

# Fort Yellowstone Historic District Tour Guide

The Army Years  
1886-1918



Yellowstone  
National Park

50¢ donation

**F**or the decade after Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, the park was under serious threat from those who would exploit, rather than protect, its resources. Poachers killed animals. Souvenir hunters broke large pieces off the geysers and hot springs. Developers set up camps for tourists near hot springs, along with bath and laundry facilities *in* the hot springs. In response, civilian superintendents were hired to preserve and protect this land. Their experience and intentions varied, and they were all underfunded and under-staffed. Word got back to Congress that the park was in trouble, but legislators refused to appropriate any funds for the park's administration in 1886.



a guardhouse, and a headquarters building on the front row; a barracks on the second row; a stables on the third row; and two non-commissioned officers' quarters in the final row. An almost identical set of buildings was finished in 1897 to house a second troop.

Yellowstone National Park turned to the U.S. Army for help. In 1886, men from Company M, First United States Cavalry, Fort Custer, Montana Territory came to Yellowstone under the command of Captain Moses Harris. They began what would be 32 years of military presence in the park.

At first, the soldiers lived in temporary frame buildings at Camp Sheridan at the foot of the Mammoth Hot Springs Terraces. After enduring five cold, harsh winters, the Army realized there was no end in sight to this assignment. Therefore, in 1890, Congress appropriated \$50,000 for a permanent post.

The first buildings of Fort Yellowstone, at the far end of the street from today's Albright Visitor Center, were finished by late 1891: two duplex officer's quarters,

In 1909, Scottish stonemasons and a force of other workers began constructing seven large sandstone buildings using standard military plans in the Colonial Revival style. The buildings provide the fort with a distinctive and substantial character. They represent the Army's attempt to live up to a substantial commitment and to provide a model post for visitors. The chapel, built of sandstone in 1913, was the final building constructed during the Army's tenure. The stone for these buildings was obtained from a quarry between the Gardner River and the Mammoth Campground.

**Photo above:**  
**Soldiers drilling in front of**  
**Bachelor Officers' Quarters, 1910.**  
**Cover: Fort Yellowstone, 1895.**

## Law and Orders



In 1910, at the height of the Army's presence in Yellowstone, there were 324 soldiers here—plus some families and numerous civilian employees. These troops staffed Fort Yellowstone and the park's outposts. From these outposts, the cavalry patrolled the park on skis during the winter, stopping at patrol cabins along the way.

These buildings remind us of the long history of our first national park and of the important role the Army played in preserving it for the future. They remind us that the resources we find within Yellowstone's boundaries are not only natural ones, but cultural as well. Our interactions with this wilderness continue to shape our idea of what a national park should be, just as they did during the days of Fort Yellowstone.

Photo above:  
Fort Yellowstone Chapel,  
1915.

Photo at right:  
Guard duty at  
President Roosevelt's Camp in  
Yellowstone, 1903.

SOME SOLDIERS CONSIDERED YELLOWSTONE to be a good duty station. The men of the "snowshoe cavalry" liked their rough life in the remote recesses of the mountains and some applied freely for service at these outposts. The life was demanding and often isolated, rugged, and dangerous—and very different from what most of them had known in other postings. But Fort Yellowstone's facilities were better than most and discipline was more relaxed than at other Army posts—especially in the field. Duties were varied and interesting . . . and the scenery couldn't be beat!



Edwin Kelsey, who served in Yellowstone in 1891, later became the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Private Kelsey's letters to his niece describe a difficult but very enjoyable life:

"December 3, 1898 . . . Left here for the Post [Fort Yellowstone] the Sunday before Thanksgiving. . . . I made 26 miles the first day, staying all night at Norris Station. The next morning it was 22° below zero, but I pulled out for the Post, which I reached about two p.m. after a cold hard ride of 20 miles. It is not so much sport riding when the snow is so deep that your horse has to work all the time. Stayed at the Post for Thanksgiving dinner and it was a beaut. The cook more than threw himself. Turkey, roast pork, sweet spuds, cranberry sauce, oyster stew, chocolate, three kinds of cake, pie, pickles, nuts and apples—how's that for soldiers? . . . There is something about life in the wilderness that fascinates me. I saddle my beast, and go off on long rides through the forest where everything is so quiet that one can almost hear the solitude. . . . Don't suppose you will hear from me again before Xmas, so I'll wish you all a Merry one—I am sorry that I have no chance to send you my remembrance.

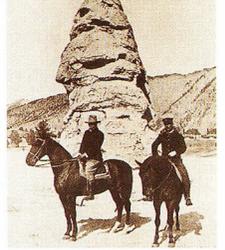
One can buy nothing here and as the troop has not been paid for two months I have no money or I would send it to you to spend with my compliments. Love to all the family and Mable, and regards to friends, Edwin."

Most of the recruits came here from dusty, dry, hot duty in the Southwest or western plains. Yellowstone's weather was quite a change for them, and a relief in many ways. Some had never seen mountains or snow, and they had much to learn. Ten different cavalry units served at Fort Yellowstone during the 30 years—troops from the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Eleventh, and Thirteenth cavalries as well as an experimental unit of men selected because of their particular skills in mountain living.

George Anderson, the third military superintendent of the park, wrote in 1897:

"As a consequence of their good work, the beauties of the park are no longer defaced; no fires have ravaged the forests; poaching has diminished to a small percentage of what it was ten years ago; and more than all, order exists everywhere."

Photo above:  
Visitors pause in front of Liberty Cap, 1903.



# Fort Yellowstone Historic District

*At present, many buildings in the Fort Yellowstone Historic District are employee residences and are not open to the public. Please respect the privacy of residents by staying on the paved route and treating living areas with courtesy.*



MOST OF THE BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTED during the Army era are still standing and used by the National Park Service as its headquarters. Many of the interiors have been modernized, while the exteriors have been maintained and/or restored. The walking tour will take you through the major parts of the fort. This map shows how the fort buildings were used in 1916, just before the National Park Service was established and took over the park's administration. Some of the buildings are gone, and others have been constructed since that time—however, much of the fort remains intact today.

## Legend

-  Paved Road
-  Fort Yellowstone Buildings

-  Walking Tour
-  Tour Exhibits



### 1. Bachelor Officers' Quarters

Built in 1909, this building had a mess or club, kitchen, sitting room, and apartments for six single officers. Temporary visitors were housed here too. It is now the Albright Visitor Center.

### 2. Captain's Quarters

Built in 1909 to house two apartments—each with kitchen, living room, dining room, 6 bedrooms, 2 baths, pantry, and laundry. The finished attic was used for a children's playroom or maids' quarters.

### 3. Field Officer's Quarters

Built in 1909 to serve as the residence of the acting superintendent/post commander of the park. Today it houses Yellowstone's superintendent.

### 4. Double Officer's Quarters

The two at the far end (built in 1891) were among the first Fort Yellowstone buildings. The later two (built in 1897) were designed for captains but were often used for officers of lesser rank.

### 5. Post Headquarters

Built in 1891 as the office for the post commander/acting superintendent, the post adjutant and the sergeant major. As the post grew, a new administration building was established and this became a storehouse. It is now a residence.

### 6. Guardhouse

Built in 1891, the guardhouse could hold 15 prisoners and 10 guards. Every visitor had to check in at this building after entering the park from Gardiner, Montana. A new guardhouse replaced it in 1911.

### 7. Chapel

Built in 1913, the chapel was the last building completed during the Army era. Built of native stone with a slate roof and oak furnishings, it is still used today and is the best-preserved building—inside and out. The bell was added in 1928, and two stained glass windows were placed in 1939.

### 8. Hospital Annex

Built in 1909 as quarters for personnel assigned to hospital duty, it is now a residence. Three hospitals were built at Fort Yellowstone in 1887, 1894, and 1913; all were demolished.

### 9. Hospital Steward's Quarters

Built in 1894.

### 10. New Guardhouse

Built in 1911, this building still serves as the jail.

### 11. Granary

Completed in 1891 to store grain for horses. It is now a residence.

### 12. Quartermaster Storehouse

Built in 1891 to store supplies such as clothing, blankets, and equipment. It is now a residence.

### 13. Commissary Storehouse

Built in 1891, troops acquired their rations here. Both commissioned and non-commissioned officers' families were authorized to buy groceries here. It is now a residence.

### 14. Cavalry Barracks

The first of these wooden barracks no longer exists. The northern-most barracks (built in 1897) is now the Yellowstone Center for Resources. Originally built to house 68 men, a basement was built in 1909 under one wing so the building could house 100 men.

### 15. Post Exchange

Built in 1905 in the Colonial Revival style, this building housed a gymnasium, reading room, canteen, and barbershop.

### 16. Double Cavalry Barracks

Built in 1909, this structure once housed two cavalry troops (200 men). The largest building in Fort Yellowstone, it is now the Administration Building.

### 17. U.S. Engineers' Offices

Built in 1903 to house the Army Corps of Engineers, which had responsibility for construction of the park roads. The nationally known architectural firm of Reed and Stem received \$750 for the building plans. New York City's Grand Central Terminal and Livingston, Montana's Northern Pacific Depot are among the firm's other work.

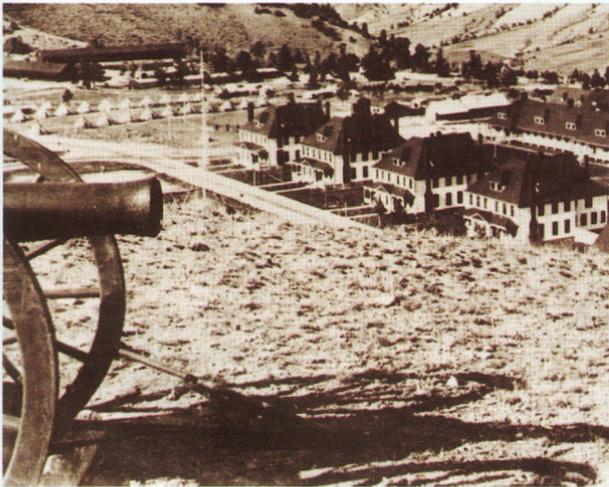
### 18. Blacksmith Shop

### 19. Calvary Stables

### 20. Drill Field

Photo above:

Fort Yellowstone, 1914.

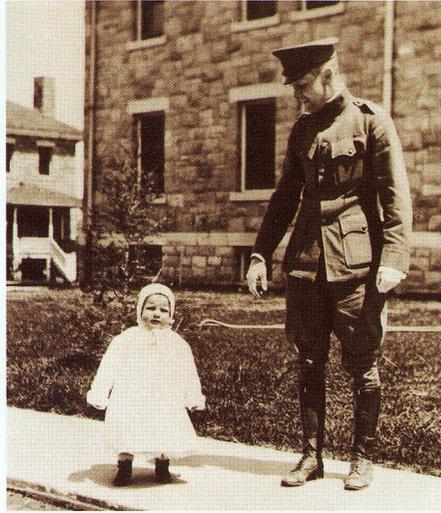


**Top: The first administration building, erected 1879 and razed 1909.**

**Middle: Firing the cannon on Capitol Hill, 1916.**

**Bottom: Fort Yellowstone viewed from Capitol Hill.**

## Life at the Fort



TOURIST SEASON PROVIDED COMPANY for the officers, who entertained visitors and friends and houseguests. Carriage rides and picnics took place during the warm months, and sleigh rides and ice skating were favorite pastimes during the cold months. There was much socializing, particularly among the officers' families; lunches and dinners together were common. With domestic help, these social events weren't a problem for the high-ranking officers—but a lot of work for the wives of lower-ranking officers who could not afford help! The isolation of the fort was softened in the summer by this busy social schedule.

Children usually went to school at the fort. Teachers were found among the soldier ranks when possible. Otherwise, families with children paid the expenses of a civilian teacher. In 1910, when no teacher could be found, the children were sent to relatives and friends to attend school.

One of the challenges of fort life was keeping supplies on hand. The wife of Captain F. J. Arnold wrote:

**“We ordered staples, meats, canned goods, bread, etc. from the Commissary and the order would be delivered and put in the kitchen. For special occasions in the winter, we would put in a special order for turkey and then hang it outside to keep it frozen as we only had a large icebox on the back porch. . . . The soldiers cut the ice in the winter up on Swan Lake Flat, then stored it in the icehouse dug into the side of Capitol Hill. . . . The four-horse freight wagons hauled hay and coal up from Gardiner, and many other supplies came on the market wagon. There were some fresh foods available at Hall's Grocery store and the Van Dyke's Meat**

**Market. . . . Clothing and household items were usually ordered by catalog and some things through the PX. Whittaker's store near the Mammoth Hotel had novelties and many smaller items and they also had the Post Office. There was no delivery, so we would either walk, or ski over in the wintertime, to pick up our mail.”**

Enlisted men spent their free time in a number of ways. Most weren't married—the Army discouraged marriage among enlisted men and seldom provided allowances or rations for their families—so they had plenty of free time and few ways to spend it. They could visit the gym or bowling alley, or play cards. As early as 1903, moving pictures were shown on Thursday evenings. Despite the breaks when the reel was changed, attendance was good, especially in the winter. One soldier wrote:



**“Most any kind of entertainment is interesting these long winter nights.”**



As soon as the first heavy snow fell, the entire community donned skis. Some sidewalks were kept shoveled, but anyone wishing to go elsewhere had to ski. The porches of the officers' quarters were lined with graduated collections of skis—from long to medium, short to very short—and the officers bought new skis regularly for their children, just as they did new shoes.

**Pictured at far left:**

**Capt. Bloomburg and his son, 1917.**

**Left: Soldiers relaxing in the Post Exchange.**

**Above top: A visitor poses for the camera.**

**Above: Soldiers on ski patrol.**

Clippings from *The Army and Navy Journal* report on post social life in those days:

“Capt. and Mrs. Arnold received the officers and ladies of the post at noon on New Year’s. Eggnog and refreshments were enjoyed. . . . The Post Exchange is open again for basketball and [roller] skating. A railing has been built around the gymnasium, protecting the heaters and lending assurance to the skaters. . . . To celebrate the holidays, the soldiers gave a dance at the Post Exchange, which was attractively decorated with Christmas trees and flags.”

Photo top: Calvary drill, 1911.

Middle: Soldier horsing around, 1909 or 1910

Below: Soldiers with bison heads captured from a poacher in 1894.



## A Job Well Done



CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER, CORRESPONDENT FOR *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* wrote in 1896:

“The Interior Department made stringent rules, with adequate penalties for their infraction, and the military arm in command has enforced them splendidly. The good citizen rejoices that there is at least one spot in the United States where law is promptly enforced. In this respect Yellowstone Park is a moral lesson of the highest value to the United States . . . the whole country will have reason to be proud of the Yellowstone Park and its condition.”

In 1916 when Congress created the National Park Service, the Army turned Fort Yellowstone over to the new agency. Local resistance made this transition difficult, and the Army returned in 1917. The park was fully under National Park Service control in 1918, and the Army departed. The fort has served the park well, both as administrative headquarters and as a constant reminder of the debt the nation owes the officers and enlisted men of the United States Army for protecting and preserving Yellowstone National Park for future generations.

Photo above: Officer of the Day ceremony.  
Below: Troop F posing in front of the double calvary barracks, 1913.



## For more information

Visit YNP's official website at [www.nps.gov/yell](http://www.nps.gov/yell)

These publications are available at park visitor centers:

*The Yellowstone Story Volume II*

by Aubrey Haines

*Yellowstone, A Wilderness Besieged*

by Richard A. Bartlett

*Old Yellowstone Days*

edited by Paul Schullery

*A Yellowstone Album: A Photographic Celebration  
of the First National Park*

by Lee H. Whittlesey and the  
Yellowstone Park staff

*Yellowstone Place Names: Mirrors of History*

by Aubrey Haines

*Yellowstone's Ski Pioneers: Peril and Heroism*

*On the Winter Trail*

by Paul Schullery

*The Yellowstone National Park*

by Hiram Martin Chittenden



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