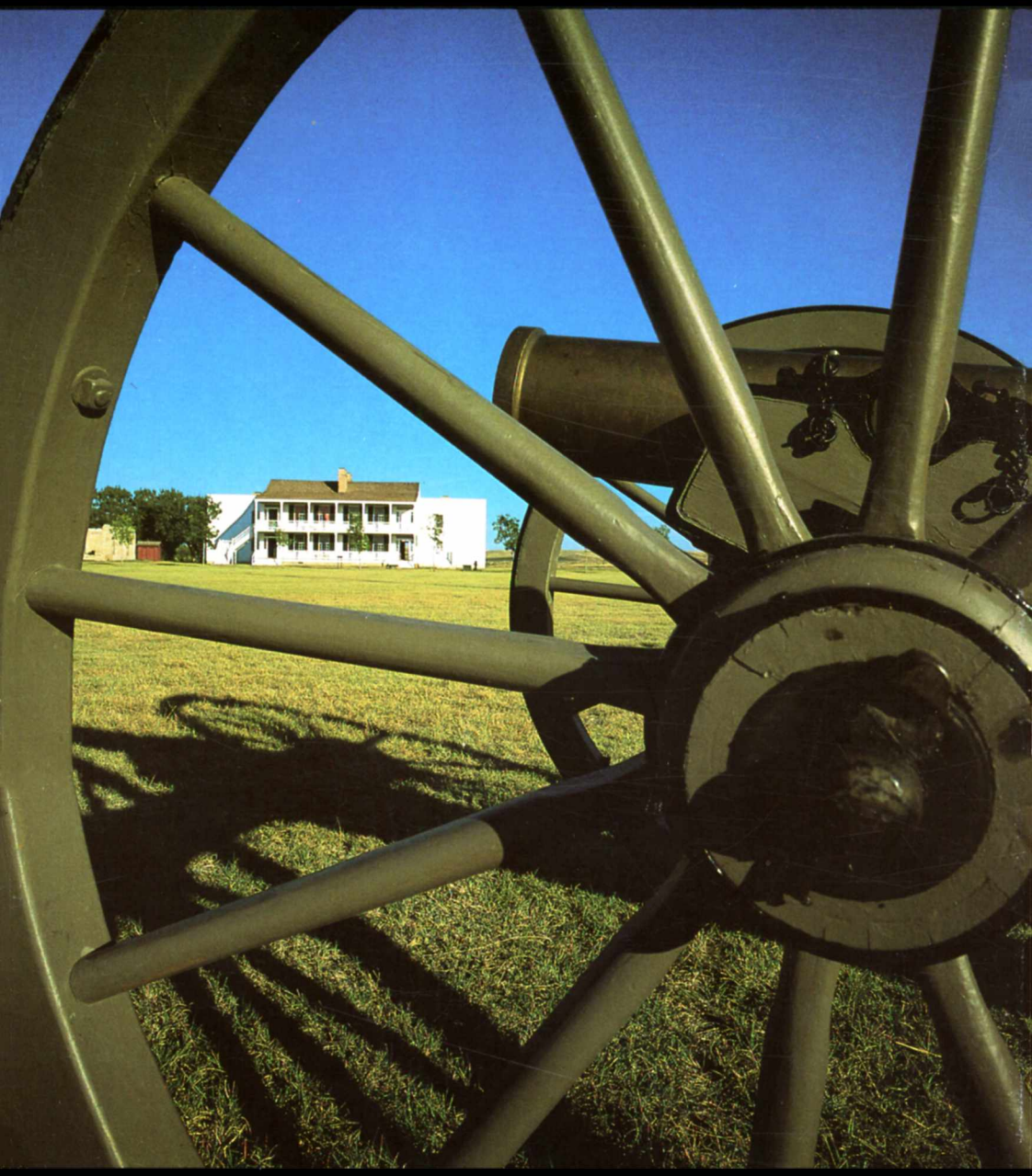
Fort Laramie

Official National Park Handbook



Handbook 118

Fort Laramie

and the Changing Frontier

by David Lavender

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National Historic Site
Wyoming

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About This Book

Fort Laramie National Historic Site in southeastern Wyoming recalls the epic days of the frontier West. From 1834 to 1890 the successive forts on this site were important centers of trade, diplomacy, and warfare on the northern Plains. Some of the most vivid figures of expanding America passed this way: trappers, fur traders, missionaries, overland emigrants, Pony Express riders, stage drivers, cowboys, homesteaders, and soldiers and Plains Indians. The following pages tell the story of this great outpost of empire and its influence over a wide region. The narrative is by David Lavender, author of many books on western America. The special drawings are the work of Richard Schlecht, an artist noted for his historical illustrations.

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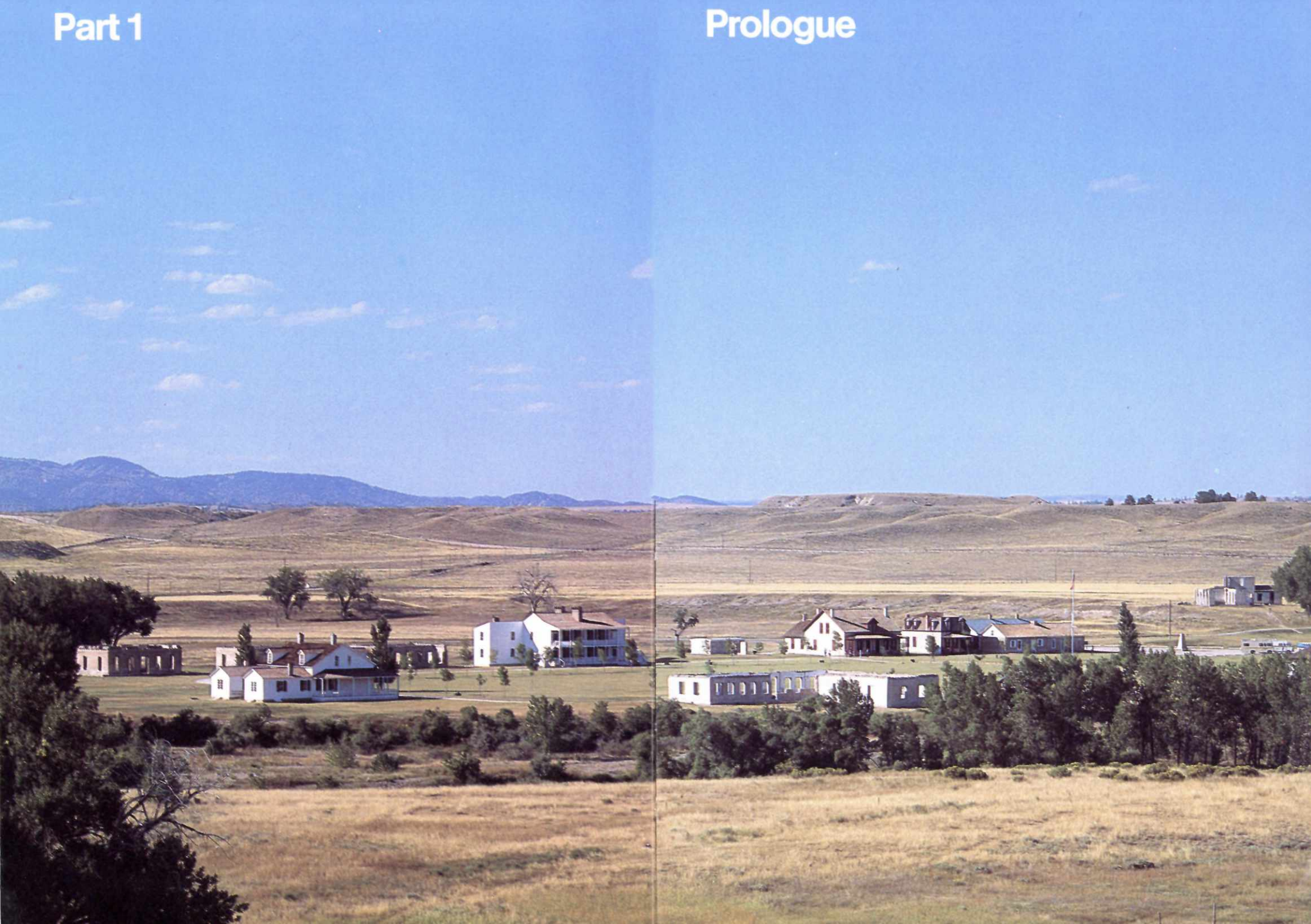
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Part 1

Prologue





The ruins of the post hospital stand on a hill north of the fort. Built in 1873 of concrete grout, the hospital had a 12-bed ward, a dispensary, a kitchen, a dining room, isolation rooms, and an office for the surgeon. It had no operating room or laboratory or even a wash room. In line with prevailing medical knowledge, the hospital's purpose was more custodial than curative. Bed rest and fresh air were its principal contributions to the health of the post.

The building of trading and military posts in what is now southeastern Wyoming became inevitable when the expansionist forces of 19th-century America intersected the stark realities of western geography.

Consider the nature of the land. Once a westbound traveler had gone beyond the central part of present-day Nebraska, he encountered an increasingly dry and windy climate. Whether he was a beaver trapper seeking the rivers on the far slope of the Continental Divide, a farmer dreaming of fat lands in Oregon, or a freighter hauling mining machinery to the goldfields of Montana, his progress was limited by the capabilities of his animals. Many wagon trains averaged little better than 15 miles a day. And in that vast arid region they had to find, on every one of those days, dependable sources of grass and water. If they did not, their quests collapsed.

Fortunately, competitive beaver hunters discovered in 1824-25 that the North Platte River and its high tributary, Sweetwater Creek—delicious name in a parched land!—took them all the way through the barrens to the easiest pass in the Great Divide. Other precursors of spreading America soon followed. Traders in buffalo hides came first and then, during the late 1830s, missionaries and their wives bound for the Pacific Northwest. In 1840 the first avowed Oregon settler, Joel Walker and his family, passed through, followed in 1847 by advance contingents of Mormons seeking, in Utah, freedom from persecution. Two years later came a flood of argonauts, wild-eyed for California. Add to those travelers an incidental muster of Pony Express riders, stagecoach drivers, government exploring parties, and dusty lines of soldiers. Add, too, later gold seekers who used part of the trail on their way to Montana during the 1860s and others who crossed it during the 1870s on their way to join the Black Hills gold madness in South Dakota. The total then reaches . . . no one really knows. Surely, though, a quarter of a million souls is well within the bounds of probability.

Not all of that multitude were able to cope with the exigencies of western travel. By the time they had crossed the High Plains, thousands needed fresh draft animals, repairs, supplies, travel hints, and just plain reassurance. As in the case of the Platte River, luck smoothed their way. By the time the immigra-



The oldest surviving building at the fort, Old Bedlam was constructed in 1849. It housed officers and the post headquarters. Altered many times over the years, it is now restored to the 1852-68 period.



The poolroom behind the sutler's store claimed some of the limited free time of enlisted men.

tion was in full swing, Fort Laramie's hide-trading predecessors and their rival posts were already established beside the trail.

True, the posts had not been built to cater to travelers but were the result of a shift in mountain economics. By 1834, returns from beaver fur were dwindling while the gain from buffalo hides was rising—and this time Indians, not whites, were the principal producers of the pelts. Whites obtained them from the Indians by means of barter.

Trade necessitated a central store where the manufactured goods the Indians craved and the hides that were collected for the eastern market could be stored until they were passed on to their ultimate destinations. A store located where? Again geography was the determining factor. Practicality demanded that the post be located close to the already established trail so that freighting would be relatively easy. (There was some hope, too, never fully realized, that when the North Platte rose with snowmelt in the spring, hides could be floated down it in shallow-draft rowboats.) The fort should also be close to the mountains so that it could draw in the trade of the beaver hunters who were still at work beside the high, cold streams. Most important, however, was the need to place the store within convenient reach of the nomadic Sioux, Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho Indians who pursued, killed, and skinned the myriad buffalo that grazed the short, curly grass of the dry plains.

Symbolically enough, the site chosen for the post—it was a typical, adobe-walled square with heavy gates, an interior horse corral, and towers for defense at opposite corners of the enclosure—stood in an area of geographic change, where the High Plains give way to the Rockies. The nearby Platte is murky with suspended sediments of the soft, easily eroded marls and clays typical of the Plains country. By contrast, the smaller Laramie, beside which the fort sat, is a bright mountain stream. There were other changes as well. During the pioneering period the valley east of the river junction was almost devoid of trees and sagebrush. Westward, however, knotted sagebrush was thick and the rising slopes were so dark with juniper and pine that for a long time they were called the Black Hills. (Today they are known as the Laramie Mountains, and the term Black Hills

is limited to a range in western South Dakota.) Most significant, it was just before reaching the post that the dust-reddened eyes of the migrants caught their first glimpse of the biggest mountain most of the travelers had ever seen, Laramie Peak, its blue hulk rising more than 10,000 feet above sea level.

There were social transitions, too, especially for the Indians. The settlement of the Oregon dispute between the United States and Great Britain, the acquisition of the Southwest, including Utah, Nevada, and California, from Mexico, and then James Marshall's electrifying discovery of gold on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada swelled the stream of travelers through the red men's country to a torrent. Streamside cottonwoods were cut down, grass disappeared from favorite camping sites, thousands of buffalo were slaughtered and the rest of the herds were frightened from their usual ranges.

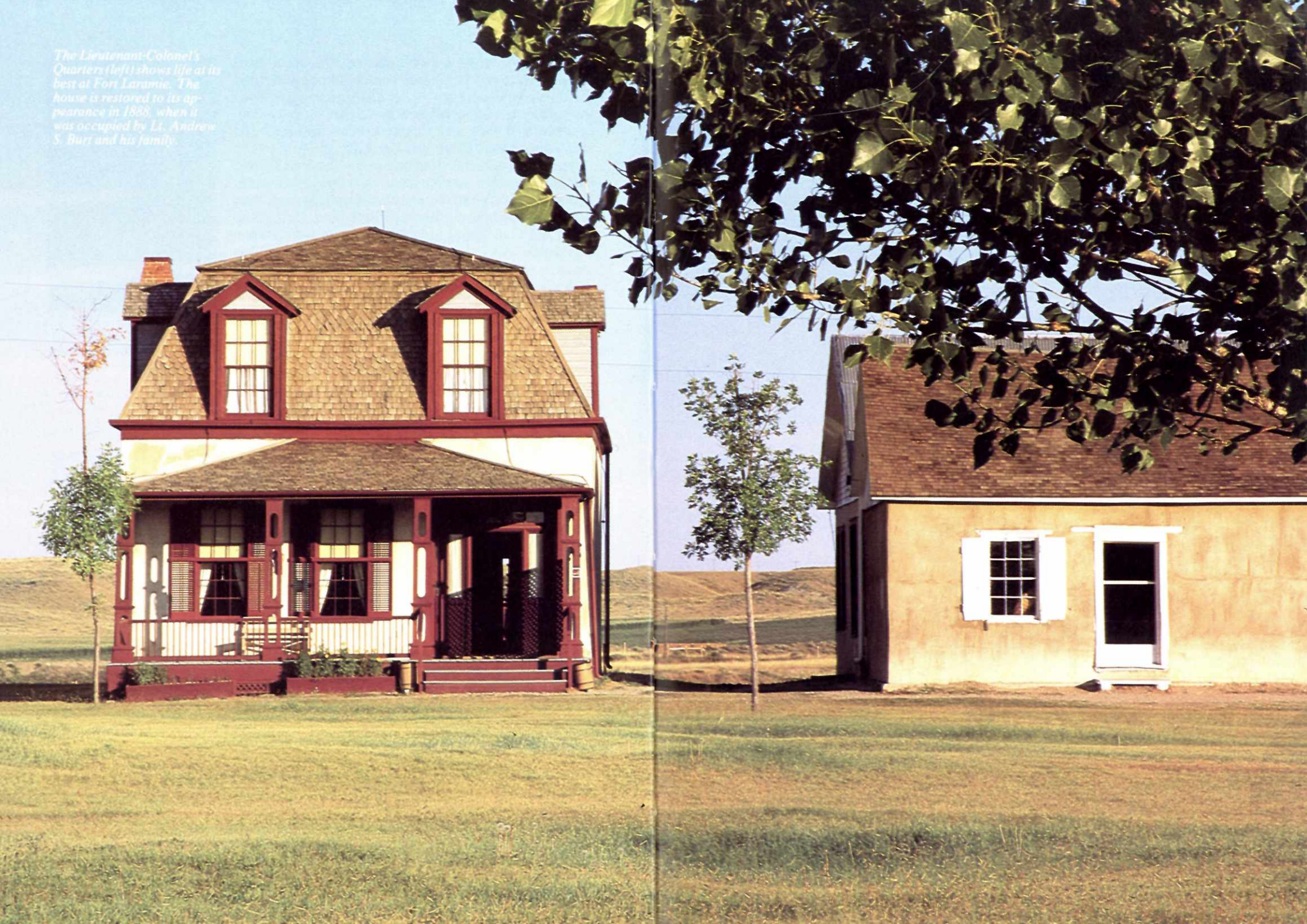
To protect the migrants from the increasingly resistant Sioux and Cheyennes, the army spotted a few posts beside the long trail. Because of the geographic value of the site near the confluence of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers—it commanded not only the east-west route but also trails leading south beside the Front Range of the Rockies, north into Sioux country around the Black Hills, and northwest into Montana—the War Department purchased the adobe building from its civilian owners. The buyers then let the original structure crumble slowly away while they built a military complex of mixed architecture around a big central parade ground.

Building and rebuilding went on for the next 40 years. Even so, military Fort Laramie never resembled the forts of popular imagination. Structures were widely separated one from another. There were no moats, walls, or watch towers. The Indians were well aware of it, nevertheless. When periodic clashes erupted, Fort Laramie was the staging point from which troops were sent into the Indians' last strongholds, and after the fighting ceased, sometimes only temporarily, Fort Laramie was often the spot where peace talks were held.

It is one of the ironies of our history that this post, which so long aided travel to the west, was in the end bypassed by the civilization it had helped establish. After the Indians had been subdued, it was aban-



The post surgeon had the means to furnish his quarters with up-to-date Victorian pieces. His house is refurnished to the 1880-82 period.



The Lieutenant-Colonel's Quarters (left) shows life at its best at Fort Laramie. The house is restored to its appearance in 1888, when it was occupied by Lt. Andrew S. Burt and his family.

doned to homesteaders. No town, no industrial conglomeration occupied the site. Thus the restoration of part of the military fort in an unspoiled setting was relatively easy.

See for yourself. Stand on the tawny slope where the present-day road to the fort starts its drop into the valley. Breathe deep—of air so dry and clear it seems to crackle, and, as you do it, let your imagination recreate the fierce heat, the wild gales and refreshing thunderstorms of summer, the crystal loveliness of October, the biting cold of January. Perhaps you will hear then, ever so faintly, the far-off chanting of a column of Indians, bedecked in finery, splashing across the river with their laden packhorses, or perhaps the rippling note of a bugle as blue-clad soldiers wheel through their drills on the parade ground below.

It is to bring back, as nearly as can be, the aura of that vitality as it existed here for more than half a century that buildings and artifacts have been restored, the pagentry of daily life is enacted in summer, and prose and pictures have been bound into volumes like this one. For it is by knowing where we have been as a nation that we are better able to understand ourselves today.

The cavalry barracks housed two 60-man companies of troops. Sleeping quarters were on the second floor, the mess room, kitchen, wash room, day room, and First Sergeant's room were on the first floor. Built in 1874, the barracks have been restored on the exterior.





Indian Trading Post

Preceding page *The artist Alfred Jacob Miller, traveling with an exploring party, painted this view of the first fort in 1837. Named Fort William, it was a log stockade, with high walls and strategically placed blockhouses. This painting and the interior view on pp. 22-23 are the only known pictures of the first fort on this site.*

The Founding

On the evening of May 30, 1834, a double file of 35 mountain men splashed with their laden pack animals across the Laramie River a little above its junction with the North Platte. On the far bank of the sparkling stream, William Sublette, the buckskin-clad captain at the head of the column raised his hand. Here. This was the place—"Laremai's point," as it was called in the trading license that had been issued to him earlier in the year by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis.

Dismounting, the men unpacked the tired animals and, as they had done nearly every evening for the past 26 nights, lined up boxes, bales, and saddles to form a low barricade around three sides of a defensive square. The Laramie River formed the fourth side. While the weary animals grazed before being picketed for the night inside the square, where they would be safe from Indians, the camptenders made small fires of cottonwood branches and sun-dried buffalo dung. Soon buffalo steaks were roasting over the coals.

William Sublette must have surveyed the scene with satisfaction. He was at the prime of a hard, active life—34 years old, 6 feet 2 inches tall, and sandy-haired, with alert blue eyes on either side of a strong, slightly hooked nose. Because of a scar on the left side of his chin, Indians sometimes called him Cut Face. For 10 years he had been moving back and forth along this trail that led from the Missouri River to the Continental Divide and beyond. Afoot. On horseback. Once with wagons. He had almost died beside the trace several times, from starvation, thirst, freezing, Indian attack. His errand now was to drop off enough men at Laremai's Point to build a trading post. Meanwhile he would ride on across South Pass with the remainder to attend the annual rendezvous of mountain trappers, scheduled to be held that summer on Ham's Fork of the Green River. There he would put the finishing touches on a bold plan which, if all went well, would make his company, Sublette & Campbell, kingpin of the beaver fur and buffalo robe trade of the central Rocky Mountains and of the high plains that border the mountains on the east.

The fort was part of that plan. To manage it, Sublette had hired a man named Edwin Patton. A

native of Alabama, Patton had learned the Indian trade as a clerk in one of the Missouri River posts of the American Fur Company, dominant firm of the western hide trade. Though capable, Patton knew nothing of the mountains, and Sublette wanted to orient him to this new region for which he would be responsible. So it is not hard to imagine Bill kneeling in the flickering firelight and with a twig drawing a rough map on a smooth piece of earth.

The first line came in from the east, from Independence, Missouri, in 1834 the westernmost settlement in the United States. The trail represented by the wavering line struck the Platte River at about where Grand Island, Nebraska, now stands. After crossing the South Fork of the Platte, which dips down into present-day Colorado, it continued west along the North Fork to the spot where the men were now camped, almost 700 miles from Independence. *Platte,* as Patton already knew, meant "shallow" in French—a braided river of intertwining channels that at times of high water formed a kind of moving lake a mile wide and, plainsmen joked, a foot deep, too muddy to drink, too thin to plow.

The next line Sublette drew represented the stream they had just crossed. Cold and clear, it rose far to the south behind the high front range of the Rockies and had been named for a French Canadian, Jacques La Ramee or Loremy or Laremais or Laramie—no one remembered how the name was spelled. For that matter, no one remembered much about the man himself, except that he had been killed somewhere beside the stream by Arapaho Indians in 1821.

Amazing how the name had clung. First to the river. Then to the huge, round-topped summit, Laramie Peak, that dominated a rumple of hills west and southwest of the fort site—called Black Hills in those days because of their dark covering of scraggly junipers and pines. Inasmuch as there was another set of Black Hills farther north, confusion sometimes arose.

Next, we can imagine, Bill Sublette drew a crosshatch of lines to represent the border between the plains and the mountains. Beginning near what is now the southern boundary of Montana, the crosshatching slanted southeast to the site of the fort and then bent south through future Cheyenne and along the Front Range of the Rockies as far as the

Arkansas River. Except for the Black Hills of South Dakota, the land that spread for 250 miles east of that border (and some valleys and basins west of it as well) was short-grass country—buffalo country.

Patton's experiences on the Missouri River had taught him that buffalo robes were becoming an important item of the Indian trade. More and more people in the East and especially in the Ohio Valley were using the shaggy hides as laprobes in sleighs and carriages and as throw rugs in front of their fireplaces. Prices were rising. White men, however, would not turn their hands to the hard work of preparing skins. Indians were the producers, and Sublette's fort was cannily located within reach of the best hunting tribes of the plains, the Teton Sioux and the Cheyennes. As soon as work on the fort was well underway, runners would be sent out to contact the principal chiefs and invite them to look the fort over. Once friendship had been established, Patton's trade in buffalo robes should be profitable indeed.

Other incidentals would add to the total. First was the trapper traffic moving both ways along the Platte between Missouri and the west side of the Continental Divide. The distance from Independence past the Laramie and on over South Pass to the Green River, hub of the far western trade, was upwards of 1,000 miles. A hard, dreary road. Travelers would welcome a place where, at any time of the year, they could pick up refreshments, shoe lame horses, replace damaged equipment, leave messages.

Nor—and again it is not hard to imagine Sublette's blue eyes thoughtfully reading the future in the firelight—was the traffic as they knew it then likely to be the whole story. The fort might become a relay station. Bringing goods as far as Laramie by wagon before switching to pack animals would save loading and unloading every morning. In fact, wagons could continue beyond the Laramie. In 1830 Sublette himself had taken 10 big vehicles and two small dearborn coaches almost as far as South Pass before cutting north to the rendezvous, held that year on the headwaters of the Wind River, east of the Divide. Two years later an army officer turned trader, Benjamin Louis Eulalie de Bonneville, had taken 20 wagons all the way to the Green. River fords on the plains had proved treacherous, however, and the pull around the Laramie Mountains was

a real shaker for expensive vehicles. So wagons had not caught on yet. But as people experimented—knocked the rough edges off the worst of the trail and figured out ways of ferrying the streams—well, it was a thing to keep in mind. Meanwhile it wouldn't hurt to keep on hand a small supply of trail goods for the traffic that already existed.

Protection was another consideration. If Sublette did not preempt this strategic location at the river junction, some other trader would. Once established, the newcomer might feel strong enough to carry merchandise on to the annual summer rendezvous to dicker for beaver with the trappers assembled there. But that was the trade Sublette intended to monopolize for his own company, Sublette & Campbell.

During the winter Sublette & Campbell had come to terms with its most formidable opponent, John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company. A fair trade: Sublette & Campbell would abandon the posts it was building along the Missouri River if in return Astor would promise not to send supplies into the mountains. Astor had agreed. This pact had left Sublette & Campbell the only major supplier for the mountain trade—until suddenly its chief customer, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, had betrayed them. On being offered lower prices by a newcomer from Boston, Nathaniel Wyeth—Wyeth had been in the mountains only two years—the trapping company had secretly signed a contract with him for their 1834 consignment of merchandise.

Just thinking of what seemed to him like a double-cross made William Sublette furious. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company would not even have existed without him. In 1830 the trapping company of Smith, Jackson & Sublette, in which Bill had been a partner, had sold its business, on credit, to five old friends—Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jim Bridger, Milton Sublette, who was Bill's brother, Henry Fraeb, and Jean Baptiste Gervais. This quintet, doing business as the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, had never paid off the original debt, and time and circumstances had brought all of their notes into Sublette's hands. Naturally he had supposed that they would feel obliged—his own brother!—to keep on buying their supplies from him. With the American Fur Company out of the way, the new firm of Sublette & Campbell would then have been in a position to

Next page *Along with his paintings, Miller left a vivid description of the fort: "The interior is possibly 150 feet square, a range of houses built against the palisades entirely surround it, each apartment having a door and window overlooking the interior court. Tribes of Indians encamp here 3 or 4 times a year, bringing with them peltries to be traded or exchanged for dry-goods, tobacco, vermillion, brass, and diluted alcohol."*



dominate the trade. Instead, Rocky Mountain Fur had switched to Wyeth, with Milton Sublette leading the break!

Admittedly Wyeth had much to offer. He planned to establish a base camp near the mouth of the Columbia River and freight supplies there by ship from Boston. The route from the Columbia to the rendezvous was far shorter and hence cheaper than the route from St. Louis to the rendezvous. So Wyeth thought that with that advantage helping him *he* would control the mountain trade. Dog eat dog—the fur commerce had always been filled with ruthless competitors.

Before William Sublette had realized what was afoot, brother Milton and Wyeth had reached the stage of putting their caravan together. Cocky about their lead, they had even granted permission for three green missionaries, Jason and Daniel Lee and Cyrus Shepherd, and two natural scientists, John Townsend and Thomas Nuttall, to go to the northwest with them. Bill was still frantically assembling his own men when the opposition hit the trail, Milton riding in a small cart because of a diseased leg bone, aftermath of an old arrow wound. In fact, the pain grew so bad that after a few days he had to turn back to St. Louis for treatment.

So Wyeth was in charge of the caravan alone. He was a good man, but this supply game was tougher than he realized. By pushing hard, Bill Sublette's caravan took the lead 12 days out of Independence and now was two days ahead. The gap gave Bill time to oversee in person the launching of the new fort beside the Laramie before hurrying on to the rendezvous, where he would soon teach his old friends a few hard truths about indebtedness.

The Christening

The next morning, May 31, Sublette and Edwin Patton, accompanied by an inexperienced easterner William Anderson, who was traveling with the caravan for his health, rode about a mile and a half up the west bank of the winding Laramie River, looking for a suitable building site close to good drinking water but out of reach of floods. Modern archaeologists have not been able to find the spot they chose, but it probably stood somewhere near the confluence of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers.

There was not much discussion about design. Almost all Indian trading posts were rectangular, with elevated blockhouses protruding at opposite corners so that defenders inside the bulwarks could sweep both adjoining walls with bullets in case of attack. The stockade of the new fort was to follow that pattern and be built of cottonwood logs hewn square with adzes and then set upright, side by side, in a trench about three feet deep. The tops would reach about 15 feet above the ground.

The big main gate was probably designed to face downriver toward the main North Platte trail. Another blockhouse would stand above the opening and protrude so far that its outer edge would have to be supported by a pair of wooden pillars. Inside the blockhouse was space for a small piece of artillery whose roar would be as effective as its cannonballs in deterring Indian threats.

Travelers who described the fort after it was built do not agree about its size. An artist, Albert Jacob Miller, who painted pictures of the place in 1837, says that the interior courtyard was 150 feet square. Two years later a St. Louis physician, Dr. F. A. Wislizenus, who took a sightseeing tour of the West with a fur caravan, shrank the fort's outside dimensions to 100 feet by 80 feet. In 1837, Myra Eells, member of another missionary party bound for the Northwest, stated that the post's stockade "compares very well with the walls of the Connecticut state prison," a remark probably meant to convey an impression of size rather than of grimness.

Inside, wrote Wislizenus, "little buildings with flat roofs are plastered all around the walls like swallows' nests." These nests served as dwellings, shops, and storehouses for goods and buffalo robes. The roofs and the blockhouse above the main gate could be reached by an outer staircase rising from the central courtyard. If an attack ever occurred, defenders could kneel behind the stockade, whose top rose three feet above the roofs, and shoot down at the enemy. Much more frequently, however, the roofs would furnish a summer promenade where the fort's staff could take the air on pleasant evenings.

Another feature common to most trading posts was a tunnel-like passageway that led from the outer gate between the walls of two of the interior buildings into the courtyard. A second gate allowed the

courtyard end of the passageway to be shut off from the square. It was thus possible to keep Indians out of the courtyard, yet still trade with small numbers of them through windows set in the "tunnel" walls. Presumably Sublette and Patton included such windows in their plans.

Modern visitors probably would have found posts like the one Sublette envisioned disagreeable in the extreme. Miller's painting indicates that each dwelling room contained one low doorway and one small, glassless window. Light and ventilation could not have been good. In addition, part of the courtyard was used each night as a protective corral for the horse herd, and it is unlikely that the manure was shoveled out until it became unbearable. Mangy dogs roamed at will; garbage disposal was haphazard; and no more water was available for any purpose than the occupants were willing to carry up from the river. Buffalo hides and beaver pelts stank; flies swarmed. It is significant, perhaps, that there is no record that any of the trail-weary missionary wives who passed by the fort each summer during the latter half of the 1830s was ever offered shelter for the night inside the walls. They camped outside, and only a few of them, it seems, ventured through the gateway to see what lay within.

After Sublette and Patton had selected a location for the post, workers from the caravan felled and trimmed a cottonwood tree and used horses for dragging the log to the designated spot. In a diary he was keeping at the time, William Anderson, the healthseeker who had joined the party at Independence, wrote laconically, "The fort on Laramy's Fork is called f. William in honour of its founder." But in a narrative written many years later he gave a fuller account. He had brought west with him, he declares, a bottle of champagne. At last a fitting event for its use had arisen—christening the fort. But under what name? "He [Sublette] proposed to call it Fort Anderson, I insisted on baptising it Fort Sublette." The impasse was solved by using the Christian name the two men shared—Fort William.

Maybe. But no one in the mountains ever connected the fort with William Anderson. Like a similar Sublette & Campbell post on the Missouri that had been abandoned following the trade agreement with the Western Department of the American

Fur Company, this Fort William was deemed to have been named for Bill Sublette alone. But since it is pleasant to think that the naming was honored with champagne, let us remember that part of Anderson's story and conjure up another picture: white foam, slightly warm, fizzing into three tin cups under the windswept skies of what eventually became southeastern Wyoming.

There was little time to waste on celebrations, however. Wyeth was coming up fast. And so early the next morning, June 1, 1834, after leaving a dozen men and bundles of necessary supplies behind, William Sublette pushed on west with the others and with the baggage train to complete his grand scheme.

Mountain Merry-Go-Round

When Sublette's supply caravan reached the fur-trappers' rendezvous on Ham's Fork of the Green River, only three of the owners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company were present. Milton Sublette was in St. Louis, seeking a cure for his diseased leg. (The effort proved fruitless; the limb was amputated on February 4, 1835, and replaced with one made of cork. Hobbled thus, he rode his cart west in 1836, and the following April 1837 died at the fort.) Another partner, James Bridger, had not yet come in with his brigade from a spring hunt in the Colorado mountains. This left Thomas Fitzpatrick, Henry Fraeb, and Jean Baptiste Gervais to deal with Bill Sublette. Short of beaver—the mountains had been overrun with competitors the previous winter—they were in no position to outface him. Moreover, couriers just arrived from Bridger said that his catch had been no better.

Sublette produced his notes of indebtedness, and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company passed out of existence. He then replaced it, before Wyeth could arrive, with an organization called Fitzpatrick, [Milton] Sublette & Bridger, and forced the group to accept the merchandise he had brought in from St. Louis. Inasmuch as only Fitzpatrick was on hand to talk for the new partners, the arrangement quite probably had no legal standing. But when Fraeb and Gervais objected, they were paid in horses, traps, and merchandise for such equity as they possessed in the defunct Rocky Mountain Fur Company and sent packing. Sublette was calling every turn now, and



Jim Bridger, explorer, trapper, fur trader, guide, and storyteller, was one of the greatest western frontiersmen. His adventures spanned the era of discovery, conquest, and settlement.

when Bridger at last appeared, he accepted what had been done by signing his "X"—Jim could neither read nor write—to the documents his old friend thrust under his nose.

Thinking that the mountain trade was now safely in his pocket, Sublette hired several trappers to ride to the Laramie and complete Fort William. He then packed up the few beaver his victims were able to give him, took new notes for the balance of their debt, and started east. He had won. But as he eyed the small size of his packs and contemplated the future, he must have wondered whether the victory would prove worth the effort.

Back on the Green, meanwhile, Fitzpatrick and Bridger found that they had fellow sufferers. This was the firm of Fontenelle, Drips & Company, which until then had been backed by and received its supplies from the Western Department of the American Fur Company. When Astor surrendered the mountain trade to Sublette & Campbell in return for a free hand on the Missouri, he of necessity had abandoned Fontenelle, Drips & Co. as well. The unhappy owners, Lucien Fontenelle and Andrew Drips, blamed Sublette as much as they did Astor for their misfortune.

They were old hands and long-time associates in the fur trade. Drips, 44, was 10 years the elder and of Scottish descent. Fontenelle came from an old French New Orleans family. He was a hard drinker and very fat, but a fine trader; reputedly he could speak 15 Indian dialects. Both men had Indian wives; Drips would soon be living with two simultaneously.

Following Sublette's departure from the rendezvous, the people he had manipulated for his own ends got together. The result was the combination of Fitzpatrick, Sublette, & Bridger with Fontenelle, Drips & Co. to form a new firm of considerable potential muscle, if the beaver trade held up. Its name: Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick & Company.

Because of the Western Department's agreement not to compete with Sublette & Campbell in the mountains, the new organization would have to deal with some other supply house—and they were angrily determined that it would not be Sublette & Campbell. But who? Fontenelle and Fitzpatrick were delegated to go to Missouri and see what arrangements they could make. William Anderson, who had

not returned east with Sublette, accompanied them on a fast ride down the Platte.

On August 20 they reached the fort beside the Laramie River. Thanks to the workers Sublette had brought from the rendezvous and to others that Andrew Sublette, another of Bill's brothers, had led overland from abandoned Fort William on the Missouri, it had gone up in jig time. "Now," wrote Anderson in his diary, "there is enclosed one hundred feet, which gives protection to men and animals. . . ." Patton, he added on departure, "treated us very kindly, hospitable. I have sung and bid 'adieu, adieu, to the mountain's brow.' "

In view of Fontenelle's fondness for the bottle, one can assume he sang, too, under the charm of Patton's hospitality, but not so lustily that he failed to notice the fort's advantages. When fall came, the three dozen or so men he saw putting the finishing touches of the construction would be free to spread out through the neighboring mountains on trapping expeditions. Moreover, as he wrote Pierre Chouteau, Jr., erstwhile manager of Astor's Western Department, this new Fort William might become "a central place for the Sioux and *Cheyenne* trade. He [William Sublette] has now men running after these Indians to bring them to the River Platte. . . . The situation may turn out to be an advantageous one for the trade."

The Pierre Chouteau to whom Fontenelle imparted this information was now the ruling figure of the western fur trade, for his firm, Pratte, Chouteau & Company, had just purchased the American Fur Company's Western Department from the aging Astor. Moreover, the senior partner, Bernard Pratte, was becoming involved in politics, and Pierre Chouteau, Jr., ran the business to suit himself. In fact, by 1838 he would own it all under the name Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Co. But to the men in the mountains, the firm would always be known as the American Fur Company, a testimonial to John Jacob Astor's enduring impact on the fur trade.

Chouteau instantly grasped the implications of what Fontenelle said about a trading post near the junction of the North Platte and Laramie rivers. Whatever robes the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians sold at Fort William would be lost to his posts on the Missouri River.

To forestall the unwelcome development he decided to reclaim the mountain trade that Astor had relinquished to Sublette & Campbell. His firm would become supply agents for the new trapping company of Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Company. To make its control complete, Chouteau offered to lend the angry new partners money enough to buy Fort William.

Surprisingly, Sublette and Campbell agreed to sell. The amalgamation of the remnants of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company with Fontenelle and Drips meant that their trappers would encounter stronger competition in the mountains than they had anticipated. And why struggle? The beaver trade, as Bill Sublette had learned following his return to St. Louis, was falling apart. Prices had been too high for too long. Hat manufacturers, who were the principal users of beaver fur in the making of top hats, had introduced cheaper substitutes. One of the replacement materials, silk, had caught on with fashion leaders. As a result, felt prices were declining sharply. Low prices, small volume . . . the outlook for beaver was definitely not heartening.

Nor did dealing in buffalo pelts alone appeal to Sublette. Although Fort William might absorb much of the Sioux and Cheyenne trade, Chouteau would dominate the rest—that of the eastern bands of Sioux, plus the Crows, Arikaras, Blackfeet, Assiniboins, and Mandans of the Northern Plains. The most that Sublette and Campbell could do along the Platte was annoy the larger organization. Forget it. Sublette's bold scheme had come too late.

Early in 1835, accordingly, the partners sold Fort William and their trading rights in the mountains to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick & Company. The transaction marked a full turn in the ever-unstable merry-go-round of the mountain trade. Although Astor had yielded the supply business in the mountains to Sublette & Campbell, his successor, Pratte, Chouteau & Co. had taken it back. And the trappers whom Sublette had expected to keep under his thumb were now masters of his fort on the Laramie. Proudly they renamed it Fort Lucien, after Fontenelle, who was to replace Patton as manager.

Still, Sublette and Campbell could hardly complain. They found a new field as wholesale merchants in St. Louis and waxed wealthy. Meanwhile

This map, ascribed to the Catholic missionary Father Pierre de Smet, locates the territory of the principal tribes of the High Plains. The map is dated 1851. Fort Laramie stands about dead center, at the junction of the Sioux, Crow, and Arapahoe lands.


MINNESOTA
IOWA
SIOUX DE DAKOTA
UTZH
NEW MEXICO
CALIFORNIA
TEXAS
MISSOURI
251

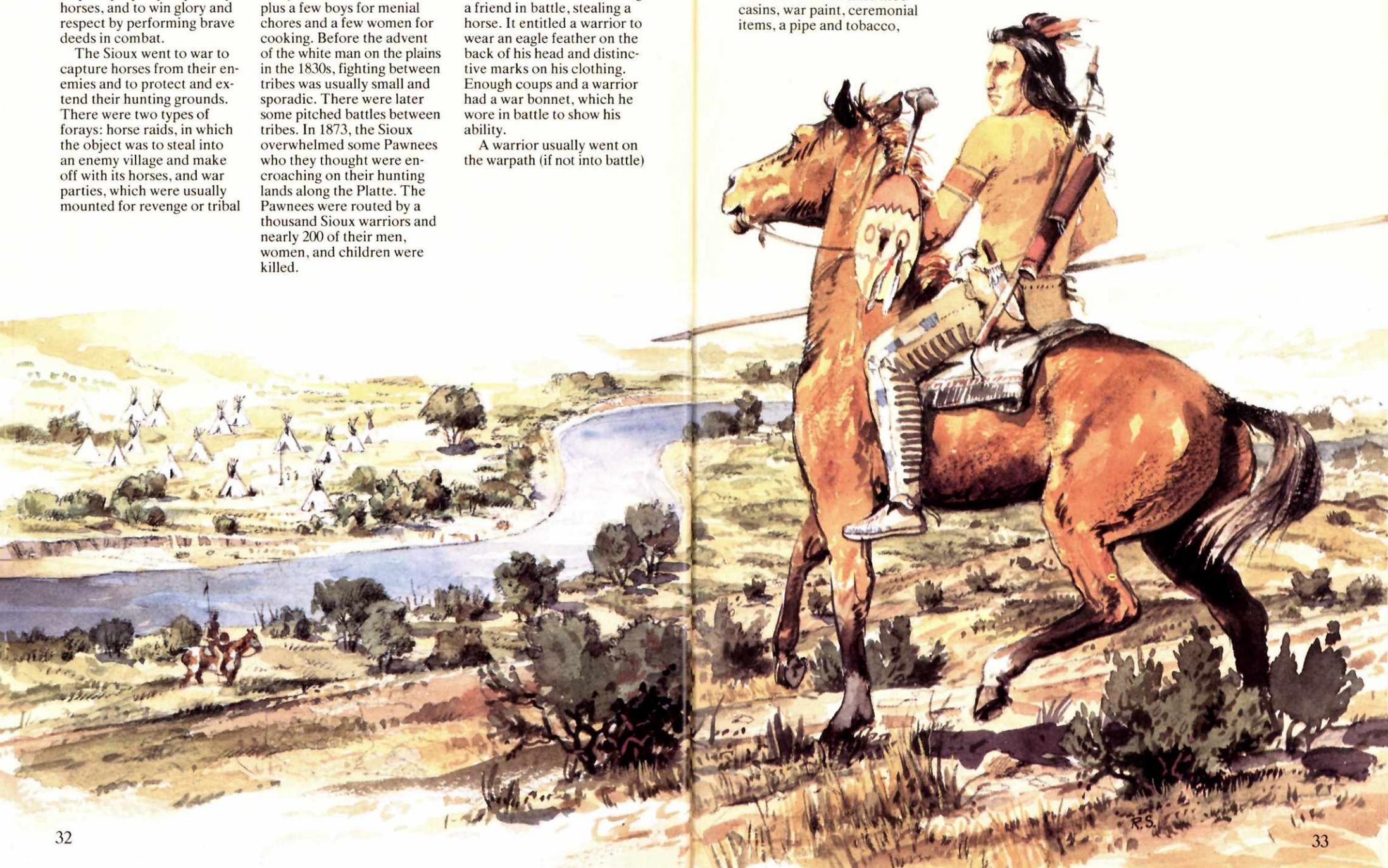
The Sioux Warrior

For Sioux males, war was both sport and ceremony, part of the very fabric of tribal life. It was a way to acquire property, especially horses, and to win glory and respect by performing brave deeds in combat.

The Sioux went to war to capture horses from their enemies and to protect and extend their hunting grounds. There were two types of forays: horse raids, in which the object was to steal into an enemy village and make off with its horses, and war parties, which were usually mounted for revenge or tribal defense. Horse raids might number from a few warriors to 15 or 20. War parties were usually larger, perhaps as many as a hundred warriors plus a few boys for menial chores and a few women for cooking. Before the advent of the white man on the plains in the 1830s, fighting between tribes was usually small and sporadic. There were later some pitched battles between tribes. In 1873, the Sioux overwhelmed some Pawnees who they thought were encroaching on their hunting lands along the Platte. The Pawnees were routed by a thousand Sioux warriors and nearly 200 of their men, women, and children were killed.

A warrior won honor in combat by "counting coup." A coup was an act of daring: striking an enemy, victory in hand-to-hand combat, saving a friend in battle, stealing a horse. It entitled a warrior to wear an eagle feather on the back of his head and distinctive marks on his clothing. Enough coups and a warrior had a war bonnet, which he wore in battle to show his ability.

A warrior usually went on the warpath (if not into battle) with an impressive amount of gear: a bow and arrow, a knife, a shield, sometimes a lance, and a parfleche in which he carried extra moccasins, war paint, ceremonial items, a pipe and tobacco, war clothing (including a bonnet and coup feathers, if he had them), and jerky and pemmican.



the beaver trade flickered out as surely as Sublette had belatedly realized it would. In 1840 Andrew Drips led the last supply caravan to the Green River. After that trappers who clung to the only life they knew had to buy their supplies from ramshackle posts that appeared here and there in the hill-girt valleys. Or else, yearning for drink and a chance to talk about the good old days to the bored hide traders, they drifted down to the big posts at the edge of the plains, most especially Fort Lucien, née Fort William. What they saw bruised their pride. For the robe trade, smelly and unglamourous though it was, had moved inexorably to the front. They had become anachronisms, and the strenuous activities of the men who had replaced them would form the next colorful phase of the fort's history.

The Lure of the Buffalo

The runners whom William Sublette had sent onto the plains to inform the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians about the new trading post beside the Laramie worked efficiently. As Lucien Fontenelle's caravan plodded, in the summer of 1835, from Council Bluffs on the Missouri up the north bank of the Platte River to receive possession of the fort on the Laramie, it fell in with 2,000 tall, handsome, colorfully clad members of the Oglala band of the Sioux confederacy.

A problem of terminology arises here. Chippewa Indians had once called a tribe west of them by a word that sounded to French traders like "Naudewisioux," which means "snake," or "enemy." The French had shortened the insult to Sioux, and as Sioux it entered the English language. The Sioux's name for themselves, however, is Dakota, an "alliance of friends." This alliance consisted of seven groups, the largest and westernmost of which were the Teton Sioux. The Teton Sioux in turn were subdivided into seven more bands. The two that became most closely associated with the forts on the Laramie were the Oglalas and Brulés. The Oglala Sioux, who in the early 1830s ranged from the White River in South Dakota down to the Platte Valley, were the first to move farther west in response to the new trading opportunities beside the Laramie. The Brulés soon followed, and within a few years the Laramie fort was the economic center for about 7,000 of the Teton Sioux's estimated population of 18,000.

The pioneering Oglalas and Fontenelle's whites traveled together to the fort. On arrival each group in its own way showed its joy over the happy turn of events. The whites got roaring drunk. The Oglala men painted stripes on their legs, ribs, and faces, tied gay ribbons to their lances and muskets, donned shaggy costumes, picked up their strikingly decorated bullhide shields, and with a noisy dance paid homage to the great sustainer of their lives, the buffalo.

Two missionaries who had traveled this far with Fontenelle on their way to the Northwest in search of a site for their work watched the performance with downturned mouths. One was Dr. Marcus Whitman. The other was Samuel Parker, 56 years old and recently a teacher in a girl's academy in Ithaca, New York. Parker later vented his feelings about what he saw in a journal published after his return east: "a large number of young men, dressed with the skins of the neck and head of buffalos with their horns on, moved round in a dancing march. They shook their heads, imitated the low bellowing of the buffalo, wheeled, and jumped. . . . What will become of their immortal souls? Rational men imitating beasts . . . and enlightened white men encouraging it by giving them intoxicating spirits, as a reward for their good performance."

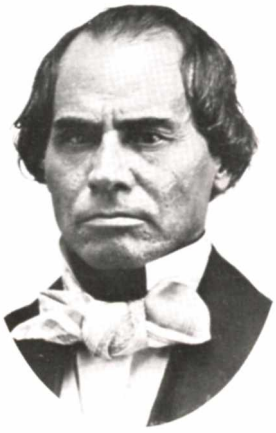
Unhappily, nothing in Parker's background let him understand what was happening. The Oglala were demonstrating the kind of magic they used, expressed through this dance, to lure buffalo close to their villages. The whites were giving them whiskey, which the Indians liked inordinately, to seal the new-found bond that would bring the hides of some of the buffalo the Oglala killed to the new fort beside the Laramie—a fort that was now taking on a medley of names: Fort William, Fort Lucien, and, rather more frequently, Fort Laramie.

It was the beginning of a long, intertwining history. Launched in joy over the prospect of mutual benefits, it ended nearly half a century later in hostility and despair. That being so, it is well to understand more of the Indians who justified Fort Laramie's existence than Samuel Parker, fresh from an eastern girls' school, was able to do.

The Sioux and Cheyennes were, relatively speaking, newcomers to the short-grass plains. Once the

Next page *The buffalo was the staple of life for the Plains Indians. It gave them food, clothing, shelter, and fuel, and for a few years the hide was an important item of barter. This party is preparing to butcher a bull. A hunter is cutting out the hump rib, the choicest part. The painting is by Alfred J. Miller.*





From his adobe fort on the Arkansas, William Bent and his partners controlled the fur trade on the Southern Plains. They enjoyed a reputation for fair dealing with the Indians.

two tribes had lived, as enemies, in the forest-and-lake country of what is now Minnesota, subsisting on wild rice, deer, beaver, and a haphazard growing of corn, squash, and pumpkins. As their population increased and the Chippewa began pressing harder on their hunting grounds from the northeast, the Cheyennes and part of the Sioux decided, independently of each other, to seek new homelands farther west.

During the closing decades of the 1600s, the Cheyennes first and after them the seven bands of the Teton Sioux reached and crossed that stretch of the Missouri River that bisects what is now South Dakota. The lure that pulled both groups west was the millions of buffalo that darkened the rolling plains between the Missouri and South Dakota's Black Hills.

Buffalo—or, more accurately, buffalo cows—provided almost everything they needed. Hides taken during summer when the hair was thin could be scraped clean and draped as a sort of tent roof over a small frame of poles. Winter hides with their thick hair left intact provided overcoats and blankets. Other skins were shaped into parfleches, a kind of suitcase in which possessions were stored. Strips of rawhide were braided into ropes. Meat could be eaten fresh or be sun-dried into jerky, which was either stored as it came from the drying racks or was pulverized and mixed with buffalo tallow and berries to form pemmican, one of the most nutritious foods ever devised. Sinew could be split into thread, bones shaped into tools and eating utensils, hooves boiled into glue, intestines cleaned and used for carrying water on dry marches.

The great drawback was hunting on foot, for as yet horses had not reached the central plains. Often the migrating buffalo herds traveled beyond reach. (Hence magic dances to bring them back.) And even when the animals grazed close by, they were risky to kill. Hunters sometimes covered themselves with wolf skins and, thus disguised, tried to creep close enough for an arrow shot. Or, if the position of a herd and the lie of the land were right (the combination was rare), the hunters, howling and waving blankets, stampeded the animals over a cliff high enough to kill some of them.

Those uncertain expedients ended in the early

years of the 1700s, when the Sioux and Cheyennes obtained horses and taught themselves phenomenal skills in riding. Stirring transformations in living patterns followed. Stealing horses from an enemy village or even just from an alien group like passing whites became one of a young man's paths to glory. Another path was war, or, as it looked to white eyes, virtuoso skirmishes between small numbers of mounted opponents. During such encounters the great feat was "counting coup"—that is, touching an enemy's body or horse without necessarily killing him.

War brought territorial aggrandizement. The mounted Sioux pushed the Arikaras and Mandans farther up the Missouri, invaded the upper waters of the Yellowstone River's southern tributaries, a range once claimed by Crow Indians, and drove the Pawnees south of the Platte in Nebraska. Those displaced tribes remained enemies. Not so the Cheyennes. When resistance failed, they and their friends, the Arapahoes, became allies of the Sioux, part of them settling in Wyoming north of the North Platte and part moving south past the South Platte to the Arkansas.

These shifts in population gave the Teton Sioux, and especially the southern and western branches, the Oglalas and Brulés, control of an enormous hunting territory. Simultaneously their horses enabled them to travel great distances in search of buffalo, then to race up on the quarry's right side and kill it with a dexterous lance thrust or an arrow shot with such power that it sometimes went entirely through the animal's body.

A ready supply of hides made possible the enlarging of tipis into commodious, conical rooms many feet high and 15 or more feet in diameter. Horses also increased a village's mobility. When the people wanted to move, down came the tipis. The heavy ends of the long poles that had supported each tipi's leather covering were tied to either side of a horse's pack saddle. The other ends dragged on the ground. A large basket woven of willow branches and used for transporting small children and a clutter of possessions was suspended between the middle sections of the dragging poles. Leather tipi covers were piled on top of the already burdened horses, or on separate pack animals, and the trek to a new village began. The wolfish dogs that had been the Indians'



Trappers usually wore distinctive clothing: buckskin of Indian make, often gaily decorated. The figure is by the immigrant artist Olaf Seltzer.

original beasts of burden were used to drag small travois loaded with light bundles.

Most of all, the surplus hides gave the Indians a desirable article for bartering with whites. The whites responded hungrily. In 1834 Bent's Fort took shape beside the Arkansas River, 400 miles south of Fort Laramie—no insuperable distance to the free-roving, horse-mounted Indians of the plains. Two years later, in 1836, an ex-army officer, Lancaster P. Lupton, built a fort on the South Platte, a little north of present Denver and only 200 miles from Fort Laramie. Both firms sent out runners to woo the Sioux and Cheyennes.

These developments, together with the continuing decline in beaver prices, doomed Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick & Co. Pierre Chouteau's American Fur Company (as it was called) did not want a shaky, semi-independent outfit in so critical an area; there was no telling what alliances they might make. So in 1836, Chouteau's firm purchased Fort Laramie and integrated its commerce with that of their forts on the upper Missouri and lower Yellowstone rivers. Still later, in 1838, Chouteau entered into an agreement with the proprietors of Bent's Fort. The American Fur Company would not trade south of the South Platte if the Bents would not trade north of that stream.

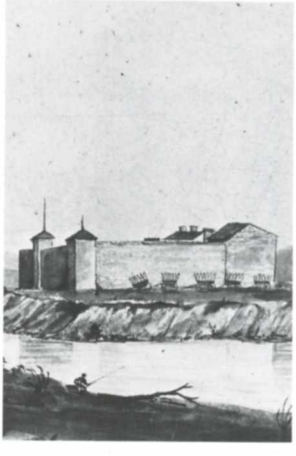
In effect Chouteau's tentacles now curved like a set of ice tongs around that part of the plains lying between the Upper Missouri and the Platte. Lancaster Lupton defied him, nevertheless. He clung to his post on the South Platte, apparently built another of which next to nothing is known near South Dakota's White River, and then topped the effrontery in 1841 by bringing a Spanish-speaking crew from New Mexico to the point of land formed by the junction of the North Platte and Laramie rivers. There he put up, in 1841-42, a rectangular post roughly 100 feet wide by 145 feet long. It was built not out of timber but of adobe clay puddled into bricks by the Mexican workers and then protected from weathering by a coat of whitewash. Its creator named it Fort Platte.

By that time Fort Laramie's soft cottonwood logs were rotting. Instead of trying to patch the decay, the American Fur Company decided to outdo Fort Platte by erecting, at a cost of $10,000 (at least $100,000 in today's terms) a whitewashed adobe fort of its own.

The site chosen was the top of a low bluff bordered south and east by the coiling Laramie. It was a little more than a mile upstream (south) from Fort Platte and a short distance from the original Fort Laramie. The company named the new structure Fort John after John Sarpy, an influential stockholder. Everyone else continued calling it Fort Laramie.

Fort John (Laramie) was somewhat larger than Fort Platte. Its walls, surmounted by pickets to make scaling difficult, stretched to approximately 121 feet by 167 feet. Each of the 18 rooms inside the stockade was equipped with one door and one window opening, as usual, onto the courtyard. Across the courtyard from the main gate was a two-story structure whose upstairs room housed the post's chief trader and his family. The usual horse corral occupied the eastern part of the plaza.

Rather than wait for customers to come to the posts—which of the competing forts would they choose?—the managers took to sending salesmen to the Indian villages. At the beginning of winter the traders chosen for the task packed up bundles of guns, powder, lead for bullets, knives, hatchets, copper cooking pots, calico that would be made into summer garments, ribbons, beads, mirrors, rings, vermillion, and the like. Depending on the terrain to be covered, the merchandise was loaded either into carts or onto mules. Traveling in groups of two or three and sometimes alone, the men then scattered out across the frozen prairies to the different villages. There they built temporary log cabins and invited the leading chiefs to a preview, an occasion enlivened by a free drink or two, free tobacco, and cups of heavily sweetened coffee. The rituals completed, trading began.



The adobe-walled second fort, called Fort John, was built by the American Fur Company in 1841.

Whenever rivalry was intense, alcohol was used to gain advantages. Hideous debauches followed, with wild sexual excesses, stabbings, gougings, even murders. Drunken customers were cheated unmercifully, and after the last robe had been stowed into the trader's cart, the Indians often had only headaches to show for months of hunting and laborious robe preparation.

Traders with a long-range interest in the business deplored the evil, but insisted that when fly-by-night competitors appeared, they had no choice but to fight fire with fire. Nor did the government help

effectively, even though trading spirits to Indians was prohibited by law. During the early 1840s prohibition agents bobbed up at the forts but never managed to locate any of the 10-gallon kegs—"hollow woods," the Indians called them—that everyone knew were hidden in profusion nearby.

Each April or early May the prairie traders trundled their winter receipts back to their home posts. A momentous decision then had to be made. How should the robes be taken to market?

The river's annual, roily spring rise provided a recurrent temptation to try locally built boats, each 40 feet or so long and capable of holding up to three tons of robes. The beginning of a run nearly always went well, but as the lower Platte spread out across its wide valley, the water grew shallow and the boats hung up in the maze of sandbars. Overboard the rowers went, wrestling and tugging. Sometimes they manhandled part of the fleet to the Missouri River; more often they did not. Stranded, they trudged to the closest fort, either on the Missouri or back to the Laramie, for horses and wagons with which to finish the journey. A compromise method, adopted in 1845, was to haul the robes by wagon from the Laramie northeast to Fort Pierre, South Dakota, on the Missouri. This added many miles to the overall journey to St. Louis, but was the quickest way to reach dependable water.

Superior resources enabled the American Fur Company to outlast its competitors. By 1845, Lancaster Lupton and his successors had sold out. Fort Platte was abandoned. Soon the company's only rivals were a few Spanish-speaking traders sheltered in hovels and supplied from Taos, New Mexico, with brown flour, hulled corn, which the Indians liked, mules, Navajo blankets, and a few barrels of a potent whiskey known as Taos Lightning.

Such competition was no great bother. Trade settled into standard patterns. On the average a year's harvest amounted to 1,000 to 1,100 packs—10,000 to 11,000 robes. It was not an exciting figure. Bent's Fort produced more than 50,000 robes a year. The American Fur Company's annual take from its several forts on the Missouri generally exceeded 100,000. But Fort Laramie's value lay in more than trade. Because of its strategic location it had played a major role in limiting the push of alcohol-carrying

competitors into the heart of the American Fur Company's best territory. In addition, it had generated, again because of its location, a supplementary source of revenue in meeting the needs, for a few weeks each summer, of the growing number of emigrants flowing westward in search of new homes beyond the divide.

The private companies that built these posts had no intention of displacing the Indians. Although their establishments were fortified to resist possible attacks by young braves eager for glory and loot, the main reason for the firms' being there was the gain that would accrue to whites and Indians alike from barter. By contrast, military Fort Laramie was designed to further white ambition without regard for what it might cost the Indians. As might be expected, the workers and soldiers who carried out these disparate functions led very different lives, even though the natural environment—isolation and aridity, extremes of heat and cold, the lack of trees, and the land's resistance to cultivation—remained unchanged during both regimes.

The most important class of men during the sway of the commercial enterprises was the hide trader. The fort manager, or *bourgeois* as he was called, received a higher salary for ordering merchandise, directing its distribution, analyzing prospects for his superiors, and hiring and firing workers. Clerks toted up the figures associated with prices, inventories, and wages. Mexican and French-Canadian roustabouts cut wood, hauled water, herded horses, built batteaux for use on the river, and disposed of trash. But the trader was the one who, by contacting the Indians with the company's offerings, made the place run. Socially he was something like a top sergeant in the army, for he occupied a place halfway between the executive officers—*bourgeois* and clerks—and the common laborers.

Summer and early fall were the trader's slack seasons. Most of that time he spent either hunting or loafing around the post with his Indian wife and halfbreed children. Occasionally he lived in a tipi outside the walls, but more often "home" was one of the small, dark rooms that lined the fort's interior courtyard. His bed consisted of a shaggy buffalo robe on the floor for mattress, another for covering. His two or three chairs were rigidly upright wooden

frames with seats of buffalo hide. A tin pail of water stood beside the door, and in one corner was a battered trunk or, more likely, an Indian parfleche of buffalo leather for holding clothing and other possessions. On the walls he hung such souvenirs as bows and arrows, tomahawks, and other Indian paraphernalia. A *bourgeois* like Lucien Fontenelle might exhibit a few conventional engravings, and some clerks owned a handful of books, but in general cultural resources were wanting.

The fort's laborers, women, and children ate in their rooms. Not so the rest of the staff. Their food was cooked in the post kitchen and served in the common messhall. There were two sittings. The first was for the *bourgeois,* the clerks, and important visitors. The second was for the traders.

Fare lacked variety. Nearly always there was meat—fresh or dried buffalo, venison, or imported salt beef. There was bread whenever flour was available and, surprisingly, fresh eggs and milk. The trading posts kept cows and chickens, but raised no garden produce. Early experiments showed that irrigation was necessary and troublesome. The workers disliked cultivating the plots, and the Indians, instinctively suspicious of the changes agriculture might bring to their land, often pulled up the plants before they matured.

A favorite idling place on hot days was the covered passageway, always cooled by a breeze, that led from the fort's front gate to its courtyard. Or else a man visited the tipis outside, where his wife's relatives, forerunners of the Laramie Loafers, hung around hoping for handouts and now and then trading a buffalo robe for necessities.

When company officials were in residence at the fort they wore ordinary frock coats and woolen trousers. The workmen, too, preferred wool when they could afford it, but often they had to use skin instead: "I had an Indian woman make a pair of leather pants for me, the kind that are worn here," wrote Frémont's mapmaker, Charles Preuss, during a pause at Laramie in September 1842.

For men in the field the most common article of clothing was a belted buckskin smock that hung almost to the wearer's knees. Beneath the smock he wore a breech clout and thigh-length leggings, their lower seams adorned with buckskin thongs. Mocca-

sins served in place of shoes. The garments could have been handsome. Indian women were able to tan buckskin so that it was almost as white and supple as paper, and they decorated smocks and moccasins with striking patterns of glass beads and dyed porcupine quills. Buckskin, however, could not be laundered, and the traders had a penchant for wiping their knives,after eating a meal or skinning an animal, on their smocks and leggings. Between treatment like that and normal soiling, a trader's garments did not stay white for long and were worn until they were shiny black, mostly from grease. Greasy, well-smoked skins, moreover, were considered more water repellant than new garments.

A trader carried his knife, pipe kit (a pouch containing a short-stemmed clay pipe, tobacco, flint and steel), powder horn, and, sometimes, an ammunition pouch. In winter he added a buffalo robe coat worn with the hair inside and a fur cap decorated Indian style with a buffalo horn or a feather or two. Traders, most of them of French descent, liked to imitate Indian customs and often tied ribbons to their guns and tinkling little bells to the accoutrements of their horses.

Hide swapping took place sometimes at the fort but more often inside the small, dark, odorous log cabin that the trader, after a hard trip across the plains from the post with a packtrain of goods, built near the Indians' winter village. Barter began when a woman, accompanied by her husband, brought in on her own back or piled atop a pony some of the robes she had prepared earlier in the year.

Haggling was intense, and only traders with a keen insight into native psychology were uniformly successful. The Indians did not produce a large surplus of marketable robes. Summer hunts for meat yielded scraggly, unsaleable hides. Of the better grade winter skins many were retained by the Indians for their own use. Even a family of several wives and female children rarely produced as many as 20 skins a year for barter.

First, the women stripped the hide from a freshly slain animal and stretched it on a frame made of poles. As soon as it was seasoned adequately, they pegged the skin hair side down to the earth. Clinging bits of flesh and fat were scraped away with a flint or steel blade fixed into a handle made of curved

elkhorn. The cleansed surface was abraded with a thorough pounding. That done, it was tanned by kneading into the roughened leather a moist mixture of buffalo brains, liver, grease from bone marrow, and pulverized soapweed. Finally a softening rope made of sinew was stretched between a handy tree and a picket stake. Exerting as much pressure as possible, the worker dragged the hide back and forth across the taut rope until the leather was pliant.

A husband could, if he chose, dictate what should be purchased during bartering—gunpowder, hatchets, tobacco, woolen blankets, liquor if it was available, and vermillion and mirrors for satisfying his vanity. As a practical matter, he also let his wife fill her needs—replacements for lost or broken cooking utensils, awls for perforating holes in leather during the sewing of tipi covers, calico, ornaments, a little coffee, sugar, and hulled corn.

Unless a hunter was buying an expensive item like a gun, which required about 20 robes, the offerings were traded one by one. The females agonized interminably over each purchase. They pointed, generally with their chins, toward what they wanted to see, and after the trader had moved the item from shelf to counter, they fingered it over and over, especially if the colors were bright.

Well they might. Except for a rare "silk robe," whose fine-spun hair shone like satin, a trader tried to pay no more than a dollar's worth of merchandise for each hide. In St. Louis that same robe would sell for $4, but profits were not exorbitant, because from that gross price the company had to deduct, in addition to the initial cost of the goods, the expenses of transportation, post maintenance, labor losses on the trail, gifts to the chiefs, and a salary of $200 a year, plus food, to the trader. Nor was it possible, except briefly in the case of novelties like whistles or squeaking toys, to increase profits by offering shoddy merchandise. The Indians demanded quality. They seldom bought more than they needed, although they might have pelts enough to pay for more. Theirs was not a consumer society, diligently though the traders worked at making it one.

The deals completed, the women and the trader exchanged a few puffs on his pipe. The robes were folded and pressed into bundles. Ten hides made a package that weighed from 90 to 100 pounds, de-

pending on the size of the skins. Each bundle was bound with rawhide thongs and carried in the spring by cart or pack animals to Fort Laramie. There they were sorted and beaten clean of dust and possible infestations of moth eggs. The trader's account was squared away in the fort's ledgers, and the robes were rebaled for their eastward journey by land caravan or batteau. One more trading season had come to an end.

Way Station

As earlier pages in this account have suggested, missionaries bound for the Northwest were the first travelers other than trappers and traders to move west along the Platte Valley toward the Oregon country. They need not have gone so far to start work. In 1834 William Sublette suggested to Methodist Jason Lee and his associates that Fort William would make a good station for spreading the Word among the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. But romance had touched the more distant heathen. Besides, Oregon's greenery, not these arid hills, held for easterners the charm of familiarity. Lee's party moved on, as did all later ones.

The first women travelers, wives of Marcus Whitman and Henry Spalding, passed the fort in 1836. Four more came in 1838, and others would follow during the next few years. The majority of these extraordinary women—many had married shortly before departure only because church boards would not send unwed females on such trips—had never before gathered buffalo dung for cooking meat still dripping blood, had never slept on the ground, ridden a horse, or seen an Indian.

For weeks they had felt as detached as sailors on an ocean; few landmarks existed on the plains to tell untrained eyes that the jolting wheels really were making progress. In that vastness Fort Laramie loomed as a welcome assurance that people of their kind had managed to anchor themselves to this desolate land.

Much has been made of the fact that many of the missionary wives and the women who followed them did their first laundry on the trail at Fort Laramie. This was not because of special provisions. There were none. One washed dirty garments and, presumably, also took baths down by the river, perhaps

using fire-blackened tubs that had been set up over a firepit by the fort's Indian housewives. Or else you rubbed the soapy clothing on rocks and let the stream do the rinsing.

Washday came because Fort Laramie brought a pause to the daily moving. The surcease also provided an opportunity to reassess one's situation, sell sorefooted animals and buy fresh ones, to replenish, at a dollar a pint, shrinking stocks of flour, and throw away possessions that had looked like dear heirlooms at home but would be dead weight in the mountains ahead.

In addition the pause let the missionaries practice their calling. If the layover came on a Sunday, one of the men preached to whatever whites and Indians gathered with them in the shade of a nearby grove of cottonwood trees. Indians pressed around curiously whatever the day. The churchmen then sought to explain their errands by gesturing toward Heaven and tapping on and reading from their Bibles—the last a great magic to the natives, who realized without fathoming the methods that whites were able to communicate with absent people by making little marks on sheets of paper. The missionaries also stood in front of their tents and sang hymns. The performances delighted the Indians, who pumped the singers' hands in appreciation—good show!—and thus gave the travelers a mistaken hope that their message was coming through.

Their impact reached out nevertheless. Where a missionary's wife could go, a farmer's family could also—and did, beginning in 1840 with Joel Walker, his wife, and their five children. Every year after that there were more, guided at first by mountain men left jobless by the drying up of the beaver trade.

In 1843 close to a thousand emigrants, counting children, paused at Fort Laramie and then rattled on, convinced by Marcus Whitman, who was returning to his mission with the train after an emergency trip east, that wagons could roll all the way to the Columbia. In 1852, under the stimulus of gold in California, free land in Oregon, and the Mormon migration to Utah, the number of wayfarers approached 60,000, the peak year, probably, of wagon travel along the Platte Valley. More than 12,000 vehicles—the exact count that apparently was kept at the fort has been lost—would have been needed

The beauty and simple life of Sioux girls appealed to Alfred J. Miller. They amused themselves, he said, by riding horses, swimming in the streams, and playing with their dogs. There was no worry about fashion. Nature gave them a bonnet of black glossy hair. Their dresses were tanned antelope hide, soft and flexible, and good in any season. Their life of freedom and happiness lasted until about 15, when a suitor, without a word to her, struck a bargain with her father.



for that many people. Still more clouds of alkali dust were stirred up by heaven knows how many head of draft animals, pack trains, and herds of cattle and sheep.

As long as Fort Laramie remained in private hands, as it did until the middle of 1849, its managers capitalized as fully as they could on this moving summertime market. Trains traveling on the north bank were encouraged to cross to the fort's side by a crude ferry operating just west of the Laramie's mouth—and by false reports that the road on the south side was much smoother and freer of Indians than that on the north. Another ferry bobbing back and forth across the Laramie during times of high water extracted tolls from migrants already moving up along the south bank trail. The fort's blacksmith and carpentry shops throve from renting space and tools to teamsters who needed to replace wagon tongues or refit iron tires to wheels shrinking in the dryness. Flour, dried meat, oddments of clothing, fresh draft oxen, horses, mules, and whiskey were generally available, if not at the fort itself, then at the camps of peddlers who came from as far away as Taos and Bent's Fort to cash in on this brief but annual market.

Unlike the missionaries, who had stayed close to their tents, the later emigrants overran the fort, prying curiously into every corner and seeking reassurance with their constant questions. Their wagon circles filled the valley. Because scores of Indian tipis were often scattered about as well, competition for grass grew so severe that many wayfarers had to camp miles from the post and use saddle horses to jog in and see what the excitement was about.

The vanished pageantry of our history: for an example, consider late June 1846. Historian Francis Parkman, who was seeking material about untamed Indians, stood on the west bank of the Laramie and watched a mobile village of Sioux swarm across. Mixed among the plunging mounts of the riders were scores of other animals, horses and dogs both, carrying packs or dragging travois between whose poles baskets had been slung for transporting puppies, small children, and miscellaneous possessions.

"The confusion," the observer reported later, "was prodigious. The dogs yelped and howled in chorus; the puppies in the *traineaux* [travois] set up a dismal

whine . . . little black-eyed children, from one year of age upward, clung fast with both hands to the edge of their basket, and looked over in alarm at the water rushing so near them. . . . Stray horses and colts came among the rest, often breaking away at full speed through the crowd, followed by the old hags, screaming after their fashion on all occasions of excitement. Buxom young squaws, blooming in all the charms of vermillion, stood here and there on the bank, holding aloft their master's lance, as a signal to collect the scattered portions of his household."

These were Oglalas, 3,000 of them according to another traveler, Edwin Bryant, and they were on their way to fight their traditional enemies, the Shoshoni and Crows. Part of the ritual consisted of a wild war dance inside the fort's courtyard. Afterwards, and in spite of a drenching rain, several of the women "a portion . . . decidedly beautiful," Bryant noted, were still so excited that they continued the merriment outside the walls, "dancing, singing, and throwing themselves into a variety of grotesque and not very decent attitudes."

The next day the throng began its march. The first maneuver was to take the women and children to a place of safety farther up the Platte. The column, Bryant wrote, was three or four miles long and divided into numerous parts. At the head of each section rode "a beautiful young female gorgeously decorated, mounted upon a prancing fat Indian horse, and bearing in her hand a delicate staff or pole, about ten feet in length, from the point of which was suspended, in some instances, a gilt ball and a variety of large brass trinkets, with brilliant feathers and natural flowers of various colors. The chiefs, dressed in their richest costumes, followed immediately in the rear of the feminine ensign bearer, with their bows and arrows in hand. Next . . . the women and children and pack animals . . . and in the rear of all, the warriors."

Stirring stuff, that. But the Indians could also be troublesome. In 1842, at Independence Rock 170 miles west of Fort Laramie, a war party of Sioux had harassed that year's small group of emigrants to such an extent that Army explorer John Charles Frémont, who was traveling a short distance behind the beleagured whites, had been prompted to recom-



Stephen W. Kearny led five companies of dragoons on a grand sweep of the central High Plains in the summer of 1845. Near Fort Laramie he met in council with 1,200 Sioux and asked for safe passage for the wagon trains on the Oregon Trail.

mend the placing of a military post near the fur company's station. As the size of migrant groups increased during the next few years, the Indians grew more circumspect. But they did steal horses if opportunity allowed and, on rare occasions, they did kill stragglers. They sensed, too, that the emigrants were contemptuous of them, yet afraid as well, a weakness that led bold youths to swagger every now and then into a trailside camp and demand gifts of tobacco, coffee, and sugar as toll for passing through their lands and killing their buffalo. Such experiences led outraged letter writers among the travelers to demand government protection for the westward trace.

Growing tension with England over the northern boundary of the Oregon country gave Washington another reason to want the safety of the trail assured so that emigrants would move more willingly to the Northwest, to build up American strength there. Furthermore, if war with Great Britain came, English sea power would interfere with troop movements around Cape Horn to the Pacific. But mounted soldiers could travel overland—if an unobstructed route were available.

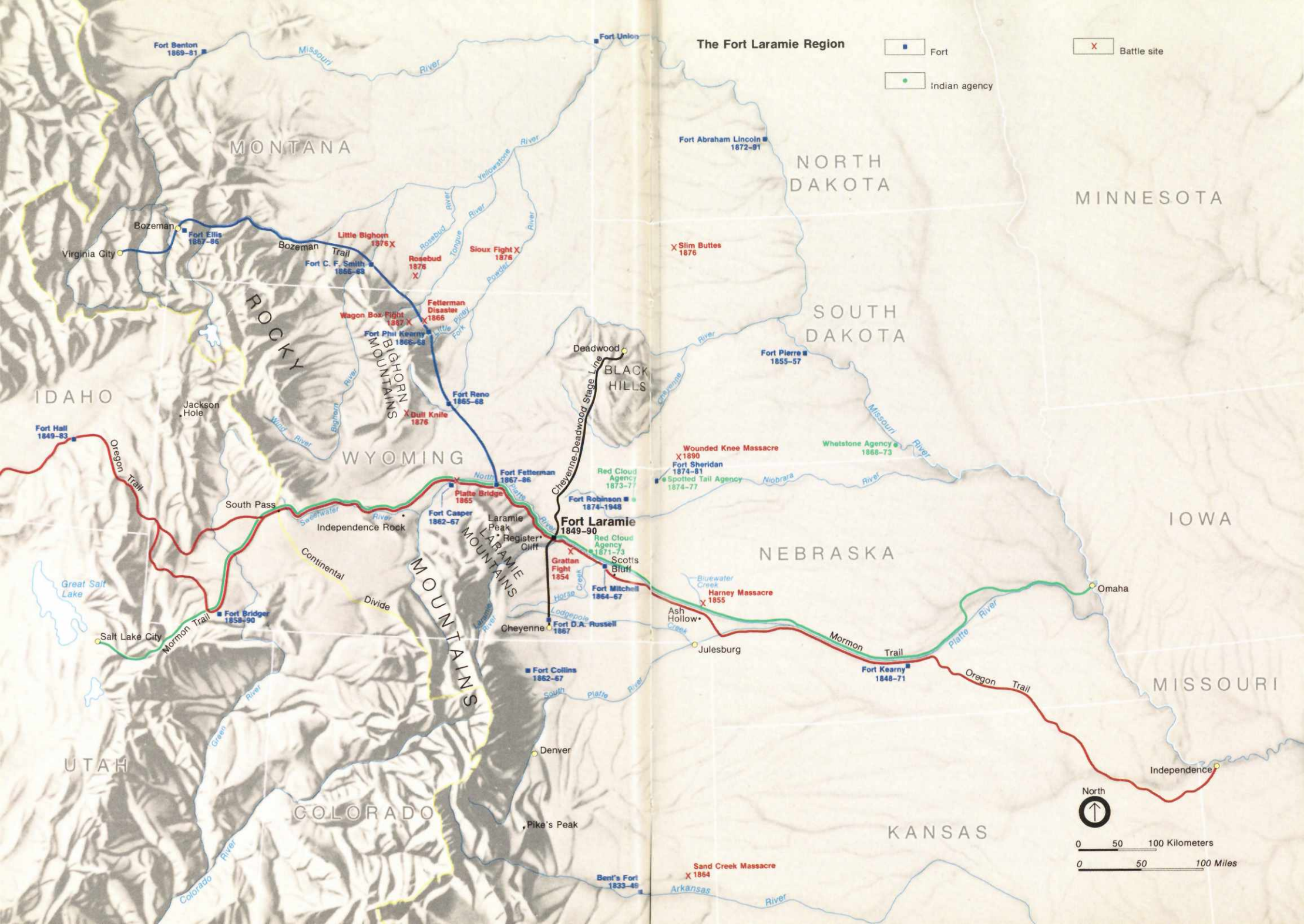
In the spring of 1845, accordingly, Col. Stephen Watts Kearny was ordered to march five companies of dragoons (250 men) as far as South Pass to awe the Indians and study the problems of prairie travel. He dispatched couriers ahead of him to invite the Sioux to meet him June 16 at a great council on grassy meadowlands three miles upstream from Fort Laramie. About 1,200 men, women, and children showed up and seated themselves in a wide semicircle facing the chairs and benches where the dignitaries, red and white, were gathered. Interpreters relayed the tall colonel's speech: "You must not disturb them [the emigrants] in their persons or molest their property." After the chiefs had responded fittingly, Kearny distributed presents and fired several shots from his howitzers, followed at darkness by a burst of rockets "to tell the Great Spirit that they [the Sioux] had listened to his words."

The Indians wondered: a bluff? The soldiers went away and, according to Francis Parkman, the Sioux who visited the emigrant camps in 1846 were as truculent as ever about the invasion of their lands. But Washington had not forgotten. On May 9, 1846,

Congress passed an act providing for a special regiment of Mounted Riflemen and "for establishing military stations on the way to Oregon."

Circumstances delayed the implementation of the bill. Four days after its passage, the United States declared war on Mexico. Shortly thereafter the quarrel with Great Britain was settled by treaty. Troops were deflected to Mexico, and no posts were built beside the Oregon road. Parkman, who may have been trying to stimulate action on a popular frontier issue, echoed the emigrants' anger at the neglect. "Unless troops are speedily stationed at Fort Laramie, or elsewhere in the neighborhood," he wrote, "both immigrants and other travellers will be exposed to the most imminent risk."

Many other public remarks of that sort had their weight. As the Mexicans gave ground, the army turned back toward the frontier. During the summer of 1848, mounted volunteers from Missouri built Fort Kearny beside the Platte River in today's Nebraska. Less than a year later, in March 1849, while the excitement sparked by the discovery of gold in California was sweeping the Nation, the Secretary of War directed that the second of the trailside stations authorized by Congress be built "at or near Fort Laramie."


The Fort Laramie Region
Fort
Indian agency
Battle site
Fort Benton 1869–81
Missouri River
Fort Union
Fort Abraham Lincoln 1872–91
MONTANA
NORTH DAKOTA
MINNESOTA
Bozeman
Fort Ellis 1867–86
Virginia City
Bozeman Trail
Little Bighorn 1876
Fort C. F. Smith 1866–68
Rosebud 1876
Sioux Fight 1876
Slim Buttes 1876
Yellowstone River
Rosebud River
Tongue River
Powder River
Fetterman Disaster 1866
Wagon Box Fight 1867
Fort Phil Kearny 1866–68
Little Piney Fork
ROCKY MOUNTAINS
BIGHORN MOUNTAINS
SOUTH DAKOTA
Deadwood
BLACK HILLS
Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage Line
Fort Pierre 1855–57
Cheyenne River
IDAHO
Jackson Hole
Fort Hall 1849–83
Oregon Trail
Fort Reno 1865–68
Dull Knife 1876
Wind River
Bighorn River
WYOMING
Missouri River
Wounded Knee Massacre 1890
Fort Sheridan 1874–81
Spotted Tail Agency 1874–77
Whetstone Agency 1868–73
Red Cloud Agency 1873–77
Niobrara River
Fort Fetterman 1867–86
North Platte River
Platte Bridge 1865
Fort Robinson 1874–1948
South Pass
Sweetwater River
Independence Rock
Fort Casper 1862–67
Laramie Peak
Register Cliff
Fort Laramie 1849–90
Red Cloud Agency 1871–73
IOWA
Grattan Fight 1854
Scotts Bluff
Horse Creek
Fort Mitchell 1864–67
NEBRASKA
Bluewater Creek
Harney Massacre 1855
Omaha
Great Salt Lake
Continental Divide
LARAMIE MOUNTAINS
Fort Bridger 1858–90
Mormon Trail
Lodgepole Creek
Ash Hollow
Platte River
Salt Lake City
Laramie River
Cheyenne
Fort D.A. Russell 1867
Julesburg
Mormon Trail
Fort Kearny 1848–71
Oregon Trail
MISSOURI
Fort Collins 1862–67
South Platte River
Green River
Independence
UTAH
Denver
COLORADO
Pike's Peak
KANSAS
North
0 50 100 Kilometers
0 50 100 Miles
Sand Creek Massacre 1864
Bent's Fort 1833–49
Colorado River
Arkansas River

Military Post

New Patterns

The Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, designated by Congress in 1846 to bring the West firmly within the American orbit, consisted of 10 companies. Two of them, neither at full strength, and a company of regular infantry were finally sent in separate installments from Fort Leavenworth, eastern Kansas, to the junction of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers during the spring and summer of 1849.

The first to depart, on May 10, were the 58 men and four officers of Company E, Maj. W. F. Sanderson commanding. Riding with this pioneer group was Lt. Daniel P. Woodbury of the Corps of Engineers, architect for the proposed new military post. Woodbury's orders directed him to examine the entire area around the river junction for the best available site. If nothing else equaled the advantages of the fur company post, Fort John, he was to offer $4,000 for it, a ridiculous figure apparently for a place that had cost $10,000 to build only seven years before. Western buildings, however, were notorious for their rapid deterioration, as the army, too, would discover. The cause: sloppy construction, indifferent materials, harsh weather, and hard usage by men who had no interest in preserving the quarters even for their own comfort.

Company E's trip west took 38 days. Trail conditions were chaotic. To the confusion created by the wagons and ill-broken pack-trains of tens of thousands of inexperienced young goldseekers were added the horrors of cholera, a dread disease that some of the travelers had picked up from an epidemic ravaging the Mississippi Valley. How many died along the trail, including Indians who became infected while visiting the trains and campgrounds, is unknown. But it was enough to spread panic among the survivors and give the tribes of the plains one more cause to resent the intrusion of white men into their country.

Apparently none of the Mounted Riflemen was stricken. Even so, the troop had ridden past enough pandemonium and suffering so that the men were vastly relieved when, on June 16, the whitewashed walls of the fur-trading post came into sight. It was not only their destination but also the point where cholera, burned out by dry air and altitude, ceased its afflictions.

As the column of blue-clad troops and its supply wagons churned through the river toward the crowded campground in front of the fort, Bruce Husband, manager of the fur-company post, fired his little cannon in welcome. The next day, guided by traders, Major Sanderson and Lieutenant Woodbury began a week-long investigation of the adjacent area. In the end they decided to buy Fort John. Its demerits were obvious. According to one scornful emigrant, the edifice was "miserable, cracked and dilapidated . . . propped up all around with beams of timber, which an enemy had only to kick away and down would come the whole structure." Still, the *bourgeoise's* apartment could furnish temporary housing for officers while more suitable quarters were being built. Non-commissioned officers and laundresses—more about them shortly—could live in the cells around the courtyard, and army supplies could be stored in warehouses that had once sheltered trade goods and buffalo hides. The enlisted men had tents, and until stables could be readied for the horses, the old fort's corral could safeguard the soldiers' mounts.

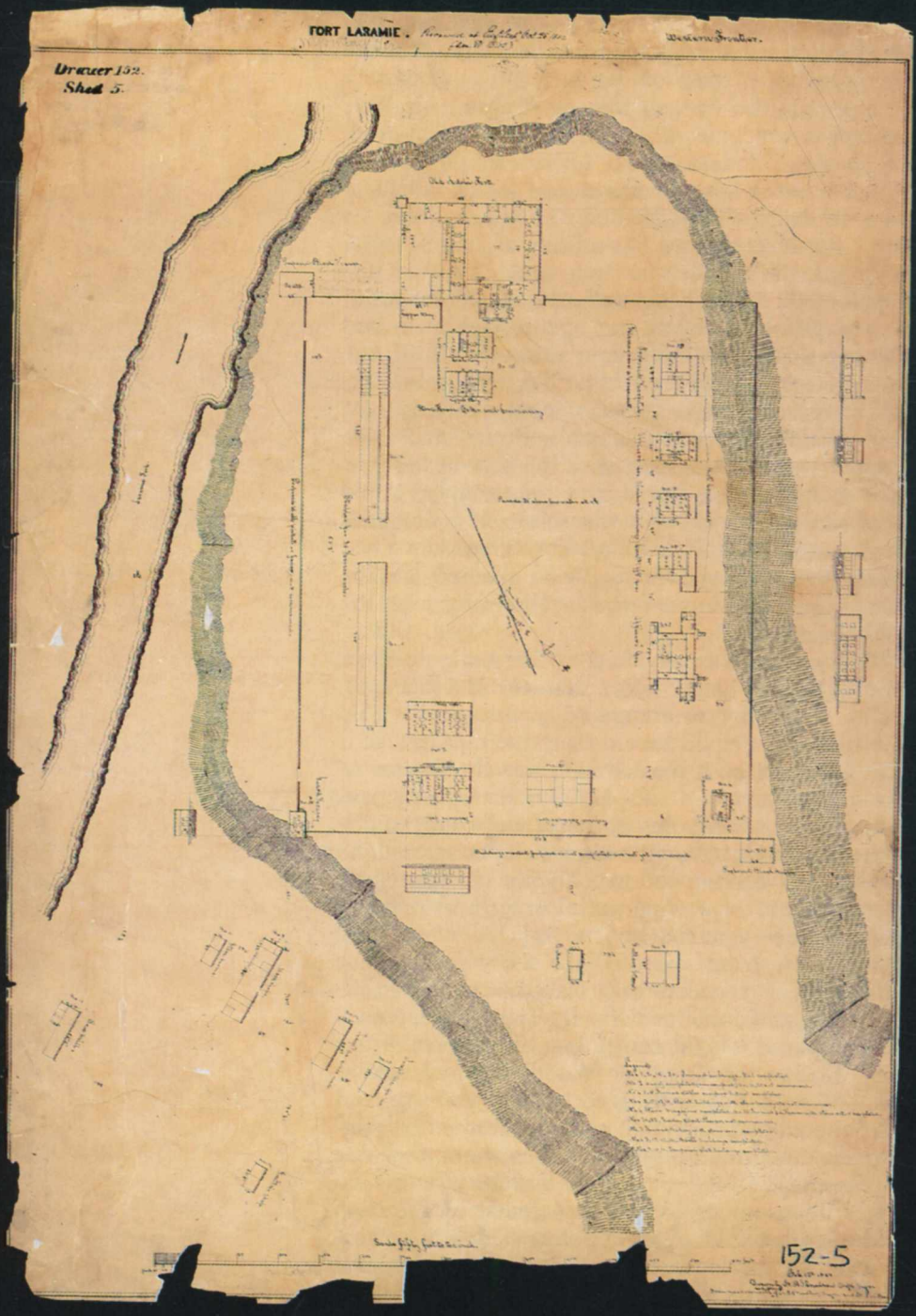
There were other advantages. The Laramie River would provide better water than the North Platte, which one emigrant compared to dirty suds. Wild hay for horses could be cut from the meadowlands that bordered both the Laramie and the Platte. At the edge of the mountains, 12 miles farther west, was enough pine for building purposes and enough limestone to provide, through reduction in kilns, the lime needed for making mortar. Finally, the purchase would get rid of a commercial enterprise that the Army did not want next door to its post.

Bruce Husband accepted the $4,000 Woodbury offered—one suspects that his employers had already suggested that he do so if opportunity arose—and prepared to shift his trading operations farther east. Meanwhile Engineer Woodbury sent soldier axmen into the mountains to cut big pine logs and haul them on the running gears of dismantled wagons to the little horse-powered sawmill that the quartermaster set up near the Laramie River. To speed things along—winter came early on the High Plains—other soldiers were put to work whipsawing planks. It was an onerous procedure. A log was placed either on a scaffold or above a pit. Two men

FORT LARAMIE.

Western Frontier.

Drawer 152.
Shelf 5.



152-5

By 1851, the army post was beginning to take shape around an immense parade ground. The old adobe Fort John (top) was still the largest building at the post, but it was rapidly deteriorating. The officers' quarters (Old Bedlam, building no. 1) stands at lower right. There are barracks for soldiers and noncoms and stables for the horses. Outside the parade are a bakery, the sutler's store, workshops, and a smithy.

worked the long saw, one above, one below, the latter receiving most of the sawdust in his face.

Woodbury had ambitious plans for Fort Laramie, as the military post was officially known. He envisioned the flat in front of old Fort John, where Indians had once camped, as the post's parade ground and hence its heart. This gave the establishment a cant roughly 45 degrees off the cardinal compass points; that is, its main axis ran from southwest to northeast. Marking off the southwest side of the parade ground was the former fur-trading post. Directly across the square from it Woodbury stepped off the outlines for a two-story barracks for enlisted men. Along the eastern (more or less) side of the square, roughly parallel to the Laramie River, he planned to erect twin stables, each capable of holding 80 horses. Opposite the stables he planned to locate another two-story building, this one for housing officers and the post commander's headquarters.

Just outside the parade area and approximately equidistant from both the officer's quarters and the soldiers' barracks Woodbury located two key buildings, to be constructed of bricks made of sun-dried, adobe clay. One was the post bakery; bread, not beans, was the basis of a trooper's diet. The other adobe was to house the sutler's store. There items that were not part of the regular army issue, liquor included, would be sold. The sutler was a civilian with political pull who was licensed by the army to deal with ordinary citizens and Indians as well as with soldiers. His trade often was very lucrative.

If Lieutenant Woodbury had had his way, Fort Laramie's buildings and parade ground would be surrounded by either a stout board fence or a rubble wall 650 feet long by 550 feet wide. Two-story blockhouses, rising at diagonal corners of the wall would command all four faces. Each overhanging block house would contain a powder magazine, an armory, and embrasures through which cannon could be fired. Woodbury, however, did not have his way. The post he envisioned would cost about $60,000—too much. Although Congress wanted the army to keep the Indians at bay all along the Overland Trail, it never wanted to appropriate as much money for the work as the military recommended. Out went all frills—in this case Woodbury's stockade. At no time in its 40-year army career was Fort Laramie en-

closed by any kind of defensive fortification; hence it never resembled the great bastions commonly brought to mind by the word "fort."

The army's need to save money created other problems. Soldiers did all the rough labor of construction regardless of whether or not they were experienced in the work they were required to do. Such guidance as they had came from a few skilled civilian foremen hired by the quartermaster's department.

The troopers did not like the system. They had enlisted, they supposed, to fight Indians, with ample time between skirmishes to loaf around, hunting and fishing. Otherwise why join the army? A private's pay in 1849 was $11 a month—a bit later it rose to $13—plus food, shelter, clothing, and medical attention. During times of discontent the men forgot the free issues and remembered only that civilians received five times as much cash as they did for pounding nails, wielding saws, driving teams, or working in the blacksmith shop. Injustice! They complained bitterly and did their share in giving the word "soldiering" its secondary meaning of pretending to work without actually doing so.

Did significant numbers of them desert bleak Laramie in 1849? Surviving records are silent, but the probabilities are that many did. Consider, for example, the nature of the men. The army did most of its recruiting in cities and so picked up large numbers of urban poor, many of them illiterate. (Not until 1866 did the War Department authorize night schools for enlisted men who wished to improve themselves.) Many recruits, whether literate or not, were honest, sober, industrious, and loyal. But others were unable to hold civilian jobs because of prison records, chronic alcoholism, dim-wittedness, emotional instability, or language difficulties. Close to half the personnel in some units were recent German and Irish immigrants bewildered by the milieu of their new country. For all such people the army was a temporary refuge, and many left it as impulsively as they joined. According to the Report of the Secretary of War for 1891, one-third of the men who enlisted between 1867 and 1891 departed surreptitiously before their terms were up. It is not likely that the rate was much smaller in earlier years.

The gold rush added to the temptations to depart.

The tail end of the great migration was still struggling past the Laramie when Company E pitched its tents outside Fort John. The river valleys hummed with activity. Migrants who had overloaded their wagons bustled from camp to camp in search of extra livestock for pulling their heavy vehicles across the mountains ahead. Unable to find what they wanted, they reduced their loads by throwing away hundreds of pounds of food and gear. Many abandoned their wagons entirely in favor of pack animals, and some of them sourly burned the vehicles so that no one else could use them.

The urgency infected those who watched it. Why not join the rush?

The excitement prompted several troopers to desert from a column of Mounted Riflemen that was marching under Col. W. W. Loring toward Oregon hard on the heels of Company E. It definitely troubled Fort Laramie during the migration of 1850. At dawn on July 23, according to fort records, "sixteen Riflemen overpowered the horse guard & taking each a horse, & completely armed, started for California." So it seems likely that Woodbury's work in 1849 was also delayed by wholesale desertions and the need to send out patrols for capturing the defectors if possible.

Other men departed legally. Some escorted empty freight wagons back east; another group rode to the Missouri River with Col. Aeneas Mackay, who had arrived in July to inspect the new establishment. Meanwhile reinforcements marched in, one company in July, another in August. In September Andrew J. Donelson of the Engineers, one year out of West Point, appeared with a small contingent to act as Daniel Woodbury's assistant in planning. (The quartermaster supervised actual construction.) By the time autumn's chill sharpened the air, the garrison had stabilized at about 125 soldiers and officers.

Inasmuch as winter temperatures on the High Plains often dropped well below zero, the pressing need was for shelter. Male shelter. As far as the army was concerned, this was a man's world. Married men were not enlisted, and if any soldier wished to take a wife after signing up, he had to obtain permission from his company commander. Officers did not need official approval to marry, but their cramped quarters and the meager 600 to 800 pounds



Preceding page *This 1858 view is the earliest known photograph of the fort. The crumbling walls of Fort John stand at left. Within a few years they will be gone. Old Bedlam in the center and the soldiers' barracks on the right are the other large buildings fronting on the parade. In the right foreground Indian tipis and a log trading post can be dimly seen.*

of personal possessions and furniture that they were allowed to take with them to their quarters were calculated to discourage family attachments.

Woodbury's architectural plans reflected the austere policy. No trace of the enlisted men's barracks he launched now remains, but since most army buildings were fairly standard, the setup can be visualized. The day room, a spartanly furnished lounge of sorts for reading, playing card games, or writing letters; the messroom with its long tables generally covered by oilcloth; and the kitchen where food was boiled, baked or roasted (mostly boiled) by soldiers assigned to the job in rotation regardless of prior training—those facilities were on the first floor. Upstairs was a cavernous, dimly lit squad room filled with the abomination of the pre-1870 army, tiers of wooden bunks in which the soldiers slept in pairs on canvas sacks stuffed with straw and covered with one gray blanket. Inasmuch as the 1849 barracks designed by Woodbury was calculated to hold a single company but was crowded that first winter with two, it must have been disagreeable indeed.

Officers at least had beds and rooms to themselves, one chamber for a lieutenant, two for a captain. The shelter Woodbury planned for them, however, was curious indeed. The front of the main two-story building, which overlooked the parade ground, was designed to be shaded by deep verandahs. Attached to either end of the building but set back like ears on either side of a high forehead were kitchen wings. Each protuberance contained, in addition to a kitchen on each floor, small storerooms and sleeping quarters for one cook per kitchen. This functionary was an enlisted man assigned to the job and given 20 cents a day extra pay for the unwelcome duty.

Faced with clapboards and painted white, the structure looked, in spite of its kitchen ears, vaguely like a plantation manor of the Old South. Inside, however, the building was as drab as a roominghouse. Outside hallways, each giving access to the kitchen at its level, ran the full width of the building. Identical rooms bordered the halls. Occupants could also reach the rooms by way of the verandahs, the upper one of which was approached by steeply rising, outside staircases. The arrangement meant

that inhabitants of the front rooms were constantly disturbed by heavy-booted traffic back and forth. Obviously no wife, especially one with babies, would like the setup. Because the two windows of each front room opened onto the verandahs, privacy was as rare as silence. Equally unpleasant were the common hallways and the need to share the far-off kitchen with other women. If these demerits entered Woodbury's engineering imagination, he dismissed them, for there was nothing in Regulations to cover the likes or dislikes of women.

Because logs had to be hauled 12 miles to the sawmill and because the mill itself broke down—months passed before new parts could be obtained from St. Louis—neither the barracks nor the officers quarters were completed until the fall of 1850. Once finished, the usual rapid deterioration afflicted the barracks. By 1857 the top floor of the building creaked and quivered so alarmingly during high winds that many soldiers carried their sacks and blankets outside to the parade ground and slept there rather than risk the threatening collapse.

The officers' quarters were stronger. Woodbury specified that the space between outer and inner walls be filled with fire-burned adobe bricks. Presumably he did this to render the building impervious to rifle balls and resistant to fire, so that it could serve as a citadel in case of need. If so, the bricks were forgotten; at least there is no evidence that the structure was pressed into service during the moments of panic that occurred during subsequent years. Anyway, the building endured. The raucous parties that it saw after payday brought it the affectionate name Old Bedlam, and as Old Bedlam it has been restored by the National Park Service as the oldest existing military building in Wyoming.

Were there any women at the fort during its first years? Formal records do not mention them, but, as in the case of the deserters, there almost surely were some. A chaplain named William Vaux, who is known to have had a family with him a few years later, arrived in 1849, but whether wife and children came with him is uncertain. Possibly they did. A passing officer scribbled in a letter home that there were "2 Army ladies here, one just delivered of a baby and the other about to be." One may have been Mrs. Vaux. The other probably was also a perma-

nent resident, for a pregnant woman of the times would hardly have made a temporary visit involving so many difficulties. Or perhaps, and in spite of the letter writer's use of the word 'ladies', the women were laundresses, for washerwomen most probably reached Fort Laramie as soon as the troopers did.

Laundresses were the only women officially recognized by the army. Their standing was old and honorable. The program had begun in 1802 with an official act that allowed each company to employ one washerwoman for every 25 men. Later, the ratio was extended to one washerwoman for every 19½ troopers. A laundress's pay was set by the Post Administrative Council. At Fort Laramie it averaged $4 a month for officers, $1 a month for enlisted men and non-coms. In addition each laundress was provided with quarters, daily rations, fuel, and the attention, when needed, of the post surgeon. They added to their income by acting as matrons in the hospital. They washed the bodies of the dead and performed domestic service for the wives of officers. Occasionally but by no means as often as might be supposed, they functioned as prostitutes.

Expectedly they came from the ranks of the poor—many were immigrant girls from abroad—and were not notable for physical attractiveness. Nevertheless, nearly all ended up married, often to the company's non-coms, who seemed to pull rank in such affairs of heart. For instance, Fort Laramie's long-time Ordnance Sergeant, Leodegar Schnyder, a native of Switzerland, in 1864 captured the hand of a washerwoman called for obvious reasons Cross-Eyed Julia. It was a lasting and happy union.

A few freer souls than Julia seem to have been "married" to more than one man at a time, dwelling with them in rotation. All produced numbers of half-wild children, mainstay's of the post's elementary schools and sources of prodigious uproars when they were piled into wagons to follow their fathers to the next duty station. If laundresses and their families passed the first hectic winter at Fort Laramie, as seems likely, they must have been unbearably crowded into some fetid nook, probably one of the decaying cells of old Fort John.

A Search For Peace

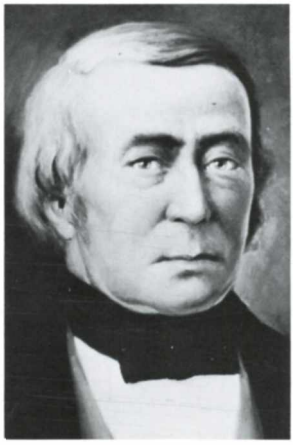
Even before the initial building program was com-

pleted, the new post was casting a long shadow across the plains. Grateful emigrants used its blacksmith and wagon shops to repair gear and crossed the North Platte on a ferry owned by officers and run by soldiers—a mixed blessing, since reckless handling and the craft's balkiness precipitated half a dozen drownings in 1850 alone. Staple groceries were available at the sutler's store in the fort. Those items gone, latecomers had to turn to the sutler or to the fly-by-night traders who came from as far away as New Mexico to tap the market. A favorite strategy of the traders was to swap a few sound horses, mules, or oxen for twice that many exhausted animals, fatten the acquisitions for a few weeks, and then trade them again.

Indians were equally aware of the fort. Some hung around it for so long that they became known as "The Laramie Loafers." Many were the wives, widows, and children of scouts and interpreters whose service dated back to the days of the fur-trading post. Male relatives often congregated with them outside the fort's perimeter, living as best they could by running errands, selling game, swapping pelts with the sutler, or, in case of the females, making moccasins and, as one distressed officer's wife of a later date put it, offering wares to which a Christian woman could no more than allude.

Farsighted chiefs, and there were many, regarded the Loafers' village near the fort as an ominous portent. The white men were altering a free, proud life. Each year's migration added to the dusty ruts scarring the buffalo ranges of the Platte. Livestock stripped away grass. Hunters chased and destroyed thousands of buffalo. Worse than slaying, however, was the driving of the great herds away from their accustomed ranges. When they were gone, what would life be like for a people who had long depended on them for both the material and spiritual foundations of their existence? Would the Sioux and Cheyennes sink into a craven existence on handouts and alcohol, like the Loafers? Or, in spite of the fort and its soldiers, would they fight? Some experienced traders and halfbreed scouts, sensing the tension, believed that if cholera had not shattered the morale of several bands during 1849 and 1850, serious outbreaks would already have occurred.

One man who repeatedly urged a more enlightened



Thomas Fitzpatrick, Irish-born mountain man, fur trader, guide, and Indian agent, was one of the organizers of the 1851 Indian council held near Fort Laramie.

policy on the government was tall, taciturn, gray-haired Thomas Fitzpatrick, called Broken Hand by the Indians because years earlier an exploding musket had torn three fingers from one of his hands. Fitzpatrick, it will be recalled, had been one of the partners whom William Sublette had frozen out of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, only to have the victims join forces and buy Fort William from him. After the drying up of the beaver trade, Fitz had found employment as a guide for emigrant trains and military expeditions. Few men knew the West and its Indians better than he, and in 1846 he had been appointed agent (a representative of the United States government) in matters concerning American relations with the tribes inhabiting the watersheds of the Arkansas, Platte, and Kansas Rivers—the whole of the Central Plains.

At the time of his appointment the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been under control of the War Department. Fitzpatrick did not approve of its policies. He did not believe that understaffed military posts located hundreds of miles apart could patrol the Plains effectively enough to protect white travelers or keep the antagonistic tribes from each other's throats on the hunting grounds. When the Bureau of Indian Affairs was taken from the War Department in 1849 and placed in the new Department of the Interior, he was given fuller opportunity to air his views. The person with whom he worked most frequently was David D. Mitchell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs and, like Fitzpatrick, a former fur trader.

Fitzpatrick pointed out to Mitchell that the Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes deserved recognition for the patience with which they had accepted the whites' violation of the Indians' hunting and grazing grounds. If the western trails and the forts that protected the trails were to become permanent, then it was time to ask the Indians' permission for the intrusion. Furthermore, the tribes should be persuaded to live within specified "territories," or, as the areas would be called today, reservations. Then perhaps conflicts over hunting grounds—conflicts that might sweep out to engulf passing whites as well—could be controlled. Finally, both races should assume responsibility for punishing, each according to its own customs, those people of its own race that

committed offenses against the other. In that way attacks of revenge based on misunderstandings would be less likely to occur.

How could the Indians be persuaded to accept all this? Fitzpatrick was blunt. Either the army would have to occupy the Plains with strong enough forces to make the Indians think twice about committing depredations or the Bureau of Indian Affairs would have to hand out enough goods each year to compensate the tribes for the losses they were incurring.

An annual distribution of food and personal goods would, in Fitzpatrick's opinion, be the better way. It would be cheaper and, if continued long enough—he recommended $50,000 worth of merchandise and provisions each year for 50 years—it would make the Indians dependent on the payments. During the life of the program, moreover, educational programs could be launched for turning the Nation's wards into self-reliant, white-style farmers who would no longer need buffalo for sustenance and warfare for glory.

Today this program of bribing the first occupants of the land to accept an alien race's cultural values seems patronizing to an offensive degree—and worse. For if the Indians were cheated rather than benefited during the distribution of annuities, if they did not receive adequate agricultural land and an education that considered their own values, if their ways were scorned as inferior and they ended up living on a beggar's dole, then all of America's native population would be turned into degraded replicas of the Laramie Loafers. But this is hindsight. In Fitzpatrick's day, the program he supported—it had been suggested by others before he picked it up—was regarded by humanitarians as a creative solution to an old and difficult problem.

A persistent man, he kept badgering Superintendent Mitchell, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Congress of the United States until the assembly he wanted was authorized to meet at Fort Laramie on September 1, 1851. Aided by traders of the American Fur Company, whose posts reached far up the Missouri River, he spread word of the conference far across the Plains. Some tribes—the Pawnees, Comanches, Kiowas—refused to attend. But the Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, their enemies the Crows and Shoshonis, and several Upper Missouri groups prom-



Washakie, a long-time Shoshoni chief, followed a policy of friendship toward whites. A contemporary described him as light in color, tall, powerfully built, and of dignified carriage and great endurance.

ised to send delegations. If all did, it would be the greatest convocation of Indians ever gathered together near the foot of the mountains.

When Fitzpatrick reached the fort, thousands of Sioux and Cheyennes had already pitched their conical lodges along the curling Laramie Valley. Then came worrisome reports. Superintendent Mitchell, some reporters from Missouri newspapers, and various high-placed officials arrived on August 30 with an announcement that the wagon train bringing gifts designed to put the Indians in a receptive mood for treaty making was three weeks behind schedule. Considerable diplomacy would be needed to keep the assembly from dispersing in disgust.

Mitchell's group, guarded by portions of three companies of troops from the fort, pitched their tents on a meadow some distance south of the base. Mounted Indians began the ceremonies on the appointed day by racing down on the whites with the wild abandon of a cavalry charge. Dismounted, however, they grew sedate. Pipes went around, and then Mitchell began playing for time by declaring that inasmuch as the thousands of horses in the vicinity would soon destroy the grass needed by the fort's horses, a new meeting place should be selected. Would the Indians return the following day with suggestions? To keep them happy meanwhile a few beefs from the fort's herd were turned loose. Excited young men ran down the animals with lassos, so reported B. Gratz Brown of the *Missouri Republican,* and after the women had done the butchering the valley was filled with the aroma of steaks roasting on green willow sticks.

The next day a detachment of troops escorted in 80 or so Shoshoni warriors accompanied by their families. At the head of the line was the chief, Washakie, 6 feet tall, ramrod straight, and dressed in full panoply of feathers and buckskin fringe. The Indians already on hand jumped on their horses and raced at breakneck speed to the fort to watch the arrival. Startled by the commotion, the post commander ordered the bugler to call the cavalry to mount. At the same instant, a Sioux brave, eager to avenge the slaying of his father during a previous clash with the Shoshoni, made a rush at Washaki. An interpreter overhauled him and hurled him from his

horse. Rifles and bows lowered, and as order returned Mitchell reminded the assembly of the day's main order of business. Where should the formal conference be held?

The Indians chose the mouth of Horse Creek, 37 miles east of the fort. Traveling there in dusty pandemonium took three days. Two companies of Mounted Riflemen and a detachment of dragoons went along to preserve order and give evidence of American power. Additional evidence was provided by the presence, either in a buggy or on horseback, of the white wife of Lt. W. L. Elliott of the Mounted Rifles. She'd not have been there, Mitchell warned the Indians, if the command had not been confident of being able to protect her.

The white negotiators had their headquarters' tent pitched on the point of land where Horse Creek ran into the North Platte. Mitchell then announced that according to white custom no work would be done over the weekend. The firing of the troops' little cannon at 9 a.m. on Monday would announce the beginning of the meetings.

Color and commotion filled the next two days. First the Sioux and then the Cheyennes staged tumultuous parades, riding four abreast and singing war songs, for which they were rewarded with gifts of tobacco, coffee, and sugar. Women from the several tribes prepared feasts by choking fat puppies to death with cords, singeing off the hair, and boiling the meat in large copper kettles. Nights of drumming, dancing, and singing followed.

The booming of the cannon on Monday precipitated considerable jostling among the Indians for precedence in seating. Quiet achieved, a redstone pipe with a stem three feet long made the rounds. During its passage from hand to hand, Mrs. Elliott created a sensation by taking a seat with the men on one of the benches.

More drama came from the announcement that a mass of Crow, Gros Ventre, and Assiniboin Indians were nearing. Their 800-mile trip from the mouth of the Yellowstone River had been slowed by their wagons, the first to cross that part of the Plains. Now they were preparing a grand entry onto the conference grounds, where their numbers would swell the total of Indians in attendance to 10,000 or more. Meanwhile the white leaders of the new delegation,



Pierre-Jean De Smet was a Jesuit missionary of wide influence among the Indians of the northern Rockies. He predicted that the 1851 treaty would usher in an era of peace. "In future," he wrote, "peaceable citizens may cross the desert unmolested, and the Indian will have little to dread from the bad white man, for justice will be rendered him."

Catholic missionary Pierre-Jean De Smet and Alexander Culbertson of the American Fur Company, had hurried ahead to attend the opening session.

Mitchell began by reviewing the terms of the proposed treaty. That done, he committed a psychological error common among whites: he interfered in ancient governmental custom.

Because of the nature of their hunting economy the tribes were divided into many bands that came together only for major ceremonies and, less frequently, for war. Each band had its war chiefs and peace chiefs who by their strength of character, experience, and bravery, could exert sway when decisions had to be reached. But the decision itself was determined by consensus within the band. Certainly no leader could command obedience outside his own group.

White administrators, however, wanted to treat with counterparts able to say "yes" or "no" for a whole tribe. Accordingly Mitchell demanded that the different groups at Horse Creek choose a representative who could speak for all his people when meetings resumed on September 10. It was a curious stipulation, for he and Fitzpatrick must have known enough of Indian ways to realize that no member of a Plains tribe would feel himself permanently bound by the work of a temporary figurehead. But the whites needed a paper to take back to Washington, and the Indians wanted the presents that were creaking west on the delayed wagon trains. So out of expedience all the bands except the Sioux agreed to choose a single head chief.

When the holdouts tried to explain their reasons, Mitchell refused to listen. Finally he placed the principal men of each Sioux band in a semicircle in front of him, gave each a small stick, and pressured them into handing the counters one by one to the tribesman they esteemed most. Because consensus was so important to Indian decision making, they declined to wrangle in front of those thousands of watchers. Reluctantly but unanimously they handed their sticks to a Brulé warrior whose name whites have rendered as Brave Bear, Frightening Bear, Bear That Scatters His Enemies. Bear protested. He was not old enough, wise enough, or familiar enough with white men to be chief of all the Dakotas, as the Sioux called themselves. "I would not have come

here today if I had known this would happen." Again Mitchell refused to heed. All the head chiefs had been chosen, and now the terms of the Treaty of Fort Laramie, or, as the Indians called it, the Treaty of the Long Meadows, could be discussed and approved with a show of legitimacy.

De Smet, Bridger, Fitzpatrick, and others who knew the country tried to draw up territorial boundaries that would suit every tribe. In answer to a hailstorm of objections, they compromised: although a tribe had to live inside its assigned territory, it could leave to hunt. So ended Fitzpatrick's hope that boundary demarcations would end disputes over hunting grounds. Other ambiguities involved the dividing line between Crows and Sioux in the Powder River area east and northeast of the Bighorn Mountains. Meanwhile prairie winds filled the air with hoof-churned dust. Sanitary facilities being nil, the stench became so unbearable that the troops moved two miles away to find relief. Possibly a desire to leave the discomforts helped bring the negotiators together. At any event, they touched pens to paper on September 17, 1851. For whatever it was worth, the Treaty of Fort Laramie was an accomplished fact. Three days later, the presents arrived. Unloaded, the heap was so mountainous that the distribution was not completed until the 23d.

To top off the program Fitzpatrick escorted 11 of the new head chiefs to Washington to impress them still further with white power. The trip so unsettled them that one committed suicide. Another sour note came from the pennypinching U.S. Senate. It cut the period during which annuities were to be distributed from 50 years to 10—or 15 if the President so decided at the end of the decade. (The value of the gifts was increased to $70,000 a year.) Thoroughly mortified by the reduction in time, Fitzpatrick resubmitted the altered treaty to some of the tribes in 1853. A few agreed to the changes; others did not. It didn't matter much. Back near Fort Laramie human frailties that no treaty could guard against were brewing up the very kind of storm the agent had hoped to avoid.

The Costly Cow

The quiet that followed the signing of the Treaty of

Fort Laramie persuaded the War Department to economize by replacing the post's cavalry with two skeletal companies of infantry. Their potential foes, of course, were mounted, but feeding army horses on corn hauled 700 miles across the plains was expensive. Surely $70,000 in annuities, it was argued, ought to guarantee the Indians' good behavior. Some congressmen even thought it was enough to justify abandoning the fort entirely.

A warning that the complacency was ill-founded came from the Miniconjou Sioux, another division of the Tetons. Although most lived well north of the Platte, they occasionally visited the Oglalas and Brulés near Fort Laramie, and in June 1853, for reasons no longer recoverable, one of the visiting groups appropriated a ferryboat that some soldiers had been using for carrying emigrants across the North Platte. When an angry sergeant reappropriated the craft and started rowing back to the south bank, one of the Miniconjous took a pot shot at him.

Though the bullet missed, Army philosophy demanded punishment. The post commander, 1st Lt. Richard Garnett, accordingly directed 2nd Lt. Hugh B. Fleming to take a squad of enlisted men across the Platte to the Miniconjou village four miles away and apprehend the shooter.

The Miniconjous told Fleming's interpreter, Lucien Auguste, that they would handle the matter themselves, as the Treaty of Fort Laramie said they could. Fleming, however, had been ordered to bring the culprit in. Stubbornly he advanced on the village. Taking fright, the Indians fled to a nearby ravine, some of them shooting as they ran. Fleming's men fired back, killing three, wounding the same number, and taking two prisoners. The man who had fired on the sergeant was not among the casualties.

In time Garnett and Agent Fitzpatrick, who rode in to supervise that year's distribution of annuities, managed to arrange parleys with the Miniconjou chiefs. Swayed by implied threats that too much truculence might cost them their share of the handouts, the headmen at last admitted grudgingly that from the whites' point of view Fleming's shooting at their people perhaps had been justified. But they added ominously, let it be remembered that the soldiers were "the first to make the ground bloody."

Resentment was still simmering the following Au-

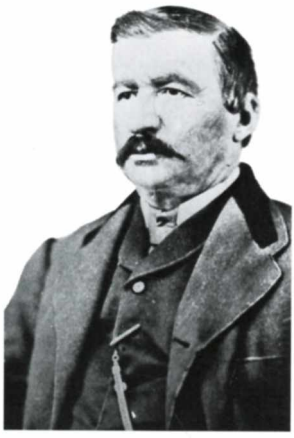
gust 1854, when several bands of Teton Sioux again converged on the American Fur Company trading post half a dozen miles down the Platte from Fort Laramie for another distribution of annuity goods. Before the event took place, a cow belonging to a Mormon emigrant broke away from a herd being driven west and wandered into the small Miniconjou section of the encampment. Evidently the owner was afraid to claim the animal then, but on reaching the fort he stated the cow had been stolen. Meanwhile one of the Miniconjou, thinking that the animal had been abandoned (so the Indians said later), killed her for a feast.

By this time Garnett had been transferred east. His replacement as commander at Fort Laramie was Lt. Hugh Fleming, who had precipitated the attack on the Miniconjous the year before. Of Fleming's meagre 71-man garrison, 32 were absent cutting wood and putting up hay.

One of Fleming's two subordinates was a supremely self-confident Brevet 2nd Lt. John Lawrence Grattan. The word "brevet" that qualified his lieutenancy may help explain what followed. Often the term was honorary; a colonel might become a brevet brigadier-general (but continue receiving a colonel's pay) as a reward for gallantry in action. Not so in Grattan's case. When he had graduated from West Point the year before, there had been no openings for second lieutenants in the shrunken Army of the United States. So he had been sent to Fort Laramie to serve with the troops there until a permanent place could be found for him. In his case the title "brevet" indicated that he was a military orphan without ties to any regular unit. But he hoped that by drawing favorable attention to himself, he might improve his chances of obtaining the first appointment that opened. He would then be able to marry the fiancee who was waiting for him in the East.

Yielding to his arguments about the need to punish depredations, Fleming gave the cocky young shavetail permission to go to the Miniconjou camp and bring back the killer of the cow. When Grattan called for volunteers, 29 of the 39 infantrymen then present at the fort responded. Grattan took all of them, leaving only 10 men at the post.

The volunteers hauled two cannon out of storage in old Fort John and hitched mules to them. The



James Bordeau was the bourgeois *in charge of Fort John for the American Fur Company. After the army purchased the fort, he opened his own trading post 8 miles downriver. The Grattan massacre took place nearby.*

men assigned to the guns rode on the limbers. The rest crowded into a mule-drawn wagon. Grattan, as befitted his position as commander, rode a horse. His interpreter, Lucien Auguste, was also mounted. Auguste disliked the assignment and to ease its rigors took a bottle along. By the time the contingent reached the long line of tipis pitched beside the river, he was drunk, loudmouthed, and abusive. It was August 19, 1854.

There were about 4,000 men, women, and children in the Indian encampment. They watched the approach of the soldiers and listened to Auguste's insults with resentment. One imagines that at least some of the volunteers grew nervous. The Miniconjous' camp was in the middle of the long line. To reach it the artillery and the wagon had to creak by the American Fur Company post, where the annuities were stored, and continue among unfriendly spectators to another private establishment run by a trader named James Bordeau.

Both Bordeau and Brave Bear, who in white eyes was head chief of all the Sioux, were dispatched to ask the cow-killer to surrender. He and the friends who had feasted on the animal with him refused and armed themselves. Grattan moved into the camp—it was all but swallowed by the much larger Brulé village—readied his cannon, and deployed his men. From this position of strength, as he evidently considered it, he conferred with the recalcitrant Indians for about 45 minutes.

Brave Bear's cousin, a Brulé war chief named Sinte Galeska, which the whites rendered as Spotted Tail, took advantage of the time to prepare an attack. Broad-faced and strongjawed, Sinte Galeska was then about 30 years old. His name derived from a white-ringed (not spotted) raccoon tail that was a prominent part of his head dress. Another notable article of his apparel was a war shirt reputedly decorated with a hundred tufts of scalp hair, each representing a brave deed in war. Because of his reputation his followers obeyed him quickly, slipping behind tipis, trees, and clumps of brush so as to surround the whites.

Apparently a soldier saw the enveloping movement, panicked, and fired the first shot without orders. A shower of arrows answered. Both cannons roared—Grattan himself jerked the lanyard of one—

but their muzzles were elevated too high (there had been no careful sighting) and the balls clipped off the top of a nearby lodge.

There was no time to reload. The Indians swarmed forward, yelling triumphantly. Grattan was among the first to die—as was Brave Bear, mortally wounded by the spasmodic firing of the soldiers. Then the surviving whites broke and fled, some in the wagon, some afoot. Except for Pvt. John Cuddy, all were run down and slaughtered. Badly wounded, Cuddy was found by some friendly Brulés and taken to Bordeau's post. The trader eventually sent him to the fort in a buggy, but he died shortly after arrival.

Other Indians had already carried word of the battle to the post. A frenzy of fear sent laundresses, a handful of civilian employees, and trappers and traders from miles about stampeding inside the adobe walls of Fort John. Messengers recalled the absent detachments, and the command frantically dug trenches to fend off the assault they were sure was coming.

Spotted Tail wanted to lead an attack but was prevented by the main council of Teton chiefs. A few braves did sweep up 36 animals from the quartermaster's corral (10 belonged to the stage company that carried mail between the Missouri River and Salt Lake City) and added them to the dozen mules they had already taken from the cannon and the transport wagon. More booty came from the American Fur Company storehouse. Fearing they would not be given their annuities because of the attack, the Sioux overawed the traders and rode off with the material.

After they had vanished Sgt. Leodegar Schnyder led a few men to the battlefield and with the help of neighborhood traders gathered up the mutilated corpses. Grattan's body was sent to Fort Leavenworth for burial. The others were tumbled into a shallow grave 10 feet in diameter, its site marked only by a heap of stones.

Retribution

The totality of the Grattan disaster quickened the pace of life at Fort Laramie. Reinforcements arrived as soon as slow communications and distance allowed. Maj. William Hoffman replaced Lieutenant Fleming as post commander. The overflow of new





officers and enlisted men necessitated the swift building of new quarters, mostly of adobe.

Patrols were intensified—with reason. The day after Major Hoffman reached Fort Laramie, Spotted Tail and his warriors accepted the challenge: they attacked a mail stage 22 miles away, killed three of the men on it, wounded the fourth, and made off with $10,000 in gold. After that troops escorted supply trains and stagecoaches. Outposts were maintained at such key spots as the ramshackle bridge that had been built in 1852-53 across the North Platte near present-day Casper, Wyoming.

Thanks to the vigilance, the emigrants of 1855 suffered no more than normal annoyances as their wagon trains wound through the Sioux country. To the War Department, however, this was not enough. Humiliated by the extent of Grattan's defeat, it sought to place full blame for the debacle on the treachery of the Indians. They had precipitated the murders, the argument ran, as a means of obtaining the annuities that the Sioux believed would be denied them because of the death of the cow. Unless retribution came hard and fast, their success might lead to worse trouble. Lieutenant Fleming summed up the feeling when he wrote nervously from Fort Laramie that if the perpetrators of the deed were not sufficiently punished, "then great sacrifice of life may be expected; as all the surrounding tribes, stimulated by the neglect of this bloody massacre, will join hand in hand and rush on to the slaughter."

The campaign of punishment was placed in charge of Gen. William S. Harney, a veteran of the War with Mexico. Six feet four inches tall, unyielding, and icily thorough in his preparations, Harney marched 600 infantry and dragoons out of his advanced staging post, Fort Kearny, Nebraska, late in August, 1855.

Accompanying the force was one of the most able and dashing of the Army's topographical engineers, Lt. G. K. Warren. With his long flowing hair and black moustache, young Warren (he was 25 in 1855) looked like a cross between the famed explorer of the previous decade, John Charles Frémont, and the ill-fated military hero of the 1870s, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer. His account of the 1855 expedition gives a different picture of events than does Harney's official report.

From civilians traveling eastward Harney learned

that a band of Brulé Sioux were drying buffalo meat beside Blue Water Creek four miles or so north of the point where the emigrant trail dropped down to the North Platte River at Ash Hollow. Eager to deliver a crushing blow, the general sent his cavalry under cover of darkness to the bluffs at the rear of the Brulé camp, where they could cut off the Indians' retreat.

At dawn the infantry advanced. Harney said later that Little Thunder, Brave Bear's successor as chief of the Brulés, came to him under a white flag of truce, begging for mercy. Warren, by contrast, says that the Indians were already retreating, having detected the cavalry movement, and that Harney stopped them by sending a messenger after them with a flag of truce. Then, as soon as the cavalry was in better position, he said he would attack unless Little Thunder turned over to him all those who had participated in the preceding year's outrages.

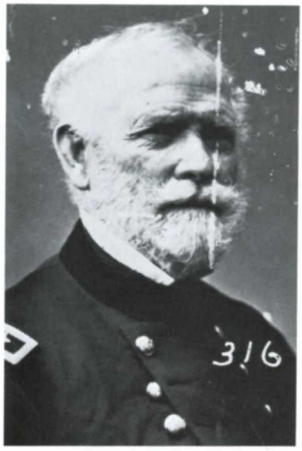
The conditions were impossible to meet, and the battle began. Spotted Tail and other braves fought a desperate rear guard action, trying to protect the women and children. The cavalry—Harney called their charge "brilliant"—cut most of them off. Diving behind boulders and into nooks in the bluff, Brulés of both sexes and all ages fought like cornered animals. Warren wrote, as Harney did not, of "wounded women and children crying and moaning, horribly mangled by bullets." Eighty-six Sioux died. Seventy women and children, one of Spotted Tail's four wives among them, were captured. An unknown number of wounded were carried away by those who broke out of the net. Harney's casualties were five killed, seven wounded.

Grattan was revenged, but there still remained the Indians who had robbed stagecoaches and horse herds. After sending his prisoners to Fort Kearny, the general marched on up the North Platte to Fort Laramie. His temper was not improved when, shortly before his arrival, raiders made off with 50 of the post's horses.

After settling in, he met with the peaceable bands who, at the suggestion of their agent, Thomas Twiss (Fitzpatrick had died of pneumonia in 1854), had gathered there in the hope of disassociating themselves from the more hostile groups. Ignoring their good intentions, Harney told them that unless the

Spotted Tail (top) became chief of the Brulé Sioux because of his fighting qualities rather than his birth. He took part in the destruction of Grattan's detachment, and later offered himself up with two others to spare his tribe. After the treaty of 1868, he became an advocate of compromise with the whites.

Little Thunder, a Brulé chief, fought against both Grattan and Harney. He was a giant of a man, standing 6 feet 6 inches tall, and of keen intellect.



To punish the Indians who had wiped out Grattan's force, the army sent William S. Harney (above) with a powerful body of dragoons and infantry. A tough veteran of campaigns in Florida and Mexico, Harney rejected overtures for peace by Little Thunder, one of the Brule' Sioux's fighting chiefs, and sent his soldiers forward to do bloody slaughter on the cornered Indians at Ash Hollow. The official army map on the opposite page diagrams Harney's strategy: trap the Indians between cavalry and infantry.

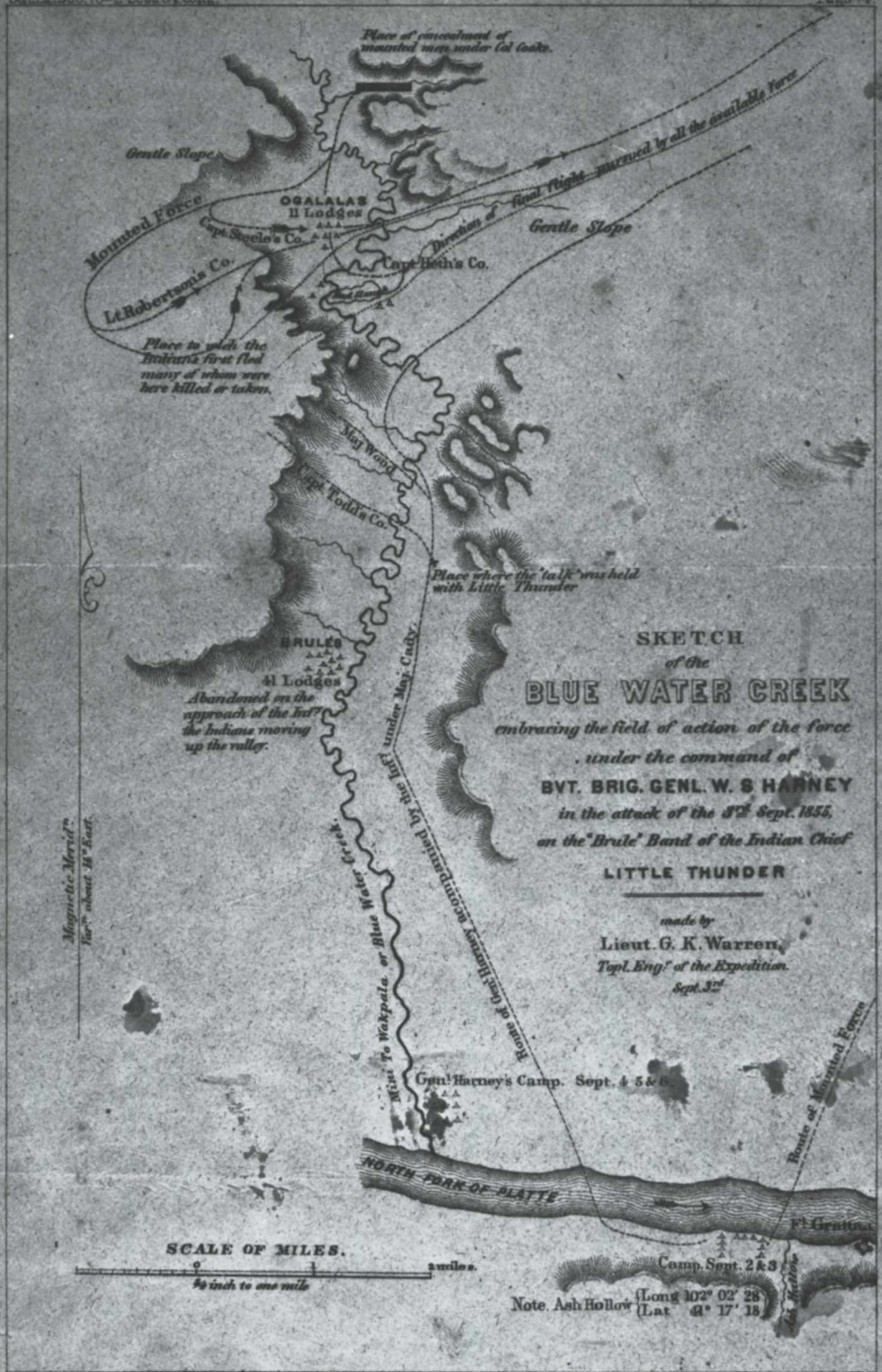
warriors responsible for the past year's raids along the trail surrendered, the entire tribe would suffer the consequences.

When word of the ultimatum reached the Brulés, Spotted Tail and two brothers of the slain Brave Bear, Red Leaf and Long Chin, decided to save their people by turning themselves in. Fully expecting to be hanged, they put on their finest costumes and rode into the fort singing their death songs. Harney sent them to Fort Leavenworth beside the Missouri to await execution. One of Spotted Tail's wives and at least one of his daughters went with him.

Still Harney was not satisfied. Despite miserable weather he marched, between September 29 and October 19, from Fort Laramie through the heart of Sioux country to Fort Pierre on the Missouri, daring the Indians to attack. None did. Completely sure of himself then, he sent out orders for all headmen to meet him at the post on March 1, 1856. As the time neared, blizzards swept the land. The Indians nevertheless braved the cold to attend.

Sternly the general warned that the right of whites to travel along the Missouri River and through the Platte Valley, as guaranteed by the Treaty of Fort Laramie, must be scrupulously honored. To those routes he added another—the old fur-trade road he had followed from Laramie to Fort Pierre. The Indians agreeing, he promised that whites would be kept out of the rest of their country. He restored the annuities that had been suspended and ordered that the women and children captured at Blue Water Creek be released from Fort Kearny. He appointed a respected warrior, Bear's Rib, to be the new head chief of all Sioux, and after the gathering had broken up, he wrote his superiors that thanks to the measures he had taken, "a new era will dawn."

By that time Spotted Tail, Red Leaf, and Long Chin had been pardoned by President Franklin Pierce, largely because of appeals sent to Washington by Agent Twiss. Freed from confinement, the chiefs spent several weeks at Fort Leavenworth beside the Missouri, waiting for spring to make travel feasible. It was an eye-opening experience for Spotted Tail. So many soldiers! Great steamboats snorting up the river to fill the warehouses! Acres of wagons to carry the matériel, ammunition especially, wherever it was needed!

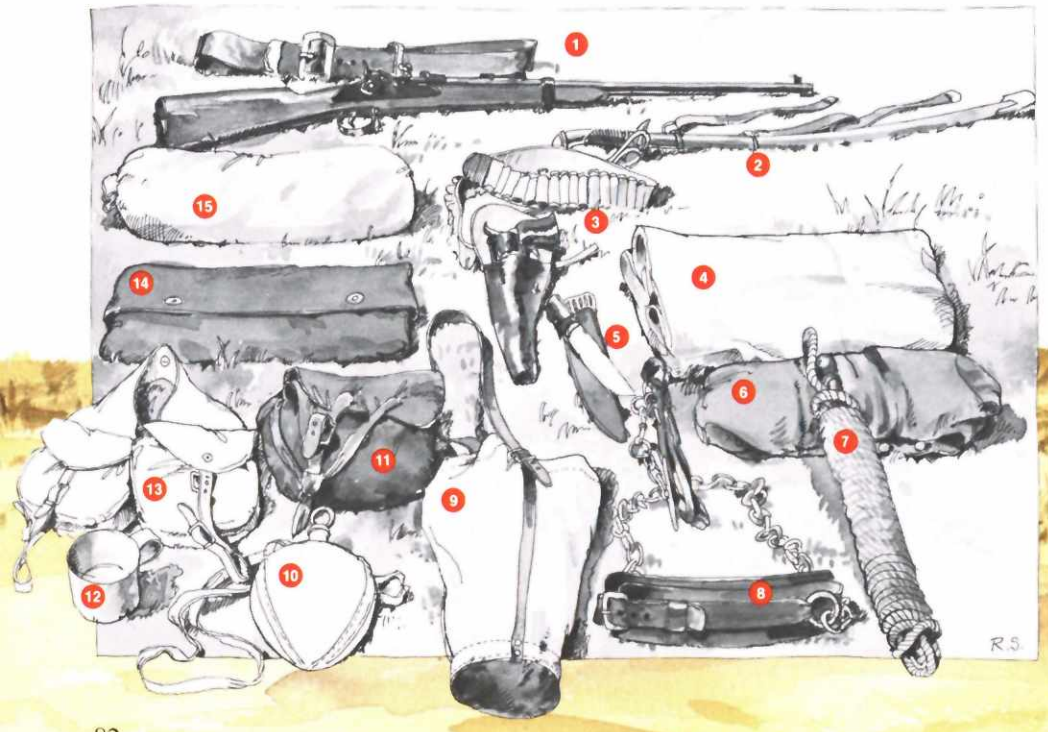

Place of concealment of mounted men under Col Cooke.
Gentle Slope
Mounted Force
OGALALAS
11 Lodges
Capt. Steele's Co.
Lt. Robertson's Co.
Direction of final Flight, pursued by all the available Force
Gentle Slope
Capt. Heth's Co.
Place to which the Indians first fled many of whom were here killed or taken.
Maj. Wood
Capt. Todd's Co.
Place where the "talk" was held with Little Thunder
BRULES
41 Lodges
Abandoned on the approach of the Inf.y the Indians moving up the valley.
SKETCH
of the
BLUE WATER CREEK
embracing the field of action of the force
under the command of
BVT. BRIG. GENL. W. S HARNEY
in the attack of the 8th Sept. 1855,
on the "Brule" Band of the Indian Chief
LITTLE THUNDER
made by
Lieut. G. K. Warren,
Topl. Engr. of the Expedition.
Sept. 30th
Magnetic Merid.n Var.n about 16° East.
Route of Lieut. Hazzey reconnoitred by the Inf.y under Maj. Cady.
Mini Te Wakpala or Blue Water Creek.
Gen.l Harney's Camp. Sept. 4 5 & 6
Route of Mounted Force
NORTH FORK OF PLATTE
Ft. Genttan
SCALE OF MILES.
0 1 2 miles.
½ inch to one mile
Camp. Sept. 2 & 3
Note. Ash Hollow {Long 102° 02' 28"
{Lat 41° 17' 18"

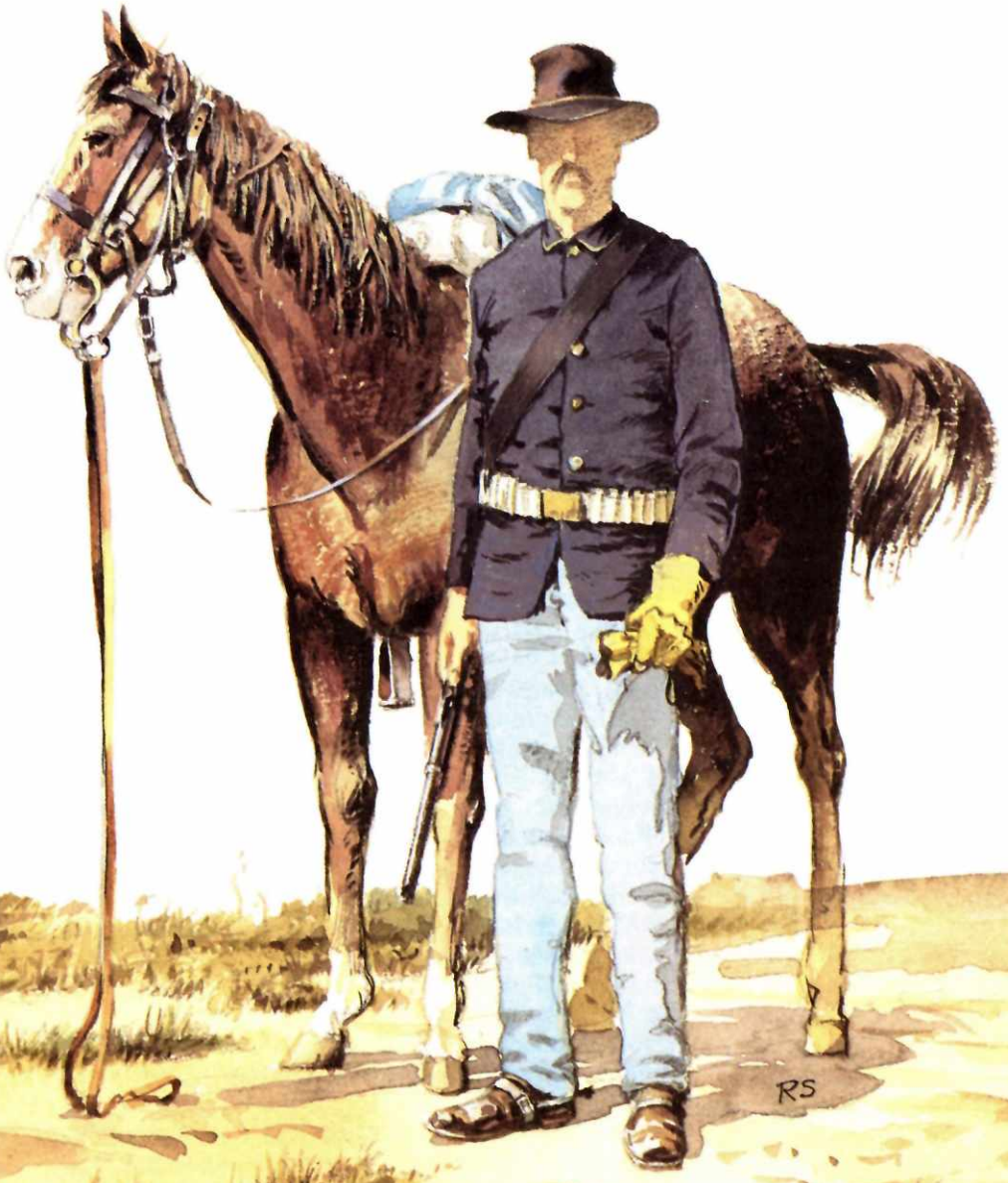
The mounted trooper, unlike his adversary, fought for no great national or personal cause. He was a volunteer, often a recent immigrant, who did his job for his pay—about $13 a month—and the honor of his uniform. The army taught him how to ride, how to use his weapons, how to fight, mounted or dismounted, with his troop or battalion, and it probably gave him whatever basic education he had.

It took the army decades to learn how to fight the Indian on his own terms. The Plains warrior was a master of guerrilla warfare—skillful, highly motivated, and mobile. The army was accustomed to fighting in conventional ways, which placed a premium on superior numbers and firepower. Eventually during the 1870s and 1880s the army went over to mobile tactics, and by the use of better intelligence, converging columns, and campaigns in winter, it succeeded in breaking the last resistance of the hostiles.

The cavalry was the main instrument of this warfare. When employed with infantry, it was a formidable opponent. This illustration shows a veteran trooper of the 2d Cavalry at Fort Laramie in 1876. He is dressed in the uniform that became generally available after 1873: a blue wool blouse, sky-blue trousers, gray shirt, boots, and a broad-brimmed civilian hat in place of the army hat, which was poorly made and quickly lost its shape. He is armed with a .45 calibre Springfield carbine (a single-shot breech-loader) and a .45 Colt revolver, both models 1873. He was authorized a saber, but probably left it behind on campaign because he rarely got close enough to the enemy to use it.

1. Carbine and carbine sling
2. Saber
3. .45 Colt revolver and cartridge belt
4. Shelter half
5. Knife and sheath
6. Overcoat
7. Picket pin and lariat
8. Side line
9. Feedbag
10. Canteen
11. Haversack
12. Tin cup
13. Saddle bags
14. Poncho
15. Forage sack





How different the Indian situation was. The Sioux never had powder enough. In addition, they had to stop fighting every so often to hunt buffalo so that their families would not starve. The whites, by contrast, could continue endlessly.

It was folly, the war chief decided, to fight such a people. The Brulés could—and should—keep Pawnees out of the hunting ground the Sioux shared with the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes in western Kansas and eastern Colorado. They were entitled, because of the way their population was growing, to push into the fine buffalo ranges of the Powder River country northeast of Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains. True, the Crows claimed the region, but the boundaries drawn up at the Treaty of Fort Laramie were ambiguous and in case of a showdown might would make right.

Might made right with the whites, too, and their strength was obvious. Accordingly it would be better, Spotted Tail now believed, to seek peaceful solutions to all disputes. Think how many had suffered because of one cow! When he returned home he would carry that message with him. Many would listen, for great prestige had come to him and his companions as a result of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the tribe.

Many Indians did not listen, however. In the spring of 1857, only a few months after Spotted Tail's return among the Brulés, the seven bands of Teton Sioux assembled in a great council at Bear Butte, not far from present Deadwood, South Dakota. The sight of their own teeming camps awoke old confidences, and with a great shout they agreed that if any whites disregarded Harney's promise and entered their last, best country, the Indians would combine to drive them out.

The determination was soon tested. As compensation for failing to authorize a railroad to the Pacific—sectional rivalries betwean North and South had prevented agreement about its route—Congress instructed the War Department and the Department of the Interior to undertake a million-dollar program of building wagon roads throughout the trans-Mississippi West. As part of the undertaking, Harney's critic, Lt. G. K. Warren, was ordered to examine the resources of the country between the Mississippi River and the Black Hills and also note satisfactory

routes for travel and military installations.

Warren was aware that the assignment violated the promises given the Sioux by both the Treaty of Fort Laramie and General Harney. He was under orders, however, and exploration was the breath of life to him. During July 1857, he marched his party through northern Nebraska, deep in Sioux country, and then cut down to Fort Laramie to replenish his supplies. As soon as he was ready to move again, he split his group. One section under Lt. James McMillan was to return to the Missouri from Fort Laramie by way of the Niobrara River, mapping the stream as it went. Warren meanwhile led 17 men and a pack train due north for the Black Hills.

War parties of Sioux Indians found both parties. Little Thunder's Brulés dogged McMillan's mapmakers down the Niobrara. A larger group of Miniconjous, Sihasipas, and Hunkpapas intercepted Warren at Inyan Kara, a great dome of basalt at the edge of the Plains, and ordered him away. "Their feelings toward us," the explorer wrote later, "... were not unlike what we would feel for a person who should insist on setting fire to our barns." Yet, though the Indians' justification for seeking revenge in battle was as great as Harney's had been at Blue Water Creek, they did not attack Warren's outnumbered party. Instead Bear's Rib himself escorted them to the Niobrara. There they rejoined McMillan and the reunited groups thankfully hurried home with their scalps intact.

Warren sympathized with the Indians. "I have always found the Dakotas exceedingly reasonable beings," he wrote, "with a very proper notion of their own rights." But he was a man of his times, too. The Indians stood in the way of the Nation's expansion, and their removal "is justified ... on that ground alone." Warren's ambivalence toward the Indian problem sprang from conflicting philosophies. For the commanders at Fort Laramie and other frontier posts the dilemma was acutely practical. On one hand, the scattered garrisons had to make good the country's implicit promise that emigrants and settlers could go about their business in safety. On the other, they were obligated to uphold, in the face of frequent objections from impatient citizens, the treaties the government had entered into with the native tribes that occupied the land the invaders coveted.

Warpath

The Quickening Pace of Change

Although the Indians' treatment of the Warren party was technically an insult to the United States, the War Department chose not to notice. Too many other events were absorbing attention in the West, and, as a corollary, at Fort Laramie as well.

The primary problem in 1857 was the so-called Utah War. Its precipitating factor was a series of exaggerated reports about head-on clashes between the leaders of the Mormon Church and officials of the United States. Declaring that the territory was in rebellion, President James Buchanan ordered the army to escort the newest clutch of government appointees to the obstreperous region and make sure they were installed. Some 2,500 troops were assigned to the project.

Among the measures the Mormons took to hold off what seemed to them a tyrannical invasion was the harassment of the troops' supply trains, many of them owned by the civilian contracting firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. Volunteer Mormon militia burned grass at critical camping places, stampeded herds turned out to graze, and occasionally burned whole wagon trains. Bitter weather and deep snow helped the defenders, so that not one army unit came near Salt Lake City during the winter of 1857-58.

As traffic bogged down, the garrison at Fort Laramie was called on to help unravel the snarls. The post also furnished supplies, sometimes unwillingly. The day before Christmas 1857, one unhappy officer wrote the adjutant general in Washington that because of requisitions made by the Utah Expedition, "We have not a pair of stockings, Drawers, or a shirt to issue our men"— a considerable shortage, for by then Laramie's garrison numbered more than 200 men as compared to the 70-odd who had been stationed there during the Grattan episode four years earlier.

Outraged by the failures of the expedition, Congress authorized sending out 3,000 reinforcements. The contract for freighting supplies again fell to Russell, Majors, and Waddell. Swiftly and with no assurance that the government would pay them for the losses they had suffered the previous winter (it never did) the company increased the number of its wagons from 350 to 4,000. It acquired 45,000 draft

oxen, and on March 25, 1858, advertised for 1,500 additional teamsters, all of whom agreed, on accepting employment, not to drink intoxicating liquors, play cards, or use profane language on the trail.

By the time the supposedly well-behaved caravans were ready to roll, the Mormons and the government had worked out terms of peace. Mormon raiders withdrew and a sizable number of army regulars occupied parts of Utah. To keep them supplied long wagon trains continued rolling past Fort Laramie, whose importance as a key depot was reflected by the increase in the size of its garrison to 380 men, necessitating still more construction. To make room for some of the new buildings, old Fort John was slowly dismantled until by 1862 not a trace remained.

In the late summer of 1858, while Russell, Majors, and Waddell's ox-teams were still plodding toward Utah, word reached Fort Laramie of gold discoveries in the vicinity of today's Denver. Several civilian workers at the post, and possibly deserting soldiers as well, hurried recklessly south into land assigned to the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes by the Treaty of Fort Laramie—good buffalo country that the tribes would not willingly yield.

For a time Fort Laramie served as a grocery, express, and mail stop for the new mining region, but when the rush intensified in the spring of 1859, a more direct route became desirable. Russell, Majors, and Waddell, looking for lucrative business to compensate for their losses in the Utah War, jumped to provide the service by means of a splendidly outfitted stagecoach line that followed the South Platte through the outlaw haven of Julesburg in northeastern Colorado to booming Denver. To this enterprise they added, by purchase, a pair of undernourished lines that followed the traditional route of western migration over South Pass in Wyoming. One of those lines provided once-a-week service from the Missouri River through Fort Laramie to Salt Lake City. (Its meager, mule-drawn wagons were beloved at the fort, for one could travel in them between the post and the Missouri settlements in 12 days, as compared to the 38 days spent on the road by the first army unit to occupy Fort Laramie.) The partners' other acquisition ran between Salt Lake City and Sacramento, California. Together the two lines

Next Page *These officers lounging on the porch of Old Bedlam in 1868 were photographed by Alexander Gardner, a noted cameraman of the Civil War. The seated officer second from right is Lt. Col. Adam Jacoby Slemmer, post commander 1867-68.*



covered 1,966 miles. Neither produced as much revenue as the Denver "branch".

The partners had bold plans, however. Linking all three lines together under the awkward name of Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company, they set out to seize the government's $600,000-a-year contract for carrying all through mail destined for Colorado and California. Currently the California plum was in the pocket of John Butterfield's Overland Mail Company, which operated a 2,800-mile route through the deserts of the Southwest in order to avoid winter snows farther north.

Russell, Majors, and Waddell loudly proclaimed that their shorter line through Fort Laramie could provide faster service without interruption from snow. (They did not mention Indians.) To prove their contention they inaugurated one of the most spectacular promotion stunts in American history—the Pony Express. Relays of carefully chosen riders mounted on sequences of picked horses would speed special, lightweight mail from the railhead at St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento in 10 days—a magical 3 days from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie.

At the time of making the boast, the promoters knew the express could not pay for itself. High charges—$5 for a half-ounce letter—would hold down volume. Moreover, a bill authorizing a telegraph line to California was being debated in Congress and was almost certain to pass. Once the wires were strung there would be scant reason for anyone's waiting 10 days to get an important message to its destination. So the Pony Express, whose costs for equipment and operations during 18 months approached $750,000 (against receipts of about $90,000) was doomed from the start. But that wasn't the point. After the Nation had been sufficiently excited by the drama of the stunt, Congressional friends of the partners would start pushing hard to have the overland mail contract switched to them.

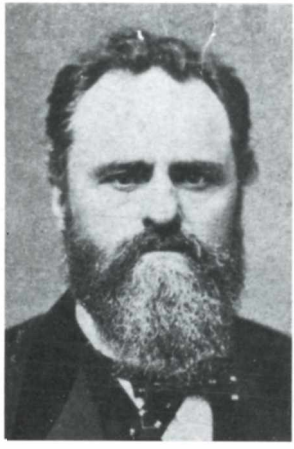
Service began on April 3, 1860. As the partners had anticipated, a telegraph line along the North Platte was authorized two months later. But what they had not expected was the election, in November 1860, of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States and the subsequent secession of the South early in 1861.

Southern forces promptly disrupted Butterfield's Overland Mail, and in March 1861, Congress authorized the operators to move the Nation's main transcontinental mail line from the Southwest to the central route currently being ballyhooed by Russell, Majors, and Waddell. When the government's mail subsidies stayed with the relocated line, the overextended firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell went bankrupt. The Butterfield line meanwhile floundered badly trying to adjust to the new route, and as a result of the many confusions the entire Overland Mail project fell into the hands of Ben Holladay, a big, spade-bearded stagecoach operator and freighter from the Pacific Northwest.

Holladay found problems. The unusually heavy snows and rains of the spring of 1862 turned sections of the trail into a quagmire. Still more frightening was an upsurge of Indian troubles, for at the outbreak of the Civil War, Federal troops had been drawn east, leaving the western forts, Laramie among them, seriously undermanned. Scenting opportunity, war parties took to falling on stagecoaches and isolated stations all along the trail. Passengers died, buildings went up in smoke, livestock vanished. For a time that spring no mail moved to California and the new silver fields of Nevada except by way of the Isthmus of Panama.

Ben Holladay tried to overcome the obstacles by changing the route traveled by his stages. He abandoned the North Platte road in favor of traveling along the South Platte as far as the site of present-day Greeley, Colorado. There his coaches swung northwest to the vicinity of modern Laramie, Wyoming, (not to be confused with Fort Laramie more than 100 miles away) and then headed for Salt Lake City approximately along the route now followed by the Union Pacific railroad.

One reason for the switch, he said, was the remoteness of the route from hunting grounds favored by the Sioux and Cheyennes. A more probable reason was a saving in distance. Despite its dip into Colorado, the new thoroughfare was shorter than the historic, northward-bulging trail along the North Platte. The South Platte road also brought the Nation's main transcontinental mail line within 54 miles of bustling Denver, an important factor to profit-minded Ben Holladay.



Ben Holladay got into freighting during the Mexican War, made considerable profits during the California gold rush, and retired wealthy in 1866 after selling out to Wells Fargo.

The change, however, injured the government. The army now had to find troops enough, during wartime, to guard *two* roads through present Wyoming—the new mail route and the old North Platte road, which was still followed by the telegraph wires and, because of its better camping places and surer supplies of water, by many emigrant trains bound for Utah, California, and the Northwest.

Since troops of the regular army were not available for guard duty, strategists fell back on volunteers. Californians under Col. Patrick E. Connor took over the patrolling of both trails west of the Continental Divide. Lt. Col. William O. Collins and eight companies of the 11th Ohio Cavalry, with headquarters at Fort Laramie, were directed to protect the two trails east of the divide by means of scattered outposts. One of those bases, located on Holladay's new line and named for Fort Laramie's commander, grew into the present city of Fort Collins, Colorado.

The unexpected appearance of the volunteer units checked the Indians for a time. "I never," wrote Colonel Collins' son Caspar (for whom Casper, Wyoming—with an "e"—is named), "saw so many men so anxious to have . . . a fight with the Indians." And the Denver *Commonwealth* editorialized on September 17, 1863, "The presence of No. 1 [i.e. first-class] troops is all that has restrained the Indians from hostility."

The calm did not last, especially in Colorado. Although a few Cheyenne and Arapaho chiefs there had been persuaded to sign a new treaty in 1861 reducing their once vast reservation to an oblong of hot, dry land in southeastern Colorado, the majority of the tribesmen continued to roam at will through their old hunting grounds, dotted now with the invaders' towns, homesteads, and wagon roads. Rumor said, probably correctly, that although the Indians seemed quiet, they were actually collecting horses and arms for a do-or-die outbreak.

The widespread attacks erupted on the Colorado plains in the spring of 1864 and spread swiftly into Kansas and Nebraska. Ranch houses burned; dozens of white civilians died; women and children, a few of whom we will meet again, were carried away into captivity.

As part of a desperate effort to handle the situa-

tion, Colorado authorities sought to separate hostile from friendly bands by ordering the latter to go to their new reservation or risk being shot on sight. A few hundred Cheyennes, accompanied by a handful of Arapahoes, obeyed and set up their tipis on Sand Creek, north of the Arkansas River. Whether or not the majority of the males in the supposedly docile haven really were "friendlies" or were warriors seeking respite during the cold winter months has never been determined.

No military man in Colorado at the time tried to learn. They were Indians and that was enough. At dawn on November 29, 1864, when most of the village's men were away hunting, 700 Colorado volunteers under a one-time Methodist preacher, Col. John M. Chivington, fell on the Sand Creek sanctuary without warning. When the abrupt carnage, rendered ghastly by obscene atrocities, was over, 150 or so Indians were dead, two-thirds of them women and children.

Recovering from their first panic and aflame with hatred, the different bands of Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes gathered in a great council on Cherry Creek in western Kansas. There the southern Sioux, with whom they were most closely allied, joined them in smoking the war pipe. Even Spotted Tail went along under pressure of his fellows.

Though fighting in the dead of winter when ponies were thin and families had to be fed was difficult, the chiefs agreed to launch an immediate retaliatory strike against the Colorado hamlet of Julesburg and the little fort, Camp Rankin, that guarded it. The strategy adopted was to have 10 chosen warriors decoy the fort's whole garrison into an ambush.

It almost worked. On the morning of January 7, 1865, the 10 slipped down a gully close to the stockade and then burst out shooting at soldiers talking near the gate. Guards shot back and the Indians pretended to flee. Sixty soldiers pounded out in pursuit, but before the trap could be sprung a few young men eager for the glory of striking the first blow broke from cover. The cavalrymen whirled around. Although 14 died, the rest, along with several civilians, regained the stockade.

All else was a success. The attackers made off with a herd of beef cattle and plundered the town store and the stage company warehouse of enough



James M. Chivington, colonel of Colorado militia, fought Indians with an implacable hatred. This former Methodist preacher led the slaughter of scores of defenseless Cheyenne at Sand Creek.

flour, bacon, corn, and sugar to feed the bands for weeks to come. Elated by the victory, the combined councils next decided to move north into the Black Hills and Powder River region. There, if all went well, they would prevail on the northern Tetons, the Northern Cheyennes, the Northern Arapahoes, and the embittered Sioux fugitives from the terrible Minnesota uprisings of 1862 to join them in all-out war against the common enemy. Then the sweeping, cloud-heaped lands they loved so dearly would be their own again.

To prepare themselves for the hard winter journey, they raided the South Platte Valley far and wide, stripping ranches and Denver-bound wagon trains of more provisions, livestock, and arms. For good measure they burned hay and houses, killed civilians without compunction, tore down miles of telegraph wire, and easily dodged the soldiers that came out of Nebraska against them. On February 2, they again struck Julesburg. While part of the warriors kept Camp Rankin's small garrison pinned inside the stockade, the rest, aided by the women, loaded scores more packhorses with provender. They then set the town afire, and as the smoke towered into the sky behind them, the massed villagers, making a track a mile wide, moved their loaded travois up Lodgepole Creek, headed for the North Platte and the wild lands beyond.

The only obstacle in their way was whatever force Colonel Collins, commanding officer at Fort Laramie, could pull together from the small outposts he had scattered at wide intervals along the frozen river.

Muddles

Collins threw up his barrier at Mud Springs, a tiny telegraph station 105 miles east of Fort Laramie. Of itself the place did not amount to much. Five civilians manned it; nine soldiers of the 11th Ohio acted as guards. Its very weakness drew the traveling Indians. They ran off its horse herd on February 4, as Collins was promptly informed by the still intact wires, and their scouts kept riding around as if contemplating an attack on the station itself.

By telegram Collins ordered Lt. William Ellsworth, in command at Camp Mitchell, halfway between Fort Laramie and Mud Springs, to ride to the beleaguered station with as many men as he could

spare. Then, at nightfall, while the thermometer dropped toward zero, Collins himself galloped out of Fort Laramie with 25 picked men. Another 100 were to follow at dawn with supply wagons. This sudden reduction in numbers so alarmed the soldiers still at the fort that they began building breastworks out of sacks of corn, in case the Indians came their way.

Ellsworth and 36 troopers reached Mud Springs an the morning of February 5 and put their weary mounts inside the stockade. Almost immediately the Indians attacked. Scattered shooting kept up all day with negligible results, for the fighters were reluctant to expose themselves. Then, as the defenders' ammunition ran low, Ellsworth concocted an effective stratagem. He threw open the corral gate and stampeded the horses outside. Booty! The bored warriors raced after the animals, then proudly returned to their camps for supper and a victory dance.

The pause allowed Collins' advance party to slip into the stockade at 2 a.m. on February 6. They were dead tired, having ridden 105 miles in 30 hours, with only a brief rest stop at Camp Mitchell. But they were ready when the Indians returned to the siege at dawn. Their heavy fire cooled the attackers' ardor, and the Indians withdrew.

The sight of Collins' supply train, which appeared on the 7th, brought them swarming back, but by throwing the wagons into a circle and digging rifle pits among the little sand knolls in the vicinity, the soldiers held them off. Still, it was a victory for the Indians. Only two of their men were wounded (the figure is from George Bent, half-Cheyenne son of trader William Bent; George was with the Indians on the march) whereas Collins lost two killed, 16 wounded, and 10 disabled by frostbite. And the way north was wide open.

Shortly thereafter Collins' term of enlistment expired, and he was replaced by hard-drinking, fiery-tempered, Indian-hating Col. Thomas Moonlight. Moonlight, who had served in Colorado during the Julesburg uprisings, was an eminently unsuitable choice. The plains that year needed either a good fighter or a good diplomat, and Fort Laramie's new commander was neither.

The flight of the Southern Cheyennes and their allies into the north was only part of the problem. Still more trouble was resulting from a stampede of

gold miners to fields that had been opened in Idaho and western Montana during the early years of the 1860s.

Many of the stampeders came from the Colorado and the Missouri frontier. The bulk of them passed by Fort Laramie and then followed the North Platte to the top of its northern bulge. From there they took one of two trails past the Bighorn Mountains into Montana.

The route along the west side of the Bighorns was worked out by Thomas Fitzpatrick's former partner in the fur trade, lanky Jim Bridger. Its main advantage was that it lay outside the hunting grounds claimed by the Sioux. Its demerits: difficult stream crossings and a shortage of grassy campgrounds.

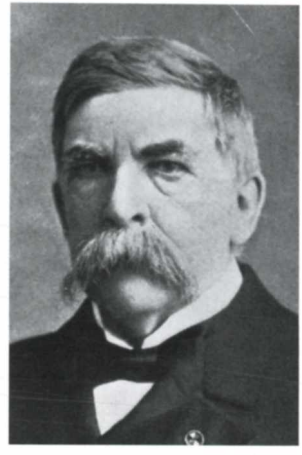
The other route, which skirted the east side of the Bighorns, led through the Powder River country, where buffalo teemed and the northern Tetons still lived as nearly as possible in their old ways. A road through that area was illegal and dangerous, but was relatively smooth, and grass for livestock abounded. The whites who scouted the way, John Bozeman and John Jacobs, promoted it enthusiastically in order to be employed as pilots (eventually the trail was known by Bozeman's name alone), and in 1864 upwards of a thousand wagons followed them north despite harassment by the angry Indians.

On March 3, 1865, Congress gave this boiling pot one more stir by appropriating money to improve the Bozeman Trail and build another road from the Missouri River through extreme northern Nebraska to a junction with the Bozeman trace at some suitable place in the Powder River country. The Treaty of Fort Laramie, in short, was being systematically reduced to less than a scrap.

The northern Sioux were certain to resist. Moreover, they could expect substantial aid from at least some of the Oglalas, Brulés, Southern Cheyennes, and Southern Arapahoes currently moving northward. White strategists decided, accordingly, to launch a strong enough campaign to force the Colorado Cheyennes back to their own reservation and then cow the Sioux into coming to Fort Laramie to sign yet another treaty. The operation would be costly and would involve thousands of soldiers, but by the spring of 1865 it seemed possible. The Civil War was drawing to a close, and troops could soon be diverted

to the West—or so the army believed, not foreseeing how eager the battle-weary Union soldiers would be to return home once the Confederacy had capitulated.

The general in charge of the projected campaign was a former civil engineer and railroad builder, Grenville M. Dodge, new head of the Army's Department of the Missouri. During the war Dodge had made a reputation as a fighter and repairer of war-damaged railway lines. The Union Pacific, which had been creeping west from Omaha at less than snail's pace since its authorization in 1862, was eager to obtain his services, but the army would not release him until the Indians were quieted and, if possible, removed from the Union Pacific right-of-way and the grant lands the railroad hoped to sell to farmers.



Grenville M. Dodge, soldier, civil engineer, and one of the authors of the army's grand offensive on the High Plains in 1865.

Dodge's plan for meeting these demands was a giant pincer operation by three columns. One would drive toward the Black Hills from the Missouri River. Two would gather at Fort Laramie. Of the latter two, one would push straight north to the Black Hills. The other would march up the Bozeman Trail, build a fort beside one of the upper forks of the Powder River and then head for a rendezvous with the other columns in southeastern Montana.

Field commander of the project and leader of the thrust along the Bozeman Trail was Colonel Connor of California, whose defeat of the Bannock Indians in southern Idaho in 1863 had turned him into a western hero and had brought him a brigadier-general's star. Connor wanted 4,000 men for the campaign, but had to settle for 2,500, some of them Confederate prisoners who avoided jail by joining the Union Army for service in the West.

Patrick E. Connor, Irish-born veteran of the Mexican War and campaigns in the west, routed the Arapahoe on the Tongue River, August 1865.



During the planning stages of the campaign, Dodge learned that more than a thousand Sioux—men, women, and children, the Laramie Loafers included—were camped at their agency about 8 miles east of Fort Laramie. All avowed peace, and some were even trying to learn farming from their agent, but the number seemed too great for so sensitive an area at that particular time. Accordingly Dodge ordered Colonel Moonlight to move the lot of them to Fort Kearny, Nebraska, in the heart of country roamed by their ancient enemies, the Pawnees.

And this brings us back to the northward-moving

coalition of Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes.

The union had begun to show cracks. Sustained war had no place in the culture of the Plains Indians. Although every male was trained from boyhood to be an accomplished warrior, the goal was personal glory. Fights were sporadic and opportunistic, and generally undertaken by small war "parties," in itself a revealing word. Success was measured not by the amount of territory seized or reparations levied, but by booty taken and coups counted, a coup being practically any deed of personal bravery—simply touching an enemy's horse, for example.

A dead man could not boast of his coups during victory celebrations. Besides, every male's services as a provider for his family were vital to the band's well-being. Accordingly, though a man might face death willingly in the defense of his village or fight with wild recklessness when trapped by superior enemy forces, he did not risk casualties that could be avoided. Stealth and surprise were the fundamentals of strategic planning. If those elements failed, perhaps because of unfortunate "magic," a war party saw no shame in running away to fight again some other time.

Marshalling large forces from many bands occurred only under stress of such extraordinary events as Chivington's massacre of the camp at Sand Creek. Even then the goal of revenge was short-term, for sustaining an "army" in the field for extended periods was impossible. It is amazing that the Sioux-Cheyenne-Arapaho combination held together as long as it did.

Once the mobile homes had reached the White River country of Nebraska and South Dakota the dissolution began. Though many Southern Cheyennes continued to the Powder River country with part of Red Cloud's Oglala band, Spotted Tail's and Little Thunder's Brulés dropped out. The excitement was over; the future looked bleak. The once-rich White River hunting grounds had been depleted by the Sioux' own eagerness to obtain hides for trade. Coupled with that were grim memories of the persistence with which white armies returned again and again to battle, backed by long wagon trains loaded with supplies. Would it not be wise, Spotted Tail argued in council, to go to Fort Laramie and make peace? Then perhaps the Brulés would be allowed to

return to eastern Colorado and western Kansas, where buffalo could still be found and the young men's zest for war could be satisfied with traditional raids against the Pawnees.

The Brulés agreed, and in April 1865 most of them turned themselves in to Colonel Moonlight at the fort. Moonlight, who had not yet received Dodge's order to move the Platte River Sioux to Fort Kearny, told them to join the others at the agency until he could determine what to do with them. By that time the village at the agency had grown so big that the agent recruited a police force of Indian "soldiers" under an able half-breed, Charles Elston, to maintain order.

About this same time Moonlight heard rumors of a gathering of hostile bands in the Wind River Valley 200 miles to the northwest. Off he rode with 500 men, saw not an Indian, and returned in a black mood. This and (it was rumored) his heavy drinking brought on an exhibition of brutality that sent shock waves throughout the plains.

Moonlight's version of what happened went like this. Charles Elston of the agency police learned that a pair of influential Oglalas, Two Face and Black Foot, were holding a white woman and her small daughter captive in a camp on the north side of the river. The woman's name was Eubanks, and she had been seized by a Cheyenne warrior during the tribe's raids into Kansas during the summer of 1864. Two Face and Black Foot had bought her and her daughter from their Cheyenne master and were holding them as slaves under appalling conditions. Outraged, Elston and some of his Indians rescued the prisoners and took them, along with Two Face, Black Foot, and three or four others, to Fort Laramie, where the Indians were locked in the guardhouse. There Two Face and Black Foot grew so truculent, Moonlight reported later, that "I concluded to Tie them by the neck with a trace chain suspended from a beam of wood and leave them there without a foothold."

Indian versions, as recounted by George Bent and others, were different. They said that Two Face, Black Foot, and their followers wanted to surrender but felt they must prove themselves because other Oglalas under Red Cloud were notoriously hostile. Accordingly they purchased Mrs. Eubanks and her child in order to turn her in as evidence of good will.

The drunken Moonlight, however, refused to listen to their explanations and ordered gallows built on a slope overlooking the fort. There, on May 26 and in spite of protests from Mrs. Eubanks herself, he hanged the pair in chains and left the bodies dangling for weeks.

To the Indians there was no greater degradation than hanging. In their eyes, moreover, this execution was inexcusable. They were still shaken by the event when General Dodge's order for the removal of the agency camp to Fort Kearney arrived. Unwilling now to trust any white man—what would happen to them if they were disarmed among enemy Pawnees?—the bands determined to break away.

Moonlight placed Capt. W. D. Fouts of the 7th Iowa Volunteer Cavalry in charge of the removal. Incredibly enough, Fouts let the Indians keep their arms and horses. He did not distribute ample ammunition to part of the escort he commanded. Discipline among the troops was lax, for the men, who had enlisted only for the duration of the Civil War, felt wronged in being held beyond their time in the Indian country. On the first night of the march several of them relieved their disgruntlement by forcing Sioux women into their tents and were not reprimanded by their officers, a circumstance that stiffened the Indians' determination still more.

The break, planned in large part by Spotted Tail, was scheduled to take place at Horse Creek, scene of the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty 14 years before. During the night scouts unchallenged by sentries found a safe ford across the North Platte and marked it with tall willow wands. Shortly before dawn horses were saddled, travois hitched, possessions loaded, children quieted. Most tipis were left behind because of the need to travel light and fast.

When day broke, the stealthy march toward the river was underway. Attempts by the surprised whites to check it were disorganized and futile. Captain Fouts and four others died trying, and the escape was completed without loss to the Indians. This time Spotted Tail's Brulés did not stop until they had reached the Powder River.

Notified by telegram of what had happened, Moonlight gathered up 230 men and rushed off in such hot pursuit that he broke down the unit's horses. When forced to stop to rest, he picked a natural trap.

Indians who had been dogging the column's flanks stampeded the bulk of the unsaddled animals away. The humiliated cavalrymen had to burn their equipment and limp back to Fort Laramie afoot, a debacle that ended Colonel Moonlight's military career.

Fiascos continued without him. The columns that Gen. Patrick Connor was gathering at the fort as part of the projected three-way invasion of the Sioux' northern homeland were stalled for weeks by a shortage of wagons, muddy roads, Indian strikes, and threats by the troops to mutiny. The delays gave the Sioux and Cheyennes time to mass a large force and launch a diversionary attack, at dawn on July 25, 1865, against Fort Laramie's principal outpost, a rough stockade guarding the bridge across the Platte 125 miles or so to the west. Although the Indians failed to eliminate the fort, they claimed victory, for during the battle they killed 28 whites. One was young Lt. Caspar Collins.

Five days after the battle, Connor finally started close to a thousand men, 179 Pawnee and Winnebago scouts among them, toward the Bozeman Trail. His intentions were bloodthirsty. He had instructed his own officers and those of the other two converging columns, "You will not receive overtures of peace or submission from the Indians, but will attack and kill every male Indian over twelve years of age."

On the southernmost fork of the Powder River, part of his command chopped down enough cottonwood trees to build a collection of log shanties grandly named Fort Connor, the first official government action to improve the Bozeman Trail. Connor meanwhile led the rest of the men across the divide separating the Powder from the Tongue River. On the latter stream he surprised about 700 Arapahoes engaged in breaking camp. A headlong charge much like that of Chivington's at Sand Creek carried the troopers into the middle of the village. "Our men had no time to direct their aim . . .," one of the officers wrote afterwards. "Squaws and children fell among the dead and wounded. The scene was indescribable." And heroic. The Indians managed to break clear, leaving only 7 women and 11 children in Connor's hands—plus 35 of both sexes dead in the village. Methodically the visitors destroyed 250 lodges and their contents and then withdrew with more than 500 Indian horses. Regrouping, the Arapahoes

stabbed repeatedly at the rear guard, trying to recover the captives, but toward midnight were driven away.

The other two columns did not fare as well. After coming together in the wild country north of the Black Hills, they grew confused in the unmapped land and lost several hundred animals to weather, exhaustion, and Indian skirmishers. Reduced at last to abandoning their supply wagons and living off horse meat, they groped their way to Fort Connor. At about that same time the party that had been surveying the new road west from Sioux Falls was brought to the ramshackle refuge by one of Connor's patrols. A rebellious escort and Indian sniping had reduced it, also, to ineffectiveness.

Adding bitterness to the defeat were orders from Washington directing Connor to cancel the $20 million campaign. Eastern humanitarians were vigorously protesting the nature of Western Indian fighting—the Sand Creek disaster, Moonlight's hanging of the two Sioux at Fort Laramie without trial, Connor's orders that all adult male Indians should be exterminated, and the atrocities committed by his Pawnee scouts on whatever enemy Sioux they could catch up with. Sourly Gen. Ulysses S. Grant explained to Dodge that the Interior Department, which had control of Indian affairs, had convinced Congress that all that had to be done "was withdraw the troops and the Indians would come in and make peace."

During the fall the dejected troops straggled back to Fort Laramie from the Powder River country, their efforts derided and hope of a new chance ended. Connor lost his command and returned, railing at the shift in policy, to his old post in Utah. A new peace commission was appointed, and Indian runners were sent throughout the Sioux lands with word that inasmuch as the government wished to draw up a new treaty, many presents would be given to those chiefs who came to Fort Laramie with their bands in the spring.

Since the Bozeman Trail was certain to be a main point of discussion—the West was as determined to keep the road open as the Sioux were to close it—old hands at the fort remained unconvinced that a peace offensive would be any more successful in quieting the hostile bands than war had been.

Cross Purposes

The Indian messengers who carried word of the new treaty to the Powder River country turned up an unexpected ally in Spotted Tail's dying daughter. She was only 18, but the winter had been unusually harsh and she may have contracted tuberculosis. Anyway, when the Brulés met in council to consider the messengers' proposals, she let it be known that she, like her father, felt it was folly to oppose the whites. She added that when death came to her, she wanted her burial scaffold raised among the graves in the Fort Laramie cemetery. Spotted Tail agreed. When the end came, he placed her body on a travois drawn alternately by one or the other of her two white ponies and led part of his band on a sorrowful 15-day journey to the post.

Obviously the seeds of sentiment were there, and later romanticists have nurtured them tenderly. Legend says, inevitably, that the girl was extraordinarily beautiful. (Charles Elston, head of the Indian police, however, described her as "stuck up ... always carries a knife and is strong as a mule.") When visiting Fort Laramie with her father, the tales continue, she loved to watch the soldiers parade and yearned to marry an officer, as a few other nubile maidens of her tribe had done.



The scaffold grave of Spotted Tail's daughter stood northwest of the fort, near the military cemetery. She was buried in a ceremony that combined all the pagentry of Sioux and military traditions.

In truth little is known of her. Even her name is uncertain. It may have been Mini-aku ("Water Bringer") or Hinzinwin ("Yellow Buckskin Girl") or Ah-ho-appa ("Wheat Flour"). Conceivably it was all three, for Indian names were related to visions and notable events, and many Sioux had more than one. The single clear thing about her is the impact of her death on Col. Henry E. Maynadier, who in early 1866 was commander of the Nebraska District of the Department of the Platte, with headquarters at Fort Laramie. He was influenced by policy, however, not romance, and does not use the girl's name in his accounts.

He was eager to get the new treaty council moving, and when a messenger came from Spotted Tail requesting permission for the girl's burial at the fort, Maynadier assented immediately. As the Indian group drew near, he and his staff rode out in formal array to meet them.

The funeral was arranged for sunset, March 8, 1866. At the appointed hour the girl's body was

wrapped in a buffalo robe, placed in a pine coffin, and loaded into a horse-drawn ambulance. The regimental band, playing a solemn march, led the way to the cemetery, where an Indian-style scaffold had just been placed atop four tall posts. A large concourse of soldiers and Indians followed.

The post chaplain, Alpha Wright, conducted, with Spotted Tail's permission, a Christian service, which the fort's interpreter translated for the watching Indians. According to Indian custom the girl's prized possessions were then placed beside her for use in her new life. Maynadier added a handsome pair of gauntlet gloves, "to keep her hands warm during her journey." The coffin was lifted onto the scaffold and covered with a red blanket nailed to the supports so that wind would not blow it away. Her two white ponies were slain and their heads and tails amputated. Each severed member was nailed to a separate post, also as symbols of the coming journey.

The next day Maynadier telegraphed the Acting Assistant Adjutant General of the District of Nebraska that the episode would act as an "opening wedge" for developing "a widespread system of education and religion, until the whole [Sioux] nation shall be rescued from the darkness in which they are now." He suggested starting a school at the fort for any Indian children who wished to attend and for the halfbreed offspring of the post's civilian employees. Chaplain Wright, who would do much of the teaching, backed him enthusiastically, and permission was granted. For some months the experiment flourished, but then succumbed (so the silence of the records suggests) to the pressures of unfolding events.

With the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, Maynadier took a different tack. The solemn burial, he wrote, had persuaded "some who had never before believed it, that an Indian had a human heart to work on and was not a wild animal. . . . I attach great importance to this ceremony as rendering beyond doubt the success of the efforts I have made to restore peace."

Alas for hope. Though warm-hearted, Maynadier was also inexperienced and did not comprehend the extent of the split dividing the Teton bands. On one side were those who wanted an accommodation with the whites. Among them were the Loafers, who had

drifted back to Fort Laramie's familiar environs within months after their escape from Captain Fouts at Horse Creek the year before. Spotted Tail's Brulés also wanted peace. They did not like the Powder River country and believed that if they signed a new treaty they would again be allowed to use their favorite hunting grounds in the Kansas-Colorado border area. Many Oglalas, anxious to resume trading at accustomed posts along the North Platte, agreed with the Brulés.

On the other side were young Crazy Horse's hard-core Oglalas, inflexible Sitting Bull's Hunkpapas, the Miniconjous, and other northern Tetons. They refused to have any truck whatsoever with the whites. In between but leaning toward the hostile bands were splinter groups like Red Cloud's Bad Face Oglalas, who could be driven by their need for rifles and powder to meet with white negotiators at least long enough to learn what was being offered. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes associated with the Sioux in the north were by and large opposed to negotiations.

Not one of the hostile chiefs except Red Cloud—and he arrived two weeks late—responded to the runners' invitation that they attend the government's new peace council, scheduled for June 1, 1866. Close to 2,000 Loafers, Brulés, and Oglalas were on hand, however, and when Red Cloud's band appeared toward the middle of the month, Maynadier and three fellow commissioners appointed by the President to conduct negotiations decided blithely to go ahead.

As anticipated, the Bozeman Trail was a primary topic of discussion. Eloquently the commissioners argued that the United States asked nothing new—merely transit rights along a road already in use. To show his generosity the Great Father would give the Indians generous annuities in return for their assent to an already existing situation.

Unhappily for the commissioners' ploy, American authorities were no more united about policy than the Sioux were. The Bureau of Indian Affairs wanted to move gently among its wards. The army, responsible for the safety of the frontier, wanted to grind them into peacefulness. At the very time the commissioners were holding out an olive branch, the War Department decided to string forts along the



Col. Henry B. Carrington. The three forts he built along the Bozeman Trail incited Red Cloud and his followers to resistance and war.

Fort Laramie was a place of kaleidoscopic physical change. Between 1849 and 1885, the army constructed at least 180 buildings here, but never quite satisfied all the needs of shelter for men and animals. The map opposite shows the fort in 1867. A French traveler that year said the fort resembled more a Spanish-American village than a military post.

Bozeman Trail. And that was not an existing situation.

The fort-building assignment was given to Col. Henry B. Carrington, a small, brisk, able administrator and recruiting officer devoid of battle experience. He had long dreamed of commanding his own post, and at last opportunity had come. He traveled in style with more than a thousand men, many of whom were to replace soldiers at Fort Laramie whose terms had expired. A horde of mules pulled 226 wagons loaded with sawmills, mowing machines, tents, bulging sacks of food, and tools of every kind. The families of several officers, including Carrington's, rode in carriages, attended by black servants.

On the evening of June 13, the long column camped beside the North Platte four miles from the fort. The next day Colonel Carrington rode in among the assembled Indians with an imposing escort. When understanding dawned on the Indians, they were astounded. They had agreed to nothing yet—certainly not to forts in the heart of their country—but the United States was acting as if the right were already theirs.

Red Cloud left the scene in a fury (Maynadier called it a tantrum), followed by about half the gathering. Spotted Tail, however, clung to his conviction that the Brulés could survive only by accepting whatever terms were offered, and the Loafers were willing to sign almost anything in exchange for a handout. The commission collected signatures from a dozen chiefs representing about a thousand friendly Indians and went east proclaiming peace. Colonel Maynadier moved on to a new assignment, and Major Van Voast became Fort Laramie's commander.

The dispatches that Carrington sent back to the fort after settling beside the Bozeman Trail were not heartening. He built Fort Reno across the creek and about a mile from ramshackle Fort Connor, which was abandoned. From Fort Reno he moved 67 miles north to the Little Piney, another tributary of the Powder, and began erecting a stockade 800 feet long by 600 wide to enclose the barracks, warehouses, shops and stables of Fort Phil Kearny, his principal establishment. A section of his command then marched 90 miles northwest to the Bighorn River and erected Fort C. F. Smith. Immediately Indian war parties began slashing at all woodcutting


Grave Yard.
47.
Cavalry Stables.
46. Hospital.
Sutler's Res.
Q.M. Store House
48
Commissary's Store House
39.
Lumber
Corn
Sutler's Store.
Comp. Shops
12 Bakery
Ice House
Magazine
Arsenal
11
Officers' Stables
19
9
Post-Office
48
Commissary's Office
42
44
Carpenters
Q.M. Office
41
Q.M. Qrs
Saddlers
Barracks
14
15
17
16
18
8 Officers' Quarters
19
20
Barracks
Laundresses
33
32
31
30
7 Officers' Qrs
5
6 Provost M.
Officers' Qrs
Parade Ground.
Barracks
22
23
Lime
Flag Staff
Ice House
Comm.ts Off.rs Qrs.
2
Guard H.
24
Barracks
26
25
Adjutant's Off.
1
Band Room
28
Ice House
29
Old Channel.
Laramie River.
Scale: 200 Feet to the Inch.



Capt. William J. Fetterman led his command into ambush and annihilation by Crazy Horse and Red Cloud.

John "Portugee' Phillips, whose 236-mile ride in four days brought news of the Fetterman Disaster.



and hay-making crews, and at the emigrant trains that risked the trail on the strength of the government's assertions of peace. Seventeen military men and 58 civilians died that summer and fall.

The nervousness spread to Fort Laramie. When Major Van Voast built a new guardhouse late that summer, he constructed it of stone in such fashion that it could be used as a defensive bastion. During the fall he erected on the northern perimeter of the fort an adobe redoubt whose walls, eight feet high, enclosed a two-acre square. At diagonally opposite corners were towers whose embrasures could cover all four walls. In case of need everyone at the fort could take refuge within the enclosure. The rest of the time the redoubt would serve for storing hay and corralling horses. Teamsters of the Quartermaster's Corps were assigned sleeping quarters in the towers.

Nothing untoward happened, and when Christmas arrived, bitterly cold with a foot of snow on the ground, the officers and their ladies decided to break the tensions with a gala, white-glove ball in Old Bedlam. About 11 p.m., when all was merriment, a huge form stumbling with exhaustion and dressed in an ice-fringed buffalo robe appeared in the doorway, asking hoarsely to see the commanding officer. The spectral figure was that of John (Portugee) Phillips, one of Carrington's scouts. He had just ridden 236 miles, mostly at night to escape observation, to report that 81 men led by Capt. William J. Fetterman had been massacred while riding to the relief of one of Fort Phil Kearny's beleaguered wood parties. Colonel Carrington, Phillips added, wanted reinforcements at once.

Squeeze Play

Blizzards and -23° weather kept the relief Carrington wanted so desperately from leaving Fort Laramie until January 2, 1867. The going was rough for the two companies of cavalry and the four of infantry involved. First the riders had to break a trail through crusted snowdrifts for the supply wagons, and then foot soldiers had to shovel the wheels free whenever they became too clogged to move.

Water for the overworked animals could be obtained only by dipping buckets through holes chopped in the thick ice. Grass was covered by snow, grain gave out, and soon the starving mules were eating at

the wagon tongues and at each others manes and tails. One man froze to death, and the command required two weeks to cover the 236 miles that Portugee Phillips had put behind him in four nights.

The arrival of the column at Fort Phil Kearny turned out to be catastrophic for Carrington. Although fault for the massacre rested on Captain Fetterman's disobedience of orders, the hapless commander was held responsible and ordered back to Nebraska. On January 23 the colonel, his staff officers, a handful of women, one of them pregnant, and three children began their own ordeal. Although the wagons in which the families traveled were boxed in with planks and equipped with small stoves, temperatures inside them dropped as low as -40°. Half the men of the escort suffered frostbite; two eventually had to have fingers and toes amputated. Carrington topped off his own misery by accidentally shooting himself in the thigh. On finally gaining Fort Laramie, he had to enter the post hospital for two weeks' convalescence before resuming his journey into disgrace.

Standard army procedure following such a humiliation at the hands of Indians was a punitive campaign. The Sioux expected one and scattered far and wide to avoid pursuit. To their surprise nothing developed. Weather prevented activity by the relief column at Fort Phil Kearny. Supplies could not get through, and $30,000 worth of livestock died for want of forage. At Fort Laramie the problem lay with the raw recruits recently sent there. Glumly the new commander of the Nebraska Sub-District, Col. Innis Palmer, wrote his superiors that he had been forced to neglect drill in order that the men could build shelters. "Half our Cavalry men would fall off their horses in a charge, and more than half the horses would run away with the men at a firing drill."

Not these weaknesses, however, but considerations of policy led the government to halt the projected campaign. The Union Pacific Railroad was hitting its stride. Its troubles now came from Indian raids rather than supply and labor problems. Moreover, the Kansas Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe were also beginning to lay track across the Central Plains. Settlers were edging close behind, and the Nation's policy makers decided that the time had come to remove all Indian tribes from



This toll bridge over the Laramie River was built in 1853 by Seth Ward and William Guerrier, who operated a trading post across the river from the fort. They charged $2.50 a wagon.

In 1867-68, government commissioners met at Fort Laramie with chiefs of the northern Plains tribes to make peace—in reality to remove them from the path of advancing white civilization. The commissioners found a more tangled world than they could have imagined back east. Some tribes were friendly and in exchange for powder, lead, and provisions would go willingly onto reservations. Others were hostile and unwilling to give up ancestral land to take up a farming way of life. Red Cloud, leader of the Oglala Sioux, refused even to talk until the army abandoned its forts along the Bozeman Trail, in the heart of their hunting country. Eventually most of the Sioux and northern Cheyenne signed the treaty, which gave them a "permanent home" in a sizable reservation and hunting rights along the Powder River. But seeds of conflict remained and within a few years bloody war broke out again.

These photographs were made during the 1868 council. Top, the commissioners sit with Arapahoe and Cheyenne. The two figures to the right of the tent pole are Gen. William S. Harney and Gen. William T. Sherman. Below is a delegation of Sioux chiefs.



Kansas and Nebraska. Those in the southern part of the area would be placed on a reservation in what is now Oklahoma. The Sioux would be moved north to the western half of today's South Dakota.

On July 20, 1867, Congress authorized the appointment of a new peace commission to negotiate with the Indians about the removal and added that if the tribes refused to come to terms, the Secretary of War could enlist 4,000 soldiers to force compliance. More ominously, the Army constructed two new forts on land the Sioux had recently roamed at will. One was Fort D. A. Russell, located near the town of Cheyenne, which had been founded that summer (1867) in anticipation of the coming of the railroad. The line incidentally did not follow the traditional emigrant trail along the North Platte because a route through southern Wyoming was closer to Denver and to potentially profitable coal mines in western Wyoming.

The other new fort, called Fetterman after the captain slain by the Sioux in the massacre that also bears his name, was built on the south bank of the North Platte near modern Douglas. The Bozeman Trail began close by, and the new post could serve as a marshalling point for expeditions ordered to invade the Powder River country.

Unaware of how much more swiftly men and matériel could be brought to bear against them, the Sioux returned to their attacks on Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith. Alert defenses and improved weapons in the hands of the whites upset plans to annihilate a haying party outside Fort C. F. Smith and a group of wood cutters near Phil Kearny, but did not sting the raiders hard enough to make them want to meet the new commission that assembled at Fort Laramie November, 1867. Instead, Red Cloud sent back word that there could be no peace until the hated forts were abandoned.

The whites yielded, for by the end of 1867 the Bozeman Trail was no longer the quickest road to the Montana goldfields. Relatively short routes connected the mining camps with new steamboat landings at Fort Benton, high up the Missouri River. The Union Pacific, moreover, would soon reach the flourishing stage and freight lines rolling north from Utah. So losing the Bozeman Trail would cost comparatively little—especially if the concession

persuaded the Sioux to settle on the proposed reservation in South Dakota. On March 2, 1868, accordingly, President Andrew Johnson ordered Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith abandoned and sent yet another group of negotiators to Fort Laramie to talk to the Indians in April 1868.

As anticipated, the prospects of freeing their land of the forts overshadowed everything else in Sioux thinking. Though a few recalcitrants held back, most of the Tetons sent representatives to the council. Once there, they were stunned by what seemed fresh duplicity on the part of the government. The new reservation, whose western boundary coincided with the present western boundary of South Dakota, would not include the Powder River country. What gain was there, then, in driving out the forts but losing the country around them? The chiefs would not even discuss such a one-sided bargain.



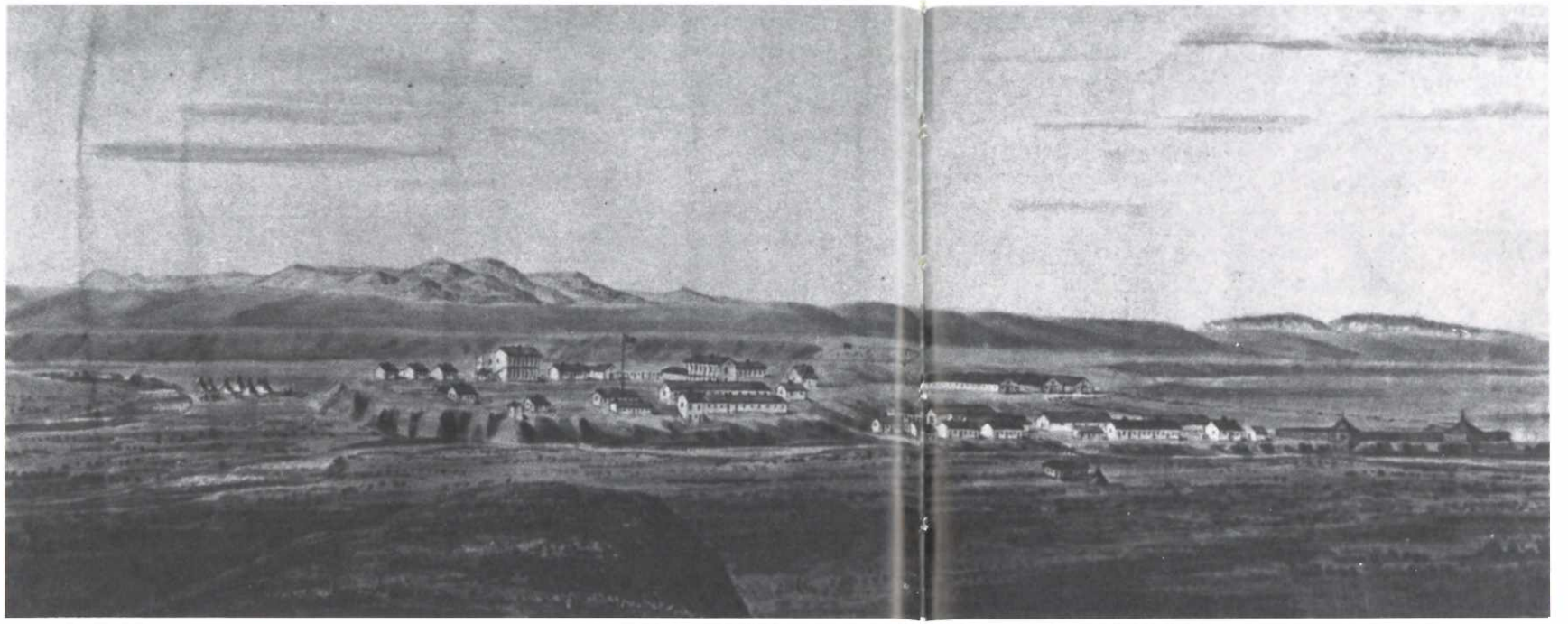
Red Cloud was one of the greatest Sioux leaders. After the 1868 treaty, he worked at keeping his promise to live in peace with whites, but he resisted the inroads of their culture. The shirt below once belonged to the warrior.

Caught in the web of their own inconsistencies, the negotiators compromised. Although the Sioux would have to live on the reservation, where they would receive education in agriculture and rations to help them survive the Dakota winters, they could make hunting trips into the Powder River region. Whites would be excluded from all parts of eastern Wyoming north of the North Platte. In exchange the Indians had to promise only that they would not attack railways, wagons roads, or military posts being built outside their land in South Dakota.

In yielding thus, the negotiators were hoping that buffalo would soon become so scarce along the Powder River that the Indians would voluntarily withdraw to the reservation before white pressures for farming land in the area forced a crisis. This unspoken motive went undetected by the Indians. One after another of the chiefs in attendance signed. Even Red Cloud gave in. After seeing the posts evacuated, he and his followers burned them to the ground and in November rode to Fort Laramie, where the leaders laboriously marked their X's on a copy of the treaty that had been left there for them. Only Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and their followers insisted that the war was not yet over.



The chiefs whose bands did agree to a reservation soon found that they did not like the arrangements that had been made for them. Their agency was located near the Missouri River at a place called





Between 1868 (top) and 1876 (bottom photograph) Fort Laramie matured as a military installation. General Sherman described the earlier fort "as a mixture of all sorts of houses of every conceivable pattern and promise." The two-story building at left is Old Bedlam, which Sherman called rickety. The two long buildings in the center are the soldiers' barracks and the mess hall. Some troops are still under tentage.

By 1876, many new buildings had been constructed, among them a hospital (top center) and cavalry barracks (just to the hospital's right). In this year most buildings were painted a reddish brown.



Sitting Bull took up the war-path after Red Cloud abandoned it. He became the leader of the non-treaty Sioux and won lasting fame when Sioux and Cheyenne under his political direction wiped out Custer at the Little Bighorn in 1876.

Whetstone, a few miles north of the Nebraska-South Dakota border. Sioux who had grown used to the clean, dry air of the High Plains were repelled by the site and by the farm machinery that stood waiting for them beside the agency buildings. Had they been dragged across the entire reservation to this dismal spot in order to be turned overnight into sedentary farmers?

To quiet objections, the army took 17 chiefs and 4 women to Washington and New York City to interview top government officials and see for themselves the great power of the whites. By appealing for justice to an overflow meeting of eastern humanitarians in New York City, the Indians turned the tables on their tour guides and returned home heroes not only to their own people but to many Americans as well. As a result Red Cloud was able to have a temporary agency for the Oglalas situated on the north bank of the North Platte only 30 miles east of Fort Laramie. Spotted Tail, unalterably opposed to becoming a white-style agriculturist, meanwhile had his Brulés relocated on the upper White River close to the southern edge of the tribe's beloved Black Hills. In 1873 Red Cloud's agency was moved to the same general area.

Though perhaps unintended, the shifts were a strategic as well as a political victory for the Indians. Members of nonagency bands were able to visit the new centers during winter to obtain, surreptitiously, food and arms. In the spring they rode back to their old haunts, taking restless young agency braves with them and inculcating them with values that the whites, in their quest for peace, had hoped to eradicate.

There were new foes, too, against whom the young warriors could test their mettle. Surveyors for the Northern Pacific Railroad were working west toward Montana, and although the 1868 treaty had not closed that area to whites, the nontreaty Sioux acted as though it had. Furiously they attacked both the surveyors and their soldier escorts, the latter composed of elements of the U.S. 7th Cavalry commanded by Custer.

The Sioux had no monopoly on despising the 1868 treaty. The whites of Wyoming objected with equal rancour. Why should they be excluded from the country above the North Platte merely to coddle

Indians unable to make efficient use of good land? In addition, time brought steadily mounting rumors of gold in the Black Hills. That country, too, was closed to whites, to the ire of western prospectors.

As excitement mounted, the army in 1874 decided to use the Sioux attacks on the 1873 railroad surveyors as an excuse for conducting a military reconnaisance of the Black Hills, ostensibly to show the Indians that they could not use the rugged country as a sanctuary for future raids. Curiously enough, Custer, who commanded the scouting expedition, allowed several civilian scientists, newspaper reporters, photographers, and prospectors to accompany the military maneuvers. As Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull had prophesied, the treaty of 1868 most definitely had not guaranteed peace.

Last Stands

The building of the Union Pacific Railroad and the creation of the Sioux reservation in western South Dakota changed the role of Fort Laramie in frontier affairs. No longer was the sprawling post charged primarily with helping emigrants safely along their way to new homes beyond the Continental Divide. By the mid-1870s it was but one of many forts arranged in an arc around the reservation, a watchtower designed to keep Indians and whites away from each other's lands.

As the closest post to the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies, Fort Laramie was important enough that its commanders were constantly requesting funds for halting the deterioration of old buildings and the erection of new ones. Though they seldom got as much as they wanted, authorization did come through for a new hospital, new quarters for the post surgeon, and a long, double-story barracks large enough to shelter two companies of cavalry. The structures were architectural eyesores, built of a kind of concrete called lime grout. Plastered over, the walls were then painted with black lines in an attempt to make them resemble masonry. By the time they were completed Fort Laramie contained a heterogeneous mixture of about four dozen frame, log, adobe, and concrete buildings—workshops, storehouses, barracks, offices, stables and what not.

More ambitious was an iron bridge across the North Platte. Recommended as early as 1871 by



George Crook, one of the army's best Indian-fighting generals, was defeated on the Rosebud in June 1876 by warriors under Crazy Horse. The Indians' victory crippled the army's plan to rendezvous columns for a decisive strike at the main Sioux village.

The Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage

The Black Hills gold rush brought a surge of civilian activity to the fort. For many of the prospectors who swarmed into the region, the jumping-off point was Cheyenne. The main route to the gold fields ran north from that freighting center through Fort Laramie. It crossed the Platte over the army's new iron bridge and continued on over a winding tangle of trails to Deadwood, a saloon-lined gulch described as "three miles long and fifty feet wide." Between 1876 and 1887, thousands of passengers, countless tons of freight, and gold worth millions traveled over this road.

The 290-mile run from Cheyenne to Deadwood took about four days. Every 30 or 40 miles there were stopping places, "road ranches," with stables, hay, grain, liquor, often a place to lie down, and usually meals at all hours. The stop just below the fort was Three Mile Ranch, well known as a place of entertainment for off-duty soldiers. Among its attractions were the belles who occupied the ranch's eight two-room cottages. At the fort itself, the stage station was the Rustic Hotel, built in 1876 by the post trader.

All sorts of equipment operated on this line—freight wagons hauled by bull teams, spring wagons, buckboards, anything that would roll—but the aristocrat of the road was the distinctive Concord coach, manufactured by Abbot and Downing in New Hampshire. This vehicle could carry nine passengers inside and the same number on top, plus up to 1,500 pounds of cargo and luggage. A driver perched up front managed the six-horse team with reins, the crack of his long whip, and a stream of epithets.

Concords were built for hard service in all kinds of weather. The bodies, crafted of many varieties of wood, were suspended on leather thoroughbraces which absorbed jolts and gave the ride its characteristic pitch.

Among notables connected one way or the other with the stage line was Mary Jane Canary (inset), better known as Calamity Jane. The epitome of the independent female in the frontier west, she was a teamster with Crook's expedition in 1876 and perhaps with the Black Hills line, served a stint in the boudoirs of Three Mile Ranch, and later claimed some success at stage robbery.





Sgt. Leodegar Schnyder served at the fort 37 years, longer than any other man. Most of that time he was in charge of ordnance. "He was a true soldier, brave and modest," said a comrade, "the most painstaking and conscientious man that I ever knew."

Gen. E. O. C. Ord, it was eagerly plumped for by Cheyenne businessmen eyeing supply contracts for the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies. Finally, in January 1874, the necessary girders were ordered, shipped by rail to Cheyenne, hauled by wagon to the fort, and during the fall of 1875 set in place on stone supports prepared by soldier laborers. After proving able to hold the weight of 13 army wagons loaded with rocks, the structure was accepted early in 1876.

The timing of the improvements turned out to be propitious. The agency Sioux had been growing increasingly restless because of lack of game to hunt, wretched food given them in its place, and, mostly, by a deep anomie brought on by the erosion of ancient lifeways. Fearful for the security of the agencies, the men in charge requested troops. In 1874, in direct violation of the Treaty of 1868, Forts Sheridan and Robinson were built at the touchy spots. Robinson was pointedly named for a lieutenant whom Miniconjou Sioux had killed near Laramie Peak in 1874.

Serious outbreaks might well have occurred even if Custer had not taken an exploratory expedition into the Black Hills. When the miners with him found gold, trouble was certain, for Custer sent a scout called Lonesome Charley Reynolds to the telegraph office at Fort Laramie with an ecstatic report on the area's riches.

Gen. Philip Sheridan, who had been responsible for sending Custer into the Black Hills in the first place, now ordered whites to stay out—at least until geologists could test the accuracy of Custer's report. Then if significant deposits of metal really existed, negotiators would parley with the Indians about another shrinkage of their territories.

Mixed-up times followed. Whites of course did not stay out of the Black Hills. Of those who were caught, some were incarcerated in the Fort Laramie guardhouse just long enough to make them angry. Meanwhile, in May 1875, Walter Jenny, a noted professor of mining engineering, visited the Black Hills under the protection of eight companies of troops from Fort Laramie. Simultaneously, and before Jenny's report was issued, several chiefs were taken to Washington to discuss selling the cool, pine-clad region.

An impasse resulted. Jenny corroborated the rich-

ness of the goldfields, but the chiefs refused to accept the government's offer without first consulting their people. Hoping to prevent distractions that might hinder those talks, tall, bushy-bearded Gen. George Crook, who had made a name for himself fighting Apaches in the Southwest, went into the Black Hills in July. Again troops from Fort Laramie provided the escort. Arriving at one of the mining camps, Crook summoned a mass meeting and asked the prospectors to depart while the Indians considered the government's offer.

The strategy did not work. Many miners declined to leave, and when the Sioux met with the commissioners at the Red Cloud Agency early in September 1875, the majority either refused outright to sell or asked such an exorbitant price—$600 million was one figure—that the talks broke off.

The commanders at Fort Laramie and the posts along the Missouri River thereupon threw up their hands in disgust. So far their patrols had been trying as best their limited numbers allowed to keep trespassers out of the mountains, but now they gave up and the trickle of violators grew to a stampede. In Cheyenne meanwhile the territorial legislature passed a bill authorizing the construction of a wagon road from the capital city through Fort Laramie to the Black Hills. This bill and the construction of the North Platte bridge led to feverish plans for pony expresses, stage lines, and freighting firms, none of which the Indians would willingly tolerate.

If the Sioux refused to sell the Black Hills, how could the government acquire them with any semblance of honor? Unfortunately for themselves, the Indians provided an answer by raiding ranches along the line of the Union Pacific and in the North Platte Valley. The governor of Wyoming assembled statistics about the outrages—possibly his figures were inflated—and the legislature petitioned the Federal Government to force the Sioux back onto the reservation. President Grant obliged by issuing, in November, a proclamation ordering every Sioux to report to his agency by January 31, 1876, or be subjected to military action.

As is so often the case in Wyoming, the winter was rugged. Some of the bands received the ultimatum late, some said they never got it, and a few recalcitrants ignored it. So small a percentage of the tribe

reported that General Crook, head of the Department of the Platte, set out from Fort Fetterman in bitter March weather to start the military roundup. Skillful resistance by Crazy Horse and timorousness by one of Crook's colonels jarred his detachment so hard that he fell back to Fort Laramie to recuperate and gather reinforcements.

Throughout the rest of the harsh war of attrition, most of it fought far away in southern Montana, Fort Laramie continued to fill that function—as resting place, gathering point for supplies, funnel for reinforcements. So many men were drawn away by the campaigns that at one point, so it is said, only 13 soldiers were available for active duty. Worried by the weakness, Sgt. Leodegar Schnyder, husband of Cross-eyed Julia, reputedly set up sections of stovepipe at strategic points in the hope of making the Indians think that the post bristled with cannon.

By assembling greater forces than veteran Indian fighters had believed possible, the Sioux and their allies at first were victorious. They halted Crook again on the Rosebud, and on June 25, 1876, stunned the Nation by eliminating Custer's command of more than 250 men at the Little Big Horn. In the long run, however, the whites' superior strength turned the tide. One by one the bands were decimated, their villages destroyed. Annuities were withheld from the entire tribe, until in the fall of 1876 a despairing minority signed an agreement ceding to the United States that part of the Black Hills lying between the North and South Forks of the Cheyenne River.

Once started, the crack widened swiftly. In May 1877, worn out by winter and relentless pursuit, Crazy Horse and 2,000 of his followers turned themselves in. Although Sitting Bull and most of his band escaped into Canada, they too yielded after two hungry years. The last battles involving troops from Fort Laramie occurred in 1879 when Northern Cheyennes who had been sent to Oklahoma broke out of their reservation and marched north to their old homes. Most were killed or captured after a relentless pursuit; of the latter only a few were permitted to settle again on their old hunting grounds.

Meanwhile the mineral boom of the Black Hills completed turning the axis of which Fort Laramie was the hub from an east-west trail to one running north and south. Again the post's wagon and black-

smith shops gave succor to stranded travelers. Patrols sallied out to deal with the few renegade Indians and the increasing numbers of white outlaws who attacked the stage and express vehicles running between Cheyenne and the northern mining camps.

Cattlemen crowded on the range vacated by buffalo and Indians. For a few heady years beef prices soared. Cheyenne, noted far and wide for its opulent Cheyenne Club, where millionaire stockmen took their ease, boasted for a time of having the highest per capita income of any town in the Nation. Some of the prosperity and social high jinks rubbed off on Fort Laramie, 90 miles away. New buildings sprouted; by 1888 there were 62 structures of various kinds on the military reservation. This air of permanence, together with the stability of the surrounding neighborhood, led more and more officers to bring their families to the post. There the women cheerfully set up housekeeping in quarters never designed for gentle hands.

The feminine influence was visible in other ways. Boardwalks connected the buildings that bordered the parade ground. Trees, grass, and flower beds appeared. White picket fences and vine-covered verandahs imparted a peaceful, small-town atmosphere to the once starkly utilitarian scene.

The very fact of these amenities, however, indicated that Fort Laramie had outlived its function as a defender of the advancing frontier. Its abandonment, first recommended in 1886, was ordered in 1889 and carried out during the following spring. In June the 35,000 acres of the military reserve were declared open for homesteading, and the empty buildings were sold at auction. For the most part the buyers dismantled the structures for the materials they contained, but a few survived as hotels, saloons, homes, and barns.

An ending without glory—and yet there were too many memories simply to be forgotten. Just as extinction seemed inevitable, a movement began for reconstructing some of the shells still standing. From that drive came the Fort Laramie National Historic Site that annually attracts more than 100,000 visitors interested in learning something of the paths their country followed during its years of vigorous expansion.

Part 3

Life of the Soldier



Military Routines

At Fort Laramie, as at other frontier posts, a bugle's piercing call, sounding at dawn or earlier, announced the beginning of the enlisted man's day. From then until tattoo (the call to quarters, which at Fort Laramie generally occurred at 8 p.m.) he was expected to be constantly on the move.

Ideally, from the army's point of view, such "fatigue duties" (routine chores) as tending to the horses, scouring the barracks, delivering water and supplies to their various destinations, and policing the grounds could be handled with ample time left over for an hour of drill each morning and afternoon. If weather was inclement, instruction was supposedly moved inside the barracks and consisted of signal flag drills and lectures, delivered by the officers and sergeants.

In practice, extra fatigue duties frequently encroached on drill time. As was noted earlier, the Nation's parsimonious Congress not only expected a small, widely dispersed army to defend thousands of miles of exposed frontier but also to fill all its needs, including housing, while doing it. Contracts for freighting in supplies from Missouri were often let to civilians, but otherwise the soldiers were pressed into service as often as possible, even cutting hay. When compromises had to be made, drill gave way to labor.

Preceding page *Regimental colors of the 2d U.S. Cavalry. This unit served at Fort Laramie at various times from 1866 to 1877.*

The most onerous of the fort's periodic tasks was the procurement of wood for fuel. It came from cottonwood, juniper, ponderosa pine, ash, and box elder trees growing in places difficult to reach with wagons—the sheltered ravines that scarred the river bluff 10 to 15 miles away from the post. In 1866 Maj. James Van Voast estimated the winter's requirements at 1550 cords, enough to keep 50 men busy for a month without the interruption of daily drills.

The logs hauled out of the ravines by the teamsters were tossed in jackstraw piles in each company's woodyard. There grumbling details of sawyers cut it into appropriate lengths for their own and their officers' barracks, for their kitchens, and for the company laundresses. Prisoners did the cutting for the guardhouse, the hospital, bakery, the chaplain, the surgeon, and the headquarters office. As might be expected the recipients constantly complained that the pieces they received often did not fit their stoves.

Nearby pines suitable for being sawed into planks for construction purposes were soon consumed, and soldier lumbermen had to go 40 to 50 miles away to the base of Laramie Peak for their supplies. Mule-drawn wagons, each holding 24 logs, then carried the harvest to the sawmill at the fort. The tedious procedure helps explain why barracks often went unfloored for years, creating exasperating dust problems for the occupants, why verandas took shape slowly, with the result that hailstorms frequently smashed out the unprotected windows, and why the top floor of the hospital erected in the mid-1870s never was completed.

Each January a reluctant detail, after donning heavy buffalo overcoats and wrapping burlap around their shoes as insulation, waddled down to the Laramie River to cut ice for filling two sod-covered, sawdust-filled ice houses that stood close to the river near the site of old Fort John. During summers prisoners delivered rigidly prescribed amounts of this cloudy ice to the sutler's store, the officers' quarters, and the barracks, where part of it was used to cool the tepid drinking water in the barrels that served both for quenching thirst and fighting possible fires.



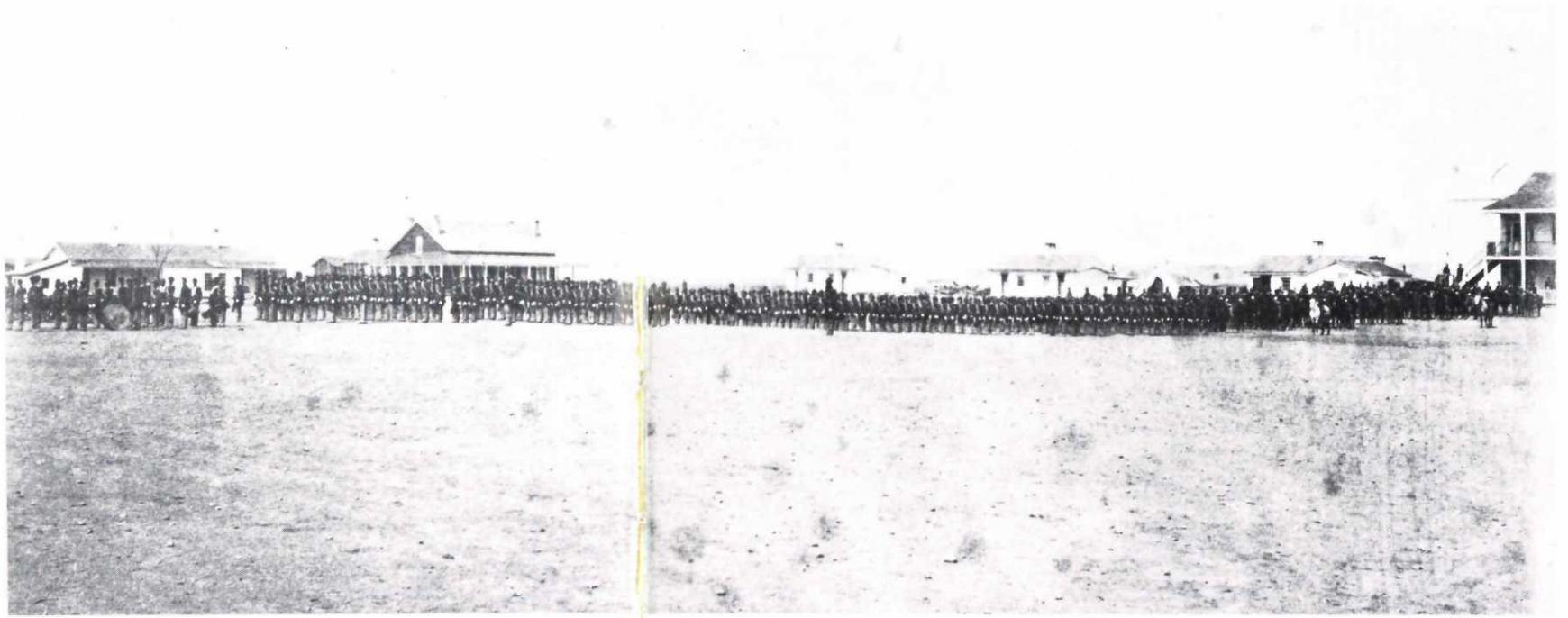
By 1889 Old Bedlam was no longer either a post headquarters or a noisy apartment for bachelor officers. It now housed married officers and their families in an air of faded gentility, with picket fences, boardwalks, trees, and trellises.

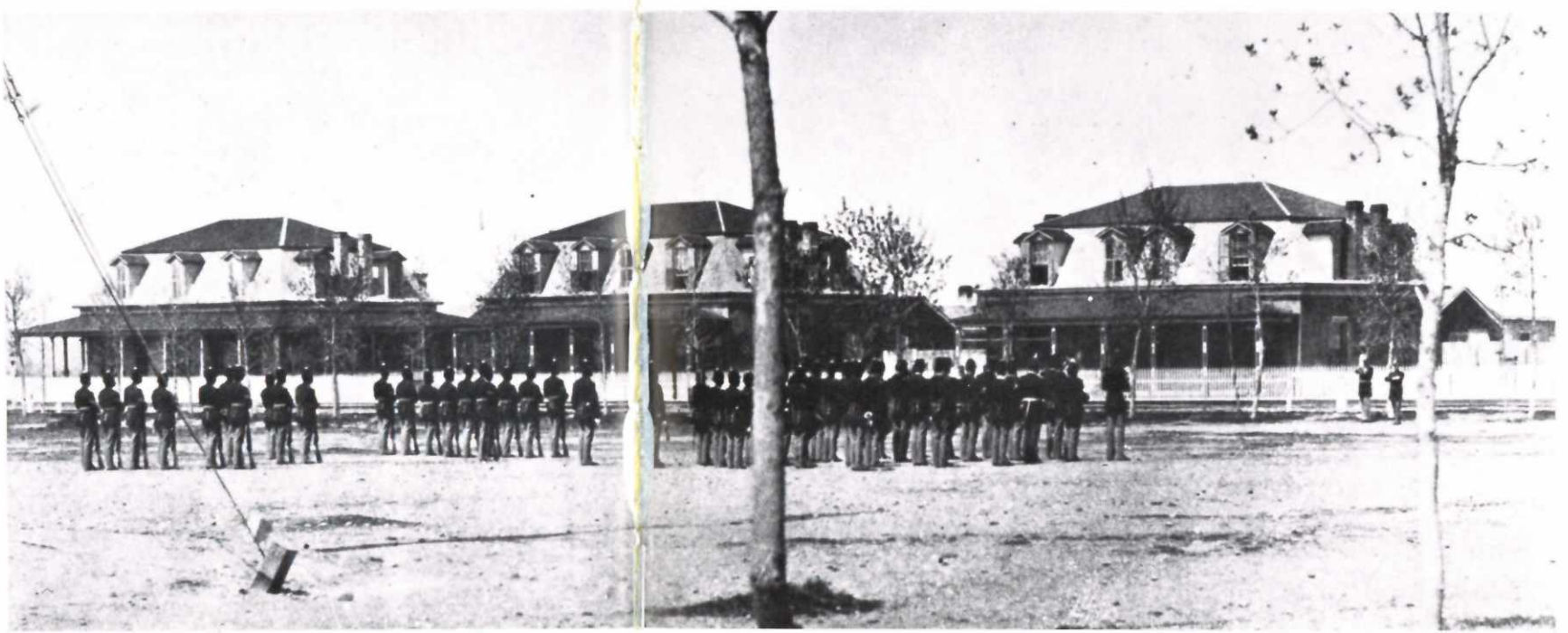
None of these fatigues was quite so hated as guard duty. The frequency with which a man's turn came depended on how many of his company were sick or absent on distant fatigues or patrol and escort duty. He discovered his fate on the roster list posted in each barracks and in the room of the officer of the day. At 9 on the appointed morning the Fort Laramie band struck up a vigorous tune. The guards selected from each company snapped to attention outside their barracks, were inspected by their first sergeant, and marched to the parade ground. There with brisk precision—much of the drill time available at the post was devoted to preparing the men for this ceremony—the new guard took over from the old.

For the next 24 hours, in alternating spells of two hours on duty and two off, the men stayed fully dressed and equipped. Some functioned as sentinels outside headquarters and at the entrances to the post, acknowledging their own officers and high-ranking visitors with meticulously practiced ceremony. No matter how cold the night, others walked prescribed beats, every so often calling out with conscious irony, "All's well!" By day they oversaw the prison-

Dress parades helped dispel the tedium of garrison life. The parade at right occurred in the summer of 1868. Appearing from left to right are a regimental band, a battalion of infantry, and a squadron of cavalry.

Below, the band and soldiers of the 7th Infantry execute a full-dress "guard mount," as the changing of the guard was called, in the fall of 1885. The officers at right are the old and new officers of the day.









The post continued its ceremonial rounds to the end. This guard mount took place about 1889. In the background is the administration building, erected in 1885, to house officers, a theater, and a school for the children of officers. The lower photograph, made about 1888, shows Post Surgeon Louis Brechemin (left) with his staff in the yard of the hospital. That building was built in 1873.

ers working at whatever tasks had been inflicted on them as punishment.

During their two-hour breaks they returned to the guardroom. In the stone guardhouse that was built at Fort Laramie in 1866, these quarters consisted of two rooms, one for the men and the other for the officer of the guard. The men's quarters contained a stove, a desk, two chairs, and a large rough bed on which the guards might rest fully clothed—if they could find room. The chamber was allotted two candles per diem, hardly enough to last out a long winter night. The best that could be said for the breaks was that they were less uncomfortable than guard duty itself.

Unless a blizzard was howling, everyone but the guards took part in a full-dress parade on Sunday evenings. As in the case of guard mount, much of the time available for drill was spent in preparation for this event. It did serve to create pride and boost morale. Civilian employees, women, and children gathered to watch. During the many years that Fort Laramie served as a regimental headquarters, a band was on hand to quicken steps and lift chins. If not a band, then buglers and trumpeters led the way. The squads wheeled and fell into line, and a little cannon—a mountain howitzer—fired a hard, sharp salute as the flag was lowered. Smartly then each company returned to its barracks, to be dismissed for supper and the free time that remained before the mournful sounds of taps announced lights out—as early on dark winter evenings as 8:15.

Domestic Details

The fort where a frontier soldier was stationed for varying lengths of time was rarely "home" to him. Instead, his sense of belonging focused on his company. And the man who held the company together was, in general, its top sergeant.

If the sergeant was loyal to the enlisted men under him, he was also honest and did not seek to feather his own nest by illegally selling company issues of food and clothing to outsiders. If others tried to do so, he cracked down on them. His handling of disciplinary problems was as impartial as his circumstances allowed, and he kept his men and their barracks neat without undue bullying.

Such things strengthened morale, for a man could be proud of belonging to a company noted for its efficiency and fairness. Pride achieved, he was then willing to take a personal interest in the general well-being of the entire group.

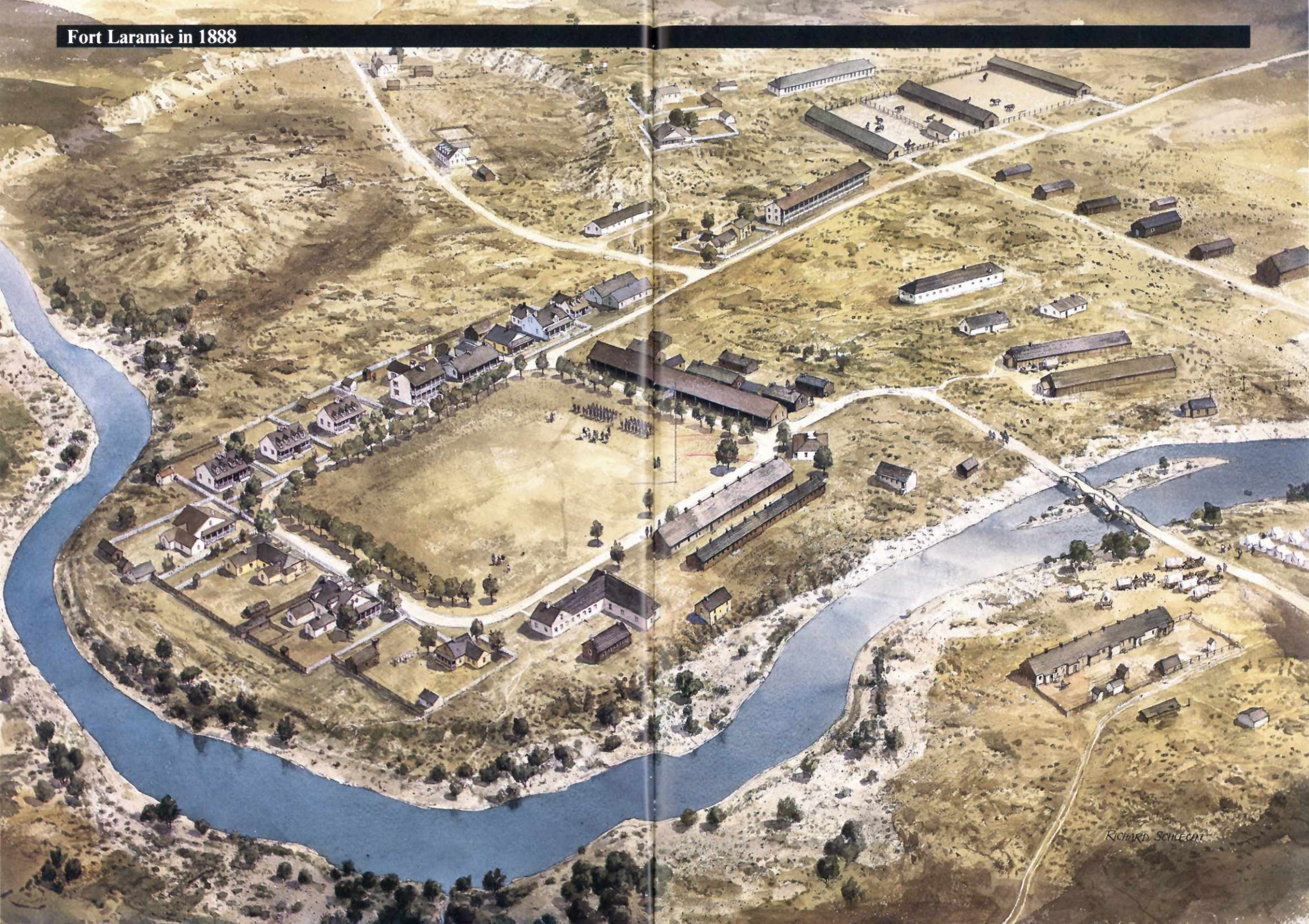
Much revolved around food. The amount a man ate depended not on his appetite but on a schedule prepared for the entire army by top brass somewhere back in the misty east—12 ounces of pork per man on days when pork was issued, 15 pounds of beans and 10 of rice for each 100 men, and so on. During the Civil War the allowance of flour was increased from 18 to 22 ounces a day, but afterwards cut back to 18 in the interests of economy. There was a loophole, however. If potatoes and onions were not available, and that sometimes happened at Fort Laramie during the tag end of winter, the post's administrative council could reinstate the 22 ounce allowance until a fresh supply of vegetables arrived.

The first sergeants drew rations for their companies at the post commissary once every 10 days. They lugged everything but flour to the kitchen. The flour went to the post bakery, where it was turned into dough, shaped into loaves, and baked in the building's huge brick ovens—one loaf per day per man. A soldier could also buy extra loaves if he could afford them.

It would seem that minds that measured provender by the ounce would also have considered the skill of cooks and bakers. Not so. They were assigned to the job by the luck of the draw. Cooks, their helpers, and dishwashers received no extra pay for this duty. Bakers, who had to live at the bakery to keep the ovens at proper temperature, did receive extra pay if they worked 10 days or longer. Like soldier blacksmiths, they were therefore classed as laborers and received 20 cents a day extra pay. (By contrast clerks and mechanics received 35 cents a day extra.) During their terms of work bakers and cooks were also excused from drill and guard duty.

A company was entitled to as many daily rations as it had men and laundresses on its muster roll. Every day some of these men were absent because of sickness or duty away from the post. The cash value of these rations could be added to the company's treasury and used to buy oilcloth covers for the mess tables, china dishes in place of the execrable iron

Next Page *On the eve of its abandonment, the post resembled a fair-sized town. The buildings standing in 1888 were a random assemblage of adobe, stone, frame, and concrete structures, either the most recent or the most durable of the nearly 200 put up between 1849 and 1885. This sketch by artist Richard Schlecht draws on many sources to reconstruct the physical appearance of the old fort in its last days. Only a dozen or so of these buildings are intact today, but the shells or foundations of many others can still be seen.*


Fort Laramie in 1888
RICHARD SCHLECHT





The sutler's store was an institution essential to the smooth progress of life at the post. For 40 years a succession of owners dispensed hospitality, provisions, dry goods, and liquor to countless soldiers, travelers, settlers, and Indians. The photos above show the store in 1877 and the sutler's residence several years earlier. Below is William Bullock, the well liked proprietor during the tumultuous years of the 1860s.



plates and tin cups that were standard army issue, magazine and newspaper subscriptions for the day room, and better candles for the barracks.

Relief from the monotony of the standard fare could be had by officers with money enough to purchase canned oysters, fruit, and the like at cost from the commissary or, at higher prices, from the sutler. Laundresses sold pies and milk from the cows that some of them, and their husbands, kept. A few married officers also kept cows (there were 16 cows altogether at Fort Laramie in 1868), and at least one post commander raised squabs for his table. Some ambitious companies bought pigs and used table slops to fatten them for butchering. Because scurvy was always a problem, attempts were made nearly every year to raise vegetables that could be stored for winter use. Some posts succeeded admirably. Not Fort Laramie, however. Indifferent soil, grasshoppers, hailstorms, and killing frosts every September played such havoc with the plants that more than one commanding officer declared bleakly that it was doubtful whether enough truck of any kind could be grown to make the labor worthwhile. Yet on most years the doomed effort was made again, if only for the benefit of patients in the hospital, who received what little matured.

Poor clothing, like bad food, was another cause of frequent complaint. When a recruit entered the service, the Army outfitted him completely. Thereafter he was given a clothing allowance—it varied from $24.45 to $35.04 a year, depending on how much of his hitch remained to be served—from which to buy replacements. Whatever he did not spend was banked for him at four percent interest. Canny shoppers accordingly tried to save money by purchasing their needs at bargain prices from veterans leaving the service or at the auction sales that were held periodically to dispose of items abandoned by deserters.

During the Civil War enormous quantities of hastily made, substandard items had been contracted for, and for years afterwards the surplus was doled out to the resentful soldiers. Their only recourse when the issues didn't fit was the company tailor or the company cobbler, again men of limited experience who received nothing for first-time alterations but did pick up extra money for subsequently sewing

on insignias or making repairs.

Post commanders grew wroth about the miserable uniforms. On April 4, 1867, Lt. Col. Innis Palmer wrote with heavy sarcasm from Fort Laramie to Maj. Gen. M. C. Meigs, Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army, that the sizes of uniforms were invariably smaller than marked (someone had profiteered on cloth), material was flimsy, and brass insignia too thin to be worth using. Shoes, he growled, must have been made from splay-footed models and uniforms cut for goose-necked or pot-bellied recruits who should never have been enlisted in the first place. "When we consider the enormous cost of transportation," he finished, "it would have been a great saving to the government if all the clothing had been thrown into the Mississippi." There is no record that the protest produced the least result.

Each unit's physical heart was its barracks—messroom, dayroom, and squad room, as the dormitory was called. The squad room's cavernous maw, where most off-duty hours were spent, held a big iron stove. Rows of bunks protruded at right angles from the walls. These were double wooden bunks until about 1872, when they were replaced by single iron bunks with wooden slats. At the foot of each bunk (after the mid-1870s) was a padlocked foot locker 2 feet long, 1 foot wide, and 10 inches deep in which all a man's personal possessions, including uniforms not being worn, were kept. Hooks and narrow shelves above the cots held gear. When the floors were scrubbed or space was needed for a rare dance—laundresses and even the men themselves served as partners—the bunks could be piled three deep on top of each other, out of the way.

Here and in the adjoining washroom the men relaxed from the day's work. Every Saturday night during the winter they supposedly took baths in tubs made of half a barrel, a cleansing that was a novelty to many recruits. (During warm weather they bathed in the river.) The company barber used the washroom for administering haircuts to each man once a month and a shave once or twice a week. Illumination generally came from candles whose brightness was increased by tin reflectors. In that flickering light the men griped to each other, bickered at times, and told endless stories as they played cards and industriously polished shoes and brass buckles

in preparation for Sunday's rigorous inspection.

The company's commissioned officers shared little of their men's camaraderie. They did not live or eat with their units but in separate quarters with other officers of other companies. A group of bachelors either hired enlisted men to cook for them or, after 1866, boarded in Brown's Hotel across the Laramie River from the quartermaster's storehouses.

The hotel, which may have begun life as a large hay storage shed, was the creation of Lt. W. H. Brown of the 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. He had been stationed at Fort Laramie during the latter part of the Civil War, and when his enlistment expired, he and his wife saw profit in providing amenities they had lacked. Somehow they acquired the shed and transformed it into a hotel for emigrants and teamsters and a boardinghouse for officers. They also sold liquor to all comers, including enlisted men, until the post trader complained. Only the sutler's store, he said, had a license to sell drinks, cigars, and other merchandise on the military reservation. The contention was upheld by the army, and in the mid-1870s Brown went out of business in favor of running a pioneer stage line to the Black Hills.



In its heyday the Rustic Hotel offered "clean beds and first class meals," but by the 1880s, when this photo was taken, it was badly run down and travelers complained of "horrid little bugs."

Married officers quite naturally centered their offduty hours on their own quarters. Aided by the arrival of the railroad in Cheyenne in 1867, their wives went to ingenious lengths to keep abreast of current fashions in dress, hair styles, and home furnishings, although their quarters were always cramped and never designed for marital housekeeping. Enlisted men called strikers by their employers and dog-robbers by their fellows sometimes hired out to help with chores and cooking. Or the women might experiment with bringing maids and governesses to the post, but no matter how unattractive these servants were—and they were chosen for their ugliness—they invariably became married soon after arrival.

The clearest indication of the gulf between men and officers was the post school, held for a few winter months whenever enough children were on hand to merit it. The offspring of enlisted men and of the quartermaster's civilian employees were required to attend. The children of officers were invited. None accepted; the parents taught them at

home as long as possible and then sent them east to live with relatives or attend private school. In 1877, for example, 20 children between the ages of 5 and 11 attended the Fort Laramie school, 3 hours each morning and 3 each afternoon, weekends excepted. The roll shows 14 girls and 6 boys. Twelve were the children of enlisted men, eight of civilians, one of whom came from nine miles away. But no officer let his child walk the short distance to the classroom.

Materials for the school were purchased out of a fund gathered through a tax on dogs. Fort Laramie swarmed with the animals. Every so often an exasperated commanding officer ordered that all canines were to be destroyed unless registered, collared, and licensed. Females cost the owner twice as much in fees as males. From this property tax came pens, crayons, paper, and at least once, in 1878, $25 worth of spelling, reading, and penmanship texts.

In 1868 the post chaplain taught the school. In 1871-72 the teacher was Mrs. Ella DeWoolf, otherwise unidentified. Parents were asked to pay her 50 cents a month per pupil. In 1877 the post surgeon donated his services and sought to encourage effort by giving out, at his own expense, prizes for scholastic accomplishment. Chaplain, surgeon, and Ella DeWoolf were exceptions, however. In the main the teachers at Fort Laramie, like the bakers and tailors, were appointed from the ranks of enlisted men, but the teachers received extra pay. They hated the work. Their fellows ridiculed them, and their undisciplined students disliked the confinement as much as they did. The result was pandemonium, frequent spankings, and an occasional distraught pedagogue who got himself fired by coming to class drunk, even though a $12 fine was the price for such derelictions.

School touched adults, too. Every so often commissioned officers and non-coms were required to attend evening "recitations" on military procedures. In 1866 the government ordered that evening classes be provided for enlisted men who wished to take advantage of the opportunity. In 1881, by order of the Secretary of War, attendance at the adult schools was made compulsory for illiterates. Again teaching was entrusted to enlisted men, not to officers who may have been better qualified. But the twain rarely mingled, even as teacher and pupil, a separation that

was considered essential in an organization whose success depended in part on a superior's commands being obeyed instantly, without question.

Health

Nineteenth-century Army hospitals, and Fort Laramie's was no exception, were the victims of a curious paradox. Their necessity was recognized, but they were poorly built on the theory that within 10 years they would be so saturated with "hospital poisons" that they would have to be replaced. Thus the first military occupants of Fort Laramie did not build a special infirmary but pressed old Fort John into service until its crumbling adobe walls became so infested with vermin in 1856 that the patients had to be moved outside into tents. Comparable shortsightedness stunted the fine new 24-bed hospital that was recommended for Fort Laramie in 1873. The post surgeon requested $17,372 to cover costs. His superiors allowed $8,000. Needless to say, the building was never finished as originally projected.



Capt. Louis Brechemin, post surgeon, sits with family and friends on the front porch of his quarters on officers' row in 1888. Opposite is a selection of medical instruments used by army doctors in the 19th century.

The primary call for the hospital's facilities arose from injuries. Men cut themselves with tools and occasionally shot themselves accidentally. (Battle wounds were relatively rare. It was quite possible for a man to spend his allotted time at Fort Laramie without being involved in a single skirmish with Indians.) They were kicked by horses and fell from horses. They hurt each other during brawls. Though damage from that source consisted mostly of lacerations and bruises, a skimming of the fort's medical records for the late 1870s and early 1880s shows that quarrels could be serious: there were three murders during the period, one by stabbing.

Frosted fingers and toes sometimes had to be amputated. Drunks in particular suffered from exposure. One deserter who surrendered after freezing his feet lost both of them to the knife; a month later he died. A man was struck by lightning. Adults and children drowned on occasion in the Laramie and Platte rivers. Babies were sometimes stillborn or perished shortly after birth. Although the Fort Laramie hospital began using a carbolic acid spray soon after its antiseptic properties had been discovered, the danger of infection remained so great that most mothers preferred to have deliveries made at home.

Although smallpox was kept fairly well under con-

trol by vaccination, other diseases sometimes raced through the barracks. Respiratory ailments and intestinal upsets were the most frequent, but there were also outbreaks of typhoid fever, cholera, and tuberculosis. Veneral diseases were a constant problem. They were spread by prostitutes who lived among the Laramie Loafers and were employed by the nearby hog ranches.

Whether there was more disease at the fort than in the urban slums of the Nation's rapidly industrializing cities cannot be said. Given the primitive state of medical knowledge and of health service in general during that era, Fort Laramie probably had the edge. For one thing, the army gave applicants for the job of post surgeon stiffer tests than did most examining boards of the time. The position, moreover, attracted capable men. A successful candidate entered the service with the rank of lieutenant. Within three years he automatically became a captain, though West Point graduates in the regular service often waited years for a similar advancement. Surgeons received free housing and were allowed to make extra money by treating civilians in their home-based offices. (Civilians could also use the hospital by paying small fees for food and service.) Because the surgeons were better educated than most of their fellows and were the chief hope of people in distress, they enjoyed considerable prestige.



There were counterbalancing annoyances, however. Surgeons were attached to the post, not to whatever regiment happened to be stationed there at the time. Thus if a doctor's soldier helpers or patients needed disciplining, he could not apply it himself but had to go to the men's officers, who were not always cooperative. The same dragging of feet also characterized the fort's commanding officer when the surgeon made inconvenient recommendations about sanitary conditions.

Indeed, disease prevention rather than disease cure was probably the post surgeon's most important duty. His facilities for treatment were sorely limited. He had no separate operating room, no anesthetist and no anesthetic other than nauseating chloroform. His nurses were inexperienced soldiers assigned to the job, in usual army fashion, for short periods of time. Although they received a laborer's standard extra pay of 20 cents a day, they did not consider it

adequate compensation for cleaning basins, carrying bed pans, and sitting up nights to cool feverish bodies, and they needed constant prodding.

Better help came, most of the time, from the hospital matron who oversaw housekeeping details and from the hospital steward who kept records, requisitioned supplies, and the like. Stewards and matrons sometimes married. The former was a good catch. He received the rank and pay of a non-commissioned officer and, like the doctor, was permanently attached to the fort's medical department. Occasionally the steadiness of the assignment resulted in remarkable loyalty. Consider, for instance, Stewart T. V. Brown, who in the spring of 1876 fenced off and fertilized a little plot of ground behind Fort Laramie's new hospital, installed an irrigation system, planted trees and flowers, and within two years produced a pleasant park for the use of convalescent patients. For young men requiring care, such surroundings, together with quiet, rest, and a somewhat better diet than their company cooks offered, were more effective than was the backward medical treatment they received.

"Hog ranches" sprang up like prairie flowers wherever the army posted a garrison. By all accounts they plied the soldier with the poorest whiskey and women in the west and took the rest of his money in gambling. The nearest such resort was "3-Mile Ranch," west of the post on the old Cheyenne-Deadwood Stage Road.

In the lower photograph an officer and his family enjoy a picnic on a nearby creek in 1889.

The army surgeons placed great store in cleanliness. Hence the orders about periodic bathing and a thorough ventilation of bedding and barracks at least once a week. In addition, each man had to replace the straw in his mattress every month—more often if contagious diseases were feared.

Kitchens, too, came under the post surgeon's surveillance, for it was he who tried to enforce the advice contained in an 1862 manual for cooks: "Better to wear out your pans with scouring than your stomach with purging; and it is less dangerous to work your elbows than your comrade's bowels." If bread was sour and heavy, it was the surgeon who reported the fact to the commanding officer. If new privies were needed—and by 1880 the ground behind Fort Laramie's barracks was so saturated by constantly relocated sinks, as the Army called the latrines, that finding suitable areas was a problem—it was the surgeon who drew the fact to the colonel's unwilling attention.

The heaps of manure at the stables and the refuse from the post's slaughterhouse fell under his eye. Like his contemporaries, he saw no harm in getting rid of offensive trash by dumping it into the Laramie

River, but at least he wanted it dumped below the point where soldiers bathed, children played, and washerwomen drew part of their water.

On occasion resounding battles grew out of what the post commanders considered the surgeon's officiousness. One flamed up in the spring of 1877 when Surgeon A. A. Hartsuff demanded that a stagnant pond a little above the fort be eliminated. Because the work would require the removal of a jetty the commander had ordered built to check river erosion at a critical point, the C. O. refused, insisting that the pond was not a menace and implying that the surgeon was trying to satisfy a yearning for power. The charges and countercharges went to the Department heads before a compromise drainage system was adopted.

Recreation

Every evening, good weather and bad, Fort Laramie's enlisted men returned from hard sessions of drill and fatigue duty to face blank time before the call to quarters. After tattoo there were more hours to fill. There were Sunday afternoons. And Christmas, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day after its founding in 1868, and the Fourth of July, legal holidays during which all duties not essential to the security of the post were cancelled. What was a man to do then?





The army had no answer. As far as it was concerned, organized recreation depended on the initiative of the soldiers themselves—with this exception. When initiative did appear, a source of money was available to help it maintain momentum.

This treasury was called the Post Fund. Handling it was one of the many petty responsibilities assumed by the Council of Administration, a board of three officers called into existence from time to time by the fort's commander. Typical duties included the disposal of the effects of men who died in the hospital, checking on the sutler to see that he carried an adequate supply of such items as gloves, chewing tobacco, and thread for mending clothes, ordering mark-downs on whatever offerings seemed overpriced, and establishing charges for laundry and haircuts. And then there was the vexatious arithmetic associated with the Post Fund.

To keep the fund nourished, the council every so often imposed on the sutler, as the price of doing





"Jacks" was a favorite game for kids, and cards and dominoes for soldiers. For those who liked to read, the post library stocked a few hundred "nearly worn out" books and subscribed to a number of newspapers and periodicals. The items on this page are from the park's collections.



business at the post, a tax of five cents per month for each of the men stationed there. Keeping track of this money was an irritation to men untrained in bookkeeping. So was supervising revenue raised by selling post bread to civilians and soldiers at prices set by the council. After expenses had been deducted, that profit too was placed in the fund. During part of 1874, it amounted to as much as $100 a month.

After raising the money, the council struggled with complicated allocations. Some of the income went to a regimental treasury that could be drawn on by all units of the regiment, whether or not they were stationed at Fort Laramie. Other allocations were designed to benefit the entire post—a melodeon for the chapel, for instance, odds and ends of material for theatrical productions, and books for the library, which was located in the post adjutant's office. (In 1867 the shelves held 300 volumes; 20 years later the number had risen to 578, cared for by a soldier drawing the usual 20 cents extra pay per diem for his efforts, which probably were more pleasant than those of the hospital nurses.) Finally, money from the Post Fund was added to sums already stored in company treasuries from the proceeds of unused rations. These moneys were then spent on athletic equipment for company teams, if there were any, and for furnishing the company dayroom with newspapers and magazines.

During off hours, then, a man could read if he wished—and if he knew how. He could also watch or participate in theatrical productions. Tastes ran to minstrel shows, pantomimes, and burlesques. In October, 1864, for example, the 11th Ohio Cavalry staged two presentations of an original production entitled the "Laramie Varieties." The cast sold tickets for 15 and 20 cents each, depending on location (spectators often had to bring their own chairs and benches to the plays) and raised $173 to help a temporarily embarrassed Post Fund buy winter reading materials for the library.

The size of the admission receipts indicates the anticipation with which theatrical performances were awaited. They were quite possibly the greatest morale builders available, for they drew together either in the audience or occasionally as members of the same cast enlisted men, officers, and families. But a great deal of energy was needed to get the shows

rolling, and this was supplied entirely by enterprising individuals fighting their own battles with apathy, and never by the army.

The same observation applies to organized sport. Baseball, foot racing, and boxing furnished fun for contestants and spectators, the latter of whom showed their loyalty by betting all the money they could afford, and often more, on their company representatives. But unless an enthusiastic post commander or even a gung-ho second lieutenant took hold, nothing happened. Years sometimes passed at Fort Laramie without this weapon against boredom being used.

Other activities that resulted in a mingling of the fort's population were band concerts, rare glee club performances, and lectures. Some of the last named were informative ("The Franco-Prussian War") or practical ("Frostbite"), but whatever the topic, it drew even a smattering of officers' wives, for they were as bored with stodgy routines as everyone else. Summer holidays also brought together members of the entire post to watch the sports on the parade ground—wheelbarrow, sack, slow mule races, and the like. The Fourth of July produced thunderous cannon salutes at noon and fireworks in the evening. All holidays featured banquets of otherwise rare meats and desserts, and officers traditionally spent part of Christmas with their men in the company barracks.

Left to themselves, the enlisted men used their leisure about as would be expected. They played cribbage, penny-ante poker, and checkers, listened to musical comrades play banjos, guitars, accordions, and mouth organs, and indulged in practical jokes, especially when a new batch of recruits arrived. They took walks in the countryside. A few went fishing in nearby streams, and enlisted men stationed temporarily at outposts where game had not been depleted went hunting, paying six cents per cartridge expended for the privilege. Many officers were avid hunters, keeping special horses and dogs and obtaining two- and three-day passes so that they could indulge in long-range pursuits of game. The fruits of the forays brightened the messes.

Predictably officers enjoyed more dances than enlisted men. A typical circular, this one sent out on February 24, 1879, by the fort's commanding officer to 11 juniors, the post trader (originally called the

sutler), the telegraph operator, and the postmaster, advised, "There will be dancing at the Quarters of Lieuts. Chase and Hardy 3rd Cavalry at 8 O'clock PM this evening. All Gentlemen and Ladies desiring to send refreshments, may be assured that they will be properly looked after."

Enlisted men did have substitutes. Whenever the musicians in an outfit felt sufficiently cooperative, the rest stamped and whirled through stag dances in the barrack, "women" being designated by white handkerchiefs around their arms. Still merrier were impromptu dances in the band room. Laundresses generally attended and, according to one volunteer of the Ohio Cavalry, the affairs mostly ended in uproars because of too much liquor.

Not every wearer of a uniform drank, of course. Still, excessive consumption of alcohol by both officers and men was a serious problem. On one hand, commanders, a few of them notorious drunks themselves, were disposed toward leniency because alcohol was regarded as a valuable relaxant. On the other hand, there was no brushing aside such statistics as this for Fort Laramie in 1876: of 114 garrison courts-martial that year, 60 percent dealt with offenses related to drinking.

Pay days, which came irregularly because of the difficulties involved in transporting paymasters and their money chests from one post to another, were raucous. After paying off their laundresses and debts to the sutler, many recipients ordered fancy foods at astronomical prices and then set about drinking themselves into trouble. The bar and officers' club at the sutler's store and at Brown's Hotel were jammed. Fights were sought and easily found. The next day the hospital experienced a surge in admissions, and troubles developed between the post surgeon and the commanding officer about the coddling of men whose only problem was hangovers.

Post commanders tried by various means to control the drinking. One device was to limit the quantity of whiskey or beer the licensed traders could sell to any individual during a single day. Another was to order bars, the officers' club, and billiard rooms closed at early hours. A third was to require that the men produce written permissions from one of their commissioned officers granting them the right to buy liquor. Temperance clubs and lectures by the

men themselves were encouraged.

No method worked. Teamsters and stagecoach drivers were willing bootleggers and managed to evade most of the searches to which they were subjected. More pernicious were places of ill-repute located just outside the military reservation and known to the soldiers as "hog ranches."

Essentially a hog ranch was an establishment offering better meals than the barracks did, cigars, liquor, and the attention of a handful of girls. The looks of the women are traditionally cited as the source of the establishments' name; the ill-paid soldiers of the frontier inevitably drew the least attractive prostitutes in the business.

The most famous of Fort Laramie's hog ranches, partly because it was the closest, was run by Adolph Cuny and Jules Escoffey, often spelled Coffee. The origins of their enterprise are obscure. They seem to have begun as freighters, using as their base of operations a collection of shacks three miles up the Laramie River from the fort. By at least the opening days of 1867, months before the railroad reached Cheyenne, they were selling liquor to soldiers and ranchers. The arrival of the Union Pacific and the opening of a regular road between Cheyenne and the fort did not turn them entirely into tavernkeepers, however, because in 1873 they took a contract to supply the lime and stone needed in the construction of the post's new hospital. When that work ran out in 1874, they developed new revenues by adding prostitutes as a regular feature of the ranch.

The start of the Black Hills gold excitement in 1875, when prospectors gathered at the ranch to scheme ways of eluding Fort Laramie's patrol, brought a boom to their business. It increased still more when the hills were declared open to whites, and stage lines from Cheyenne followed the road that led past their tavern. These outside contacts, to say nothing of the inside attractions, naturally appealed to soldiers who had few chances to hobnob with anyone not in uniform.

The ranch's attractiveness soared again in 1881 when President Rutherford B. Hayes prohibited the sale of liquor—interpreted to include beer, ale, and wine—at all American military establishments. Soldiers who were able to obtain passes thereupon flocked to Escoffey's. (Cuny had been murdered









four years earlier at a rival establishment farther up the river.) No one pretended that the ranch provided exemplary recreation. But in view of the other alternatives available—Fort Laramie never had a post canteen—what did the army expect its bored and lonesome men to do?

Crime and Punishment

When a man joined the army he agreed by implication to heed throughout his 5-year term of enlistment a more extensive and complex maze of regulations than his memory was capable of retaining for long. He also discovered that the punishments meted out for violating those many rules were determined by a different set of value judgments than he had been used to as a civilian. Most notably, he discovered, the army was intolerant of anything that threatened the security of the system by which it operated. For that reason an enlisted man who was reckless enough to strike an officer or desert an assigned post during the heat of battle might be sentenced to death by the court-martial that tried him.

There was this other point. Except in cases calling for dishonorable discharge (and the severities of that sentence will be mentioned later), a man could not be fired from the army. As a consequence such trivia as failing to meet standards of dress during inspection or sitting down without permission while on guard duty were considered crimes and punished as such with fines, imprisonment, and heavy labor.

Enlisted men also developed values of their own toward certain crimes. They despised anyone who stole from a companion. To many of them, however, army property was fair game. Food items from the company commissary, clothing from the quartermaster's warehouses, corn consigned to the stables, tools, rifles, and, particularly, new Colt revolvers, disappeared regularly, often in exchange for whiskey. Occasionally guards or civilian employees of the Quartermaster's Corps would connive with rustlers in stealing beef cattle and horses from herds belonging to the fort and the sutler.

Public brawls were common and sometimes serious. One especially violent brawl exploded at the Cuny and Escoffey hog ranch on the Fourth of July, 1867. Having obtained 24-hour passes, a dozen soldiers went to the place to celebrate the holiday. If

they were looking for trouble, they picked the right place; according to the fort's commander, six or seven civilians had been slain there since the first of the year.

By the time the soldiers arrived on the Fourth, several local toughs were already on hand. They, too, were spoiling for a fight. Fists began to fly and then worse. A citizen dropped dead and the riot grew wild. Next a soldier died. Taking alarm, someone rushed the three miles to the fort, and out galloped part of a company of cavalry under a Colonel Greene to investigate. Discovering that some of the civilian leaders of the uproar had fled, Greene dispatched part of his command in pursuit while he returned to the fort with the now subdued holiday celebrants. He misjudged his own patrol. Unable to overtake their quarry, the men returned to Cuny and Escoffey's ranch, pillaged it, concentrating probably on liquor, and then burned the "vile den," as General Palmer called it, to the ground. A general court-martial was summoned to probe into the affair, but surviving records unfortunately do not reveal the outcome.

Another extraordinary event concerning which only partial records remain occurred on December 13, 1877, while three companies from Fort Laramie were marching toward the Black Hills. For reasons unknown, Private Kennedy of Company A murdered his top sergeant, J. H. Van Moll. Van Moll was popular in the company, and Kennedy's fellow soldiers lynched the murderer on the spot. Although vigilante-style justice was fairly common on the frontier, it was also illegal; yet the army, that bulwark of law and order, apparently made no move to punish the lynchers. If fact, they were later allowed to solicit funds with which to buy a handsome stone for marking Van Moll's grave in the fort cemetery.

The most common major offense at Fort Laramie, as it was elsewhere in the army, was desertion. Most deserters decamped just before troop movements were scheduled. In that way they were able to leave with the horse, weapons, and loaded haversack they had prepared for the campaign. This added the crime of theft to that of flight. Even worse, the army eventually had to go to the expense of recruiting and training replacements. Neither military dignity nor economy could tolerate the blows. Men who went

Discipline in the frontier army was swift and sometimes harsh. For minor infractions an offender might be given extra duty or an unpleasant chore such as chopping wood or cleaning latrines. Serious offenses were punished by fines and confinement, sometimes with shackling and a diet of bread and water.

The guardhouse at Fort Laramie was a spartan place. Prisoners had no light, no heat, no furniture, nothing to read or pass the time with, and only their own blanket for a covering.



over the hill, as the flights were called, were pursued vigorously and sometime disastrously. In May 1876 a sergeant drowned in the Laramie River while on patrol for deserters.

Officers at Fort Laramie gave two explanations for the high number of defections. One, offered most commonly after the Union Pacific had brought settlements close to the fort, theorized that footloose civilians signed up as a way of getting room and board for the winter and had every intention of deserting in the spring. Another theory cited erratic paydays; sometimes six or eight months intervened between the paymaster's visits. A soldier who suddenly found himself with large sums of money in his pocket, said his superiors, was under immediate temptation to take off for kindlier climes.

The soldiers themselves declared that although money assisted desertions, it was not of itself a motive. They pointed to deeper causes. One was fear—fear of some bully in their own outfit, fear of punishment for an infraction of rules; fear of a campaign against the Indians. Others said that they disliked their tyrannical officers and resented being used as underpaid conscript labor for burning lime and sawing planks for construction purposes. But the greatest spate of angry departures followed a Congressional edict that dropped the Civil War pay scale of $16 a month for privates back to $13.

Another motivating factor was the likelihood of success. In spite of pursuit, cold and hungry traveling, and rewards offered to civilians for tips leading to apprehension, close to 80 percent of all who broke loose from the military reservation were never retaken. But those who were caught were punished harshly. Until 1870, a small "D" was branded on their left buttock. The rest of their enlistment period, and sometimes more, was then spent at hard labor in the gloomy military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Supposedly soldiers accused of crime were entitled to speedy trial. In the case of serious crimes this involved a general court-martial. Such a body could be summoned only with the approval of the commanding officer of the Department in which the offense had taken place and only when enough officers (from 5 to 13), were on hand to meet procedural requirements. The conjunction of circumstances came slowly sometimes.

In 1865-66, for instance, a certain Emanuel Saltiel, a "galvanized Yankee" (that is, a Confederate prisoner who enlisted in the Union Army for frontier service to avoid confinement), was incarcerated in the Fort Laramie guardhouse, apparently on trumped-up charges by an unfriendly captain, for 93 days before his case came to trial. Another 175 days passed at hard labor before his sentence, dishonorable discharge, was carried out. When the moment came, it was grim beyond Saltiel's expectations. In May 1866, he was publicly denounced on the parade ground in front of the entire garrison, formally lined up at stiff attention. While drums rolled ominously, he was then taken outside the fort by two guards marching in front of him with rifles held upside down and two behind with bayonets ready. On reaching open country he was turned loose without food or arms at a time when the country was aswarm with Indians. Yet somehow he reached Denver—and became a respected businessman!

From today's point of view, even the ordinary army punishments of a century ago verged on brutality, as a glance at the Fort Laramie guardhouse will suggest. Its top floor, which housed the post's guardroom, has been described. Prisoners were kept below in what amounted to a semibasement, for the building stood on a hillside. The jail had no furniture and no stove, though winter temperatures often reached -20°. Prisoners brought their own blankets and slept on the floor. They sometimes had to relieve themselves on the floor, too, if no guard was available for conducting them to the outside privy. Refractory prisoners were kept in two small cells at one end of the room. Generally they were further confined by a ball and chain. The pain of having the chain forged onto their ankles by the blacksmith often caused even hardened men to scream in agony.

Small infractions were punished by a 10-dollar fine and 10 days in the guardhouse. These short-term prisoners, always working under a guard's rifle, delivered water, ice, and wood, and policed the grounds. More serious offenders drew stiffer punishments. A robber might have to carry a knapsack full of bricks around the parade ground all day, with a large sign "Thief" hung around his neck. Two or three men convicted together of drunkenness might have to parade endlessly with a big log on their





Drums and bugles regulated the soldier's day. They woke him in the morning, called him to duties throughout the day, controlled his movements in the field, and sent him to his bunk at night.

shoulders. A summer punishment was shoveling sand or chopping wood in heavy overcoats buttoned to the chin. Spread-eagling was accomplished by gagging a prisoner, then tying his ankles and wrists, fully extended, to stakes driven into the ground or to the spokes of an upright wagon wheel and leaving him to the sun and flies for as many hours as he stayed conscious. But at least flogging was abolished in 1861. Whether or not such standards really helped the rank and file become better fighters cannot, by the nature of things, be proved. But we can note how the soldiers of America's Indian-fighting army performed when called on to meet their obligations in the field.

Field Service

Field service embraced a variety of forms. Escort duty was one. Whenever Indians were menacing, small detachments of troopers, generally dragoons or cavalry, were ordered to guard vulnerable stagecoaches and trains of freight wagons. Soldiers often protected government explorers, scientists, and surveyors, who, without army help, could not have finished their tasks. Well outfitted escorts lent strength and dignity to civilian treaty commissioners charged with meeting Indian delegations at some central point for working out accords.

Because escort duty offered a change from the routine work of fort maintenance and was seldom dangerous, it was generally welcomed. Patrol actions—"scouts" in army jargon—were more onerous and often came suddenly as a result of Indian depredations on livestock herds within Fort Laramie's administrative district.

Veteran soldiers learned from experience to provide themselves in advance with items that were not basic army issue. For winter use they bought extra blankets, long overcoats of buffalo hide, face masks, and hats of muskrat fur. For summer they favored, in place of the standard flat-topped forage cap, soft, broad-brimmed hats. (It is interesting to note that by the 1880s, many items of clothing pioneered by resourceful individuals had become standard issues.) Most veterans also bought at the sutler's store a small, solid skillet and a deep tin cup to take the place of the frying pan with folding handle and the shallow plate that had been issued them. A few

regulars, proud of their marksmanship, even purchased their own rifles rather than rely on one of the many types of weapons, calling for different kinds of ammunition, that the army handed out until 1873, when .45 caliber Springfield rifles and Colt .45 revolvers became standard.

Action began with the chatter of telegraph keys or the arrival of a sweat-drenched horse carrying a courier with word of a raid. While the commanding officer studied maps and wrote out orders—"You will use every exertion to overtake and capture the marauders" was common exhortation to the lieutenant in charge of the patrol—the officer of the day selected the dozen or so men who were to undertake the pursuit.

Because speed was essential, wagons or pack animals for hauling tents and rations were seldom used. Cavalrymen—they were the ones most often called out on patrol duty—checked their gear and then piled onto their horses their weapons, blanket rolls, 100 or so rounds of ammunition per man, 10 to 15 pounds of grain per horse, and packs containing extra clothing and enough greasy salt pork, hardtack, and green coffee beans to last out the patrol—10 days was the normal maximum.

Since the pursuers seldom knew the country as well as their quarry did, a scout generally acted as guide and tracker. A few scouts were former mountainmen familiar with Indian ways and dialects, including sign language; gaunt Jim Bridger and boastful Jim Baker were two familiar figures at Fort Laramie. More frequently, the scouts were from tribes—Crows and, especially, Pawnees—that were hostile to the Sioux and Cheyennes of the Laramie district.

Although the scouts could follow trails that ordinary soldiers couldn't see and although the post commander directed the pursuit as well as he could by sending couriers to the patrol with the latest telegraphic information about the Indians' travel pattern, the chases succeeded only in rare instances. The agile raiders had too much head start, even when the livestock were seized from the fort's own herd.

For instance: during the tense summer of 1864, several details spent three days scouring the countryside around the fort for sign of hostile Indians. None


Sun & Fury
5 Drons

The furnishings of this bachelor officer's quarters tended toward the plain. From a photograph made about 1865 at an unidentified post.

were out there, they reported on their return, and, after unsaddling, let the horses roll on the sandy parade ground before being taken to the stables. All at once 30 or so mounted Indians raced through, yelling, shooting, waving buffalo robes. Before any of the startled soldiers could shoot back, they swept up the horses and dashed off to the north. Pursuit was organized immediately—as immediately, that is, as ammunition, rations, and corn for the mounts still in the stables could be gathered.

Pushing their horses to the limit, the soldiers rode all that night, all the next day, all the second night. After a hundred miles, much of it in rugged country, they gave up, grazed their exhausted horses, and slowly returned to the fort, sleeping in their saddles some of the time and the rest of the time walking and leading their mounts so as to lighten their loads. It was indeed better, commented Capt. Eugene F. Ware, who reported the incident, "to feed the Indians than to fight them."

Nevertheless, as settlement advanced and the Indians became thoroughly aroused, fighting proved necessary—arduous campaigns conducted by units from several forts and planned to force the tribes into a pitched battle. Because notice of a campaign was posted 48 hours or more in advance of departure, more time could be spent on preparations. This did not mean spit-and-polish. No regulation uniforms were prescribed, and individual preference came into play, particularly in the choice of hats. Few shaved. Coats were peeled off along the way or blankets were draped around shoulders according to the weather—a far cry from the spruceness of daily parades at the fort.

If the terrain allowed, the men either rode or marched four abreast. Scouts ranged far ahead and on the flanks. Also well in the lead, and vulnerable to Indian attack, were "pioneers" charged with smoothing out rough places for the wagons—two big 6-mule wagons for each 65 men. Those wagons could be a curse when they had to be dragged through swift streams or up steep, rocky hills. But they were loved, too, for they carried bedrolls, tents, and rations, except for the two days of emergency food that each man stowed in his haversack. If the way was too rough for wheeled vehicles, then pack mules were used.

The men were up before dawn, striking tents, rolling beds, and lugging the bundles to the wagons, where they were put on the ground to await loading by the teamsters. Then breakfast, and before sunup the column was moving again, cavalry in front and on the flanks. Behind them marched the infantry, followed by the artillery. Supply wagons and ambulances brought up the rear.

Except when forced marches became necessary, most days were relatively easy. The column trudged along for four or five hours, then nooned for two while the man and horses rested and ate. (On long marches, infantry easily outlasted cavalry horses.) The afternoon march was short, for camp had to be made early.

On reaching the campground, chosen by scouts for its fuel and water, each unit went to its designated spot and pitched tents, either two-man pup tents or big, conical Sibley tents that could hold as many as 15 men sleeping like the spokes of a wheel, feet toward the center. They next gathered water and wood, or, if wood was lacking, buffalo chips. As soon as fires were going each man roasted, in his skillet, the green coffee beans that had been issued him, pounded them up, and brewed a big cupful of coffee—"after any sort of exhausting effort," said *The Soldiers' Handbook* given to each recruit during the Indian wars of the 1870s, "a cup of coffee or tea . . . is an admirable sustainer of strength until nature begins to recover herself."

The handbook also warned, "In any campaign sickness disables or destroys three times as many as the sword." But the army did little to follow its own advice. The Indian wars were nearly over before campaign rations consisted of anything more than the eternal salt pork (it was so greasy that it saturated the other articles in the haversack in which it was carried), the almost indestructible, often wormy hardtack, and occasional servings of beans. Each man was his own cook. Cleanliness was not notable; water was seldom purified. After being parboiled in the skillet, the meat was fried or roasted on a stick in front of the fire. If there was grease in the pan, the hardtack was soaked in it and flavored, on lucky occasions with a sprinkling of brown sugar. To enlived this diet the men occasionally bought, before departure and with their own money, a few potatoes

and onions from the messhall cooks. For the officers, the scouts were a source of game. Yet there was seldom enough of these additions to prevent scurvy and intestinal complaints.

Weather, too, was a greater enemy than Indians. Summers on the plains could be scorching; wind seemed everlasting, or else downpours turned the campgrounds into morasses. The men had canteens to help them from waterhole to waterhole, but the horses suffered terribly. According to Captain Ware, it was not uncommon for a cavalryman to pour part of his water into his hat and let the horse drink it and then lick the inside for the last drop.

Winters were worse. Temperatures on the plains could drop to -40°. Wind-driven snow seeped through the small pup tents almost as if they did not exist, and although the big Sibley tents could hold stoves, they presented a different kind of hazard. Heavy snowfall might break a center pole and let the canvas drop against the red-hot stovepipe, whereupon the entire tent was likely to go up in flames. Frozen hands and feet, frequently followed by amputations, were a common winter danger.

Amputations, performed without anesthetics or sterilization, were the chief treatment for arm or leg bones shattered by bullets. Abdominal and head wounds defied the skills of doctors working on the ground in the open and were seldom treated at all; if nature could not repair the damage and the infection that almost always followed, death was inevitable. Though efforts were made to take the sick and wounded back to the fort hospital, the long jolting in an ambulance wagon or on a horse-drawn travois was so agonizing that sufferers sometimes begged to be shot instead. Balancing the grim account was the low casualty rate: many recruits never saw a hostile Indian during their stay at Fort Laramie.

Next page *An infantry column with escort wagons on the march near Fort Laramie about 1884.*



Essay on Sources

In spite of Fort Laramie's renown first as a fur-trading establishment and then as a major Army post, only two books have concerned themselves exclusively with its history. The first is *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West* by LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis M. Young (1938); the second is Remi Nadeau's *Fort Laramie and the Sioux Indians.*

Contrasting with this dearth of books about the fort are the many references to it in accounts about the fur trade, the overland migrations, the Indian wars of the High Plains, and the gold rushes to Montana and the Black Hills of South Dakota. A good trio about the fur-trading post are Dale L. Morgan's and Eleanor Towles Harris's editing of *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson: The West in 1834* (1967), Bernard DeVoto's *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947), and Don Berry's *A Majority of Scoundrels* (1961).

To west-bound emigrants, Fort Laramie was one of the grand landmarks of their trail, and hundreds of them described it at least briefly in the journals they kept. Particularly useful are the diaries edited by Clifford M. Drury over the course of several years, and a complementary pair from the year 1846, Francis Parkman's classic *The Oregon Trail,* (1848), and Edward Bryant's *What I Saw in California,* first published in 1848. For a summary of another critical year, see Merrill J. Mattes, *Fort Laramie and the Forty Niners* (1949).

The way soldiers and their dependents lived at Fort Laramie can be deduced from such general studies of Army life on the frontier as Don Rickey, Jr.'s, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay* (1976); Patricia Y. Stallard's *Glittering Misery, Dependents of the Indian Fighting Army* (1978); Robert M. Utley's, *Frontier Regulars* (1973); and appropriate chapters in Everett Dick's *Vanguards of the Frontier* (1941). Harder to find but rewarding are diaries and letters in various state historical journals. A short sampling would include Myra Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains: the Diary of Lewis B. Hull, 1864-1866," *Kansas Historical Quarterly,* February 1938; Agnes W. Spring, "The Letters of Catherine Weaver Collins," *Colorado Magazine,* October, 1954; Merrill J. Mattes, "The Sutler's Store at Fort Laramie," *Annals of Wyoming,* July, 1946; and John D. McDermott, "Crime and Punishment in the United States Army: A Phase of Fort Laramie History," *Journal of the West,* April, 1968.

A knowledge of the Indians of the High Plains is, of course, essential to an understanding of Fort Laramie. Among the many accounts available are Joseph A. Cash, *The Sioux People* (1971); Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux* (1963); and George E. Hyde's accounts of two prominent chiefs, *Red Cloud's Folk* (1937) and *Spotted Tail's Folk* (1973). George B. Grinnell treats of the Sioux's principal allies in *The Fighting Cheyennes* (1915) and *The Cheyenne Indians* (1923).

For material focussing on warfare see Dee Brown, *Fort Phil*

Kearny (1962); Agnes Wright Spring, *Caspar Collins: The Life and Exploits of an Indian Fighter of the Sixties* (1927); Eugene Ware, *The Indian War of 1864* (1960); Edgar I. Stewart *Custer's Luck* (1955), Consult also the chapter on Crazy Horse in Alvin Josephy's *The Patriot Chiefs* (1961) and the appropriate pages in Wilcomb E. Washburn and Robert M. Utley, *The American Heritage History of the Indian Wars* (1977). A personal reminiscence of value by a man who was stationed for a time at Fort Laramie is Percival Lowe's *Five Years a Dragoon,* edited by Don Russell (1965).

Mention should also be made of the manuscript data in the archives at Fort Laramie itself. Studies conducted by Nan Carson Rickey, Sally Johnson, John McDermott, James Sheire, Jerome Greene, and Don Rickey, Jr., in connection with the restoration of various buildings at the site contain valuable historical material. In addition numerous abstracts from contemporary records are grouped together in the files under such headings as "Crime and Punishment," "Recreation," "Medical," "Domestic Life," "Soldiers' Life in the Garrison," "Treaties and Indians," and the like, all of it of great value in the writing of this account.

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Fort Laramie

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