

FORT LARAMIE

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



POST SURGEON'S QUARTERS



Dress Uniform Emblem for
Medical Service Officer

THE POST SURGEON

Quartermaster plans suggest that this building, constructed in 1875, was intended to house post surgeons.

However, it is likely that other officers of similar rank may have occupied the quarters at various times.

The Post Surgeon was a staff officer attached to the post.

Men achieved this status in a variety of ways. Often entering the army medical corps from civilian practice, as assistant surgeons with the rank of 1st lieutenant.

After three years of service a promotion to Captain was automatic. Further promotions depended on vacancies, either by death or resignation of senior medical officers.

The extent of the surgeon's education was greater than that of the average army officer. His diverse interests and knowledge in all things scientific and cultural made him a highly respected member of the military community.

The interior furnishings you will see reflect the year 1880.

THE PARLOR



As the cultural leader of the post, the surgeon selected certain furnishings to convey new decorative trends. A swing towards straightened lines, balanced curves, and studied design is represented in the Bentwood rocker, and the Eastlake style settee and chairs. The heavy solid-colored draperies in this room and the dining room are hung straight from large round rods and are not characterized by loops and folds and material

puddles on the floor so typical of the fashionable décor of an earlier era. Oriental influence is apparent in the carpeting and the fans on the wall shelf. A popular plaster Rogers group, "Rip Van Winkle", adorns one corner, and wall decorations are arty photographs of art and chromo lithographs.

DINING ROOM



Documentation reveals that even when all of the decorative trappings of a far away eastern society had to be abandoned, army wives still maintained their fine linen, glassware, china and silver. The table has been set with Ansley or Grandmother pattern dinnerware. An elegant marble-topped sideboard and large dining room table are examples of

furniture that might have been purchased from a previous owner or at auction, as such pieces would have been difficult and expensive to move. A decorated papier-mâché folding table with mother of pearl inlay from an earlier time, may have been a family heirloom. It could have been easily packed and transported from one military station to another.

STUDY/KITCHEN

The study served the purpose of providing a work place for the many functions performed by the Post Surgeon, while isolating these activities from social events and family needs, for which the only parlor would have served. In this room he would have been on call for his patients, studied the plant and animal life in the area, and recorded weather conditions and temperatures. A number of ornithological, amphibian, and reptile specimens are arranged on the shelves and about the room. Ethnographic artifacts adorn the walls and floor of the study. The weather thermometer and barometer on the wall represent the surgeon's interest in all aspects of his environment, and characterize the belief that weather conditions had a strong bearing on one's health. The science of diagnosing diseases was still in its infancy and recovery depended largely on one's own constitution. The array of medical instruments



and medications, on the table, aided to some extent in treating the ills of the garrison and any civilian patients associated with it.

Since there is no indication that there was a room(s) set-aside in the post hospital for surgery/lab functions, both the study and kitchen may have been used to perform minor surgical procedures and treat immediate medical needs.

MASTER BEDROOM

A traditional second parlor was not available to the surgeon's wife, so likely in a creative use of space she used her bedroom for sewing or leisure pursuits. Wash sets were used before indoor plumbing was available and one's toilet was usually accomplished in the bedroom rather than in a room designed for that purpose. A set usually consisted of a water

pitcher and large bowl, toothbrush holder, a smaller pitcher for warm water, a soap holder, slop-jar, and chamber pot.

An interesting ball gown is displayed on a form in this room. The dress was designed and worn by an officer's wife here at Fort Laramie, most likely for a "costume ball" as the creation is not typical of traditional ball gowns of the 1870's - 1880's period.

BOY'S BEDROOM

 This room is interpreted as having been occupied by three young boys not yet old enough to be sent back East to school. The surgeon and his wife were undoubtedly involved in the boys' "formal" education with basics being taught at home. The youngsters' interest in their natural and cultural environment can be seen in

the collection of bones, fossils, rocks, Indian artifacts, and Army equipment.

GIRL'S BEDROOM

 Utilitarian architecture of military dwellings always presented a quandary in providing sleeping space for young occupants. The girl's bedroom is a partitioned section of the hallway. This room is furnished for a child of two or three.