

Fort Larned

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • KANSAS

Fort Larned was established by the U.S. Army in 1859, and though abandoned just 18 years later, it played a significant role in opening the trans-Mississippi West.

Built near the confluence of the Pawnee and Arkansas Rivers in south-central Kansas, Fort Larned was first charged with protecting the mail and travelers from attacks by the Plains Indians on the eastern leg of the Santa Fe Trail. Later it served as a center for the Indian Bureau's attempted peaceful administration of the Indians, while at the same time, it was also a base for military operations against the Indians. Fort Larned's final task, which actually put an end to its own usefulness, was to guard the construction crews that pushed the Santa Fe Railroad west across the Plains. The railroad displaced the slower-moving, more vulnerable wagon traffic along the old trail.

TROOPS GUARD SANTA FE TRAIL

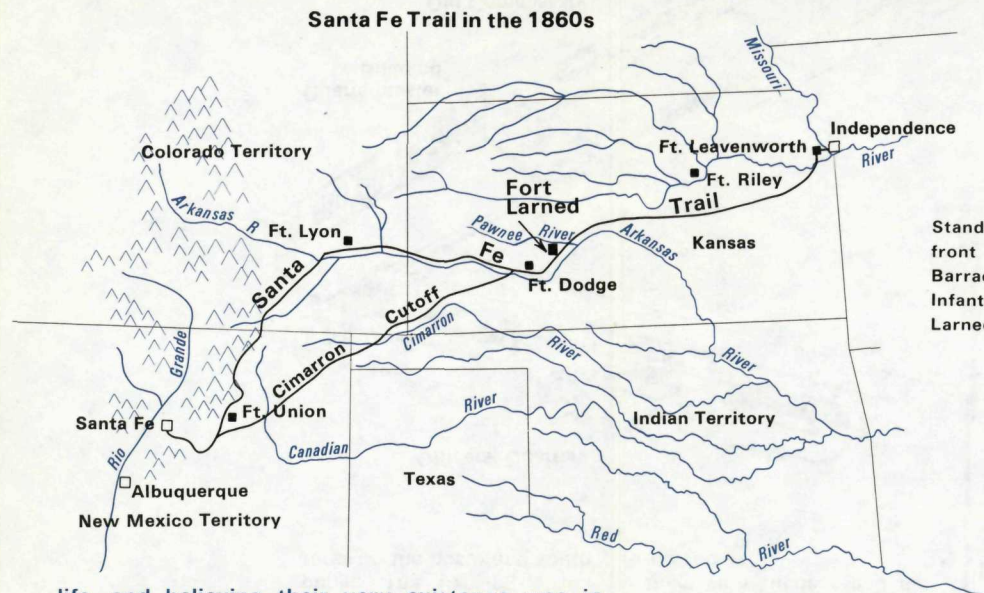
The Santa Fe Trail was one of America's most important overland trails from 1822 to 1880, carrying annually several million dollars in commercial traffic between Independence, Mo., and Santa Fe. The acquisition of vast new southwestern territories by the United States after the Mexican War, and the gold rushes of 1849 and 1858, gave added impetus to trail traffic. This great influx of settlers, merchants, gold seekers, and adventurers, however, inevitably disrupted the Indians' way of

life, and believing their very existence was in jeopardy, the tribes struck back, attacking the commerce, mail shipments, and emigrants on the trail.

As a result of this restiveness, a military post was established October 22, 1859, near Lookout Hill (now Jenkins Hill) on the bank of the Pawnee River about 5 miles from its junction with the Arkansas. In June 1860 the camp was moved 3 miles farther west, where a more durable sod-and-adobe fort was built. Named for Col. Benjamin F. Larned, U.S. Army paymaster from 1854 to 1862, Fort Larned became the northern anchor of the line

of forts that defined the southwestern military frontier. This line extended almost due south from Fort Larned through Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma) and Texas, ending at Fort Duncan on the Rio Grande.

Locally, for several critical years, Fort Larned was a principal guardian of the Kansas, or eastern, segment of Santa Fe Trail commerce, its soldiers cooperating with troops from Forts Union and



Standing in parade formation in front of the Enlisted Men's Barracks are men of the 3rd Infantry, Company C, at Fort Larned in 1867.

Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.



Lyon on both the Cimarron Cutoff and the Mountain Branch. In 1864, following the Chivington Massacre at Sand Creek and after the War Department would not allow travel beyond Fort Larned without armed escort, the post furnished guard detachments for mail stages and wagon trains.

TREATIES FAIL, FIGHTING CONTINUES

During the 1860s the Indian Bureau's agency at Fort Larned sought to provide a solution, based on a peaceful approach, to the cultural conflict between Indians and whites. The treaty of Fort Wise (1861) first established this relationship. In the Treaties of the Little Arkansas (1865) and Medicine Lodge (1867), the Government agreed to pay annuities to the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Kiowas, and Comanches in return for keeping the peace and staying away from Santa Fe Trail traffic. The agency at Fort Larned was abolished in 1868 when the tribes were moved to new reservations

VISITING THE PARK

Fort Larned National Historic Site, located 9.5 kilometers (6 miles) west of the city of Larned, Kans., on U.S. 156, is open all year; it is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Groups who would like guided tours can make advance arrangements with the superintendent, whose address is Route 3, Larned, KA 67550.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

in Indian Territory, but from 1861 to 1868 Fort Larned served as a distributing point for annuity payments to the Indians. Attracted by the opportunities thus offered at the fort, traders frequented the post and it became an important center of trade.

Peace did not come to the Plains in the 1860s, however, and Fort Larned also served at that time as a center for military operations against the Indians. It was the base for Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock's abortive 1867 campaign against the Plains tribes. This campaign, which was intended to impress the Indians with the military strength of the United States, only succeeded in intensifying hostilities. It was during this campaign that a young lieutenant colonel named George A. Custer was initiated into the ways of Plains warfare.

The next year, Fort Larned became a key post in the Indian war of 1868-69. In 1868, in violation of the Treaties of Medicine Lodge signed the year before, the Cheyennes attacked several wagon trains along the Santa Fe Trail and raided settlers as far south as the Texas panhandle. These events signaled a general outbreak, and Kiowas, Comanches, and Arapahos also began to pillage and raid from Kansas to Texas. To meet the threat, Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, commanding the Department of Missouri, organized a winter campaign and ordered Lt. Col. George A. Custer and the 7th Cavalry to Fort Larned for a thrust south into Indian Territory. Custer's campaign culminated in the defeat of Black Kettle's Cheyennes at the Battle of the Washita on November 27, 1868. This battle ended organized Indian resistance in the area around Fort Larned, although skirmish action and unorganized activity continued.

SOLDIERS PROTECT RAILROAD BUILDERS

Fort Larned's last important function was, ironically, to help end the usefulness of the trail it had so long protected. The close of the Civil War released the Nation's great industrial energies, foremost of which was the great surge of the railroad across the Plains. The railroad promised inexpensive, fast transportation and shattered old ideas of distance. Trails of mud and dust could not compete with the trails of steel stretching westward from the Missouri. In the early 1870s as the Santa Fe Railroad pushed west, troops from Fort Larned protected construction workers against possible attack.

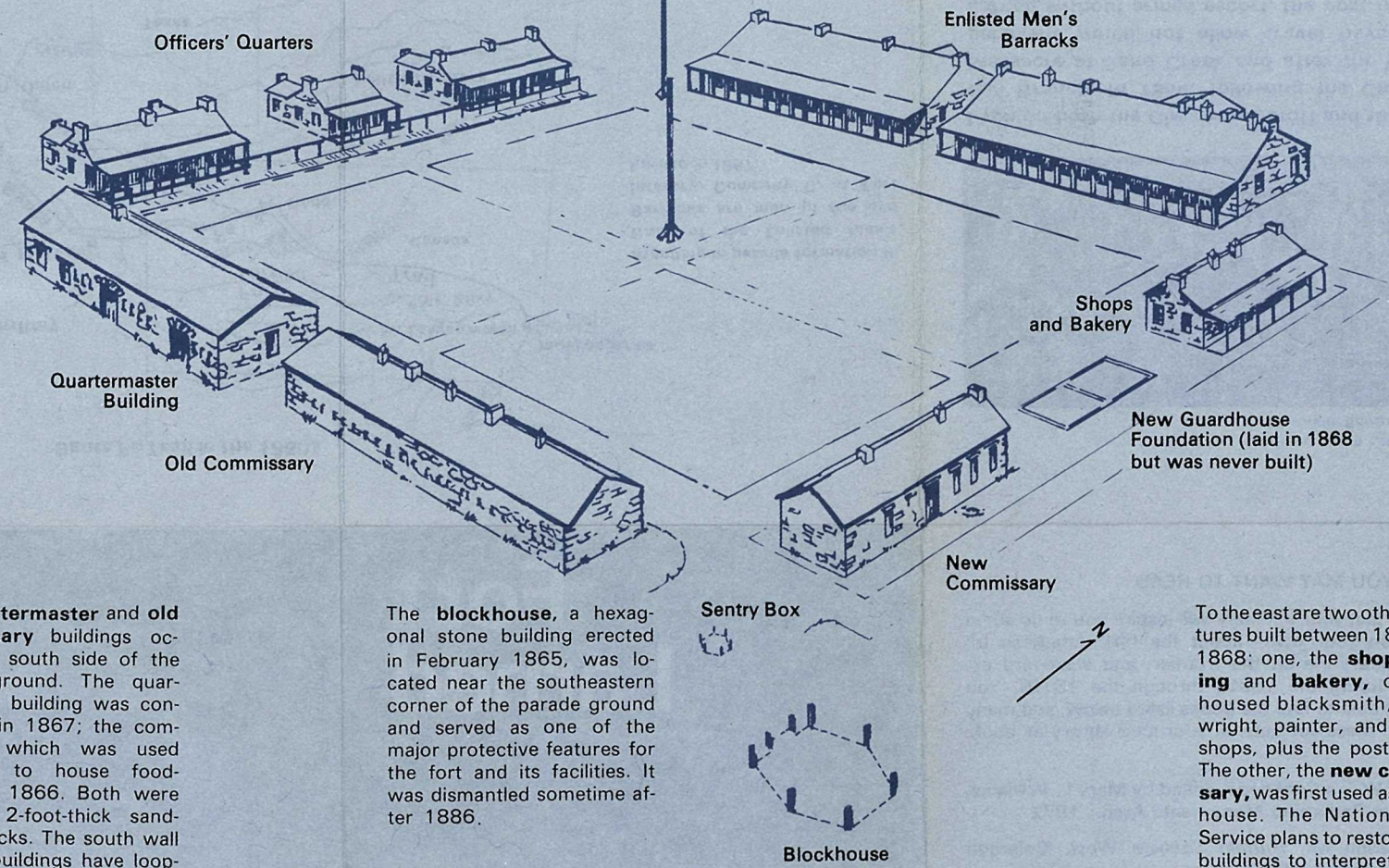
THE FORT IS ABANDONED

In July 1878, just 6 years after the completion of the railroad through Kansas, Fort Larned was abandoned. On March 26, 1883, the Fort Larned military reservation was transferred from the War Department to the General Land Office, U.S. Department of the Interior. A year later the buildings and land were sold at public auction. For the next 80 years the property remained in private hands. In August 1964 the President of the United States authorized the establishment of Fort Larned as a National Historic Site and a unit of the National Park System.

The **officers' quarters**, built in 1867-68, were constructed of sandstone, with shingle roofs and broad porticos in front. The middle of the three buildings served as commanding officer's quarters. It had four rooms and a kitchen, with servants' quarters upstairs. At present, this building is a private residence and is not open to the public. The flanking structures on the north and south

were company officers' quarters, each accommodating two captains and four lieutenants. The captains' quarters were in the ends of the buildings and consisted of two rooms, a kitchen, and a small area for servants. The lieutenants had one room each without kitchens. In 1870 additions were made to their quarters to provide them with kitchens and dining rooms.

The west and east **enlisted men's barracks** were probably begun in 1866 and, when finished, included mess rooms, kitchens, orderly rooms, and storage space. Each building could accommodate two companies, with each company allotted 40 feet square. In 1871, part of the east barracks was made into a hospital, containing two wards, a messroom, dispensary, kitchen, storeroom, and attendant's room.



The **quartermaster** and **old commissary** buildings occupy the south side of the parade ground. The quartermaster building was constructed in 1867; the commissary, which was used primarily to house foodstuffs, in 1866. Both were built of 2-foot-thick sandstone blocks. The south wall of both buildings have loopholes or gunslits.

The **blockhouse**, a hexagonal stone building erected in February 1865, was located near the southeastern corner of the parade ground and served as one of the major protective features for the fort and its facilities. It was dismantled sometime after 1886.

To the east are two other structures built between 1866 and 1868: one, the **shop building** and **bakery**, originally housed blacksmith, wheelwright, painter, and saddler shops, plus the post bakery. The other, the **new commissary**, was first used as a warehouse. The National Park Service plans to restore these buildings to interpret the variety of operations and services provided the military and civilians at Fort Larned.

HELP PROTECT THESE BUILDINGS



The commanding officer's quarters shown here, like most of the buildings at Fort Larned, is made of sandstone blocks. Over the years, people have disfigured the buildings by scratching or carving their names and initials on the blocks. We all must help stop this kind of destruction so that future visitors can see the fort just as you see it today. Therefore, PLEASE DO NOT SCRATCH, CARVE, OR MARK ON THE WALLS OF THE FORT.

We want to remind you that all objects here—buildings, artifacts, and other historical items—are protected by the Federal Antiquities Act, which means that it is illegal to disturb, injure, or remove any of them.

FORT LARNED'S BUILDINGS

FOR YOUR SAFETY

To make your visit to Fort Larned a safe one, please observe all "hard-hat" and "warning" signs around buildings undergoing restoration or stabilization. Keep your children a safe distance from the Pawnee River and the irrigation ditches.

When Maj. Henry W. Wessells, 2d Infantry, came to the fort in 1860 to construct a set of buildings, he thought they were to be built of wood and was disappointed when ordered to use adobe, which he thought would be less durable. But by the end of the year, seven buildings were completed: an officers' quarters, a combination storehouse and barracks, a guardhouse, two laundress' quarters, and a hospital. Subsidiary buildings included soldiers' quarters and a bakery, both dug into the river bank; a small adobe meathouse; a picket and canvas carriage house; and a three-room picket structure housing blacksmith, carpenter, and saddler shops. During the winter of 1864-65, a stone blockhouse was added for defense.

For the most part, Fort Larned's buildings at that time were poorly constructed and inadequately garrisoned to meet the threat of the large-scale Indian war many high-ranking officers were predicting. But the War Department, its energies consumed by the Civil War, could do nothing to remedy the deficiencies until the eastern conflict was resolved.

Finally, appropriations for the work were made in 1866, and the Fort Larned garrison began an extensive building program, using pine timbers shipped in from the east and sandstone from quarries located near the fort. By the winter of 1868 the old buildings were gone, and nine new stone buildings stood around the quadrangular parade ground. These buildings are still standing, and although once modified for farm use, they are currently being restored to their original state.



Students from the University of Colorado work in this archaeological dig to help uncover foundations of early adobe buildings. For several years, student crews have worked on similar projects here during their summer vacations.



In the old days, soldiers drew water from this well that was behind the Enlisted Men's Barracks.

BOOKS YOU MAY WANT TO READ

We hope that your visit here will inspire you to do some reading on your own—about the fort, American Indians, military life on the frontier, and westward expansion during the 1850s through the 1870s. You should be able to find the books listed below, and many others on these subjects, at your local library or bookstore.

An Army Wife's Cookbook, edited by Mary L. Williams. Southwest Parks and Monuments Assn., 1972.

Carroll, John M., *Buffalo Soldiers West*. Colorado Old Army Press, 1971.

Downey, Fairfax, *Indian Fighting Army*. Colorado Old Army Press, 1971.

Glass, L. N., *The History of the Tenth Cavalry, 1866-1921*. Colorado Old Army Press, 1972.

Hyde, George E., *The Pawnee Indians*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1951.

Mayhall, Joseph, *The Kiowas*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

Monaghan, Jay, *The Life of General George Armstrong Custer*. Little, Brown and Co., 1959.

Nye, Wilbur, *Plains Indian Raiders*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1968.

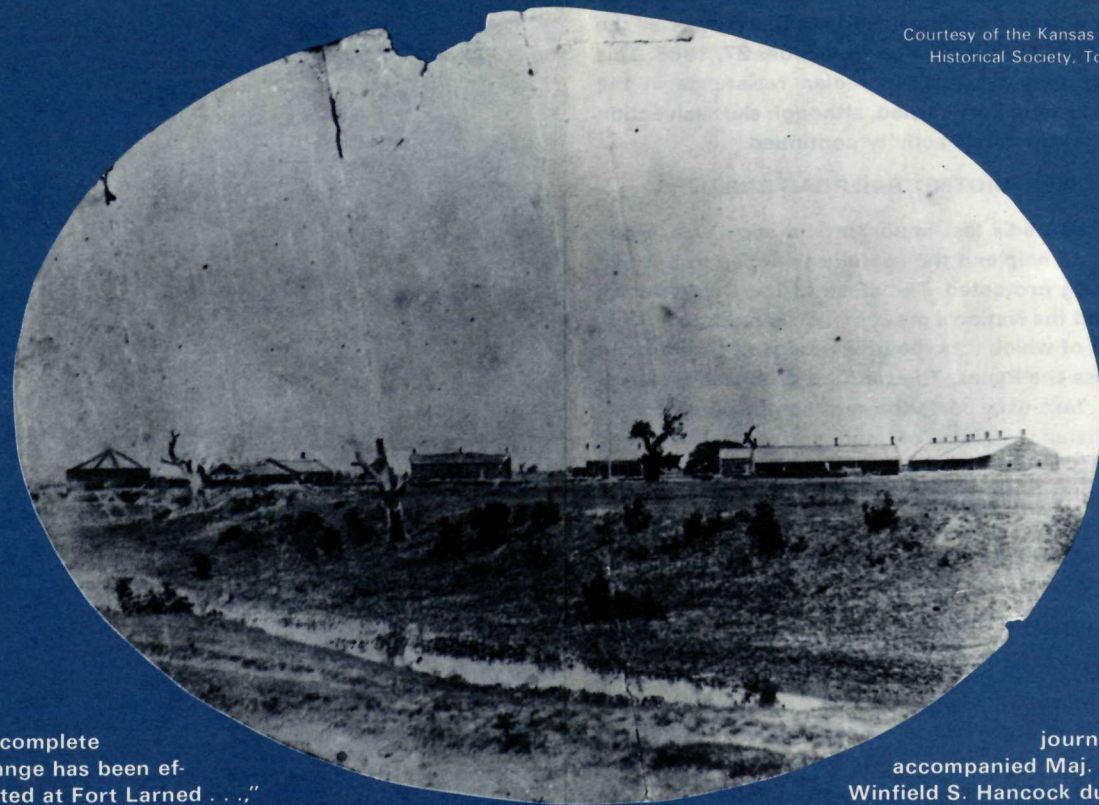
Oliva, Leo E., *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1967.

Tilden, Freeman, *The National Parks*. Knopf, 1968.

Utley, Robert M., *Frontiersmen in Blue* and *Frontier Regulars*. Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967 and 1973, respectively.

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Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

"A complete change has been effected at Fort Larned . . ." wrote Henry M. Stanley, well known for his rescue of David Livingstone and for his explorations in Africa. "The shabby, vermin-breeding adobe and wooden houses have been torn down, and new and stately buildings of hewn sandstone stand in their stead. The comfort of the troops has been taken into consideration by the architect and builder. . . ." Stanley, then a 26-year-old

journalist, accompanied Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock during his 1867 campaign against the Plains Indians. The military expedition stopped several times at Fort Larned, and Stanley made these observations in October 1867. This photograph was taken sometime during the construction period of 1867-68 and shows the fort much the same as it looked when Stanley was there. The buildings in the picture still stand today.