, the mail, and the settlers from sporadic Indian attack.

In 1861, with the fort's garrison down to 30 dragoons and 10 infantry, the Indians conceived the plan of entering the unwalled fort with concealed weapons and slaughtering the troops. Indian Agent Warren Wasson rode alone and unarmed into the Indian meeting and talked them out of it. Wa-he, the leader, fled to Oregon, returned a short time later and was murdered by two Paiutes.

When the Civil War broke out, the remaining regulars were drawn east, their place taken by California and Nevada volunteers. Added to the normal duty of keeping an eye on the Indians was the task of preventing Southern sympathizers and supplies from reaching the Confederacy, and the life line to California was even more important. After the war was over the fort was a supply depot manned by a small company. In May 1868 what remained of the garrison was ordered to Fort Halleck, Nevada (near present Elko). In 1870 the State of Nevada declined to garrison the fort, and in March 1871, the buildings were auctioned to Sam Buckland for $750. He took the wood of the roofs, windows, and doors a few yards to the Fernley-Yerington Road and used it to build the Towle House. The land was turned over to the General Land Office. In 1880 the bodies burried in the post cemetery were removed to Carson City and San Francisco for reinterment. The reservation was used for an Indian school for a while, but the school was moved to Schurz.

At the urging of the Sagebrush Chapter of D.A.R. the State of Nevada acquired 200 acres of the old reservation in 1931 for use as a park. The 1934 National Park Service plan for stabilization of the adobe ruins resulted in a Civilian Conservation Corps camp being opened there in 1935 to do extensive work on the old fort. New bricks made in the old manner reinforced old walls, a visitor center/headquarters building (not a part of the landmark) was a reconstruction of one of the old fort buildings, and a public campground was built. During World War II the park was closed and subject to vandalism. Finally in 1961 the State got clear title to the site and redevelopment of the park began.

The fort is today included in the public park maintained by the State of Nevada, which provides both some interpretation of the historic site and picnic and camping grounds on the Carson River.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

A Master Plan for Fort Churchill, Historic State Monument, Nevada State Parks Commission, n.p., n.d.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY c. 20 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A				B			
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Marilyn Larew, Historian

ORGANIZATION
Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service

DATE
January 1978

STREET & NUMBER
1100 L Street, N.W.

TELEPHONE
523-5464

CITY OR TOWN
Washington

STATE
D. C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ____ STATE ____ LOCAL ____

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11/3/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

The Fort Churchill ruins are a part of the Fort Churchill State Park in Lyon County, Nevada, in the southeast one-half of section 34, township 17 north, range 23 east. The Fort Churchill National Historic Landmark includes only the ruins of the old fort so as to exclude a trailer camp ground and the interpretive center which is a recent reconstruction.

Beginning at a point on the southern edge of the Fort Churchill State Park Road about one mile southwest of alternate U.S. 95 where the dirt road goes south around the adobe ruins of Fort Churchill, proceed south on the inside edge of the dirt road approximately .1 mile south, then approximately .2 miles west, then approximately .1 mile north to the point where the dirt road intersects the Fort Churchill State Road; thence approximately .2 miles east on the southern edge of said road to the point of origin.