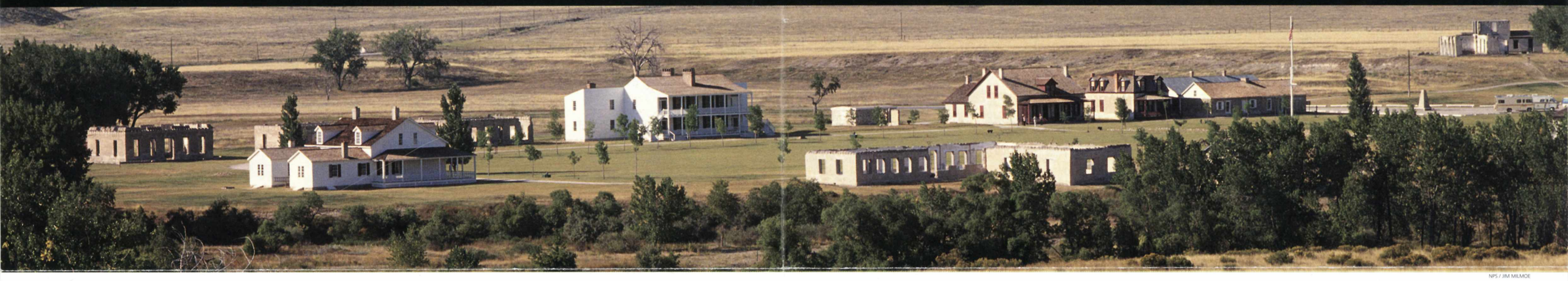
Fort Laramie

Fort Laramie National Historic Site
Wyoming

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



NPS / JIM MILMOE

In 1834 Robert Campbell and William Sublette built the first "Fort Laramie" near the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers. Officially named Fort William, the small post measured 100 by 80 feet. Hewn cottonwood logs 15 feet high formed its palisade. It enjoyed a near monopoly on the buffalo trade here until 1841 when a competing trading post, Fort Platte, was built a mile away. The rivalry led Fort William's owners to replace their own aging fort with a larger, adobe-walled structure named Fort John.

Indian tribes, especially the Lakota (Sioux), traded tanned buffalo robes here for manufactured goods. Each spring caravans arrived at the fort, laden with trade goods. In fall tons of buffalo hides and other furs were shipped east. Throughout the 1840s, however, as the take of buffalo robes declined, Fort John's role changed. In 1841 the first of many westward-bound emigrants arrived. Over the next two decades tens of thousands stopped at the fort en route to Oregon, California, and the Salt Lake Valley. Traders at Fort John did a brisk but seasonal business catering to the emigrants' needs.

In 1849 the US Army bought Fort John as part of a plan to establish a military presence along the emigrant trails. Officially renamed Fort Laramie, it served as a military post for the next four decades. Soon after arrival, the army constructed new officers' and soldiers' quarters, stables, and a bakery, guardhouse, and powder magazine to house and support the garrison.

As its size and importance grew, Fort Laramie quickly became the principal military outpost on the Northern Plains. The fort was also the transportation and communication hub for the central Rocky Mountain region. Not only emigrant trails but stage lines, the Pony Express, and the transcontinental telegraph all passed through the post.

Fort Laramie hosted several treaty negotiations with Northern Plains Indian Nations. Most famous among these treaties were the Horse Creek Treaty of 1851 and the Treaty of 1868 *(see below)*, which remains controversial and contested to this day.

Relations between Indian tribes and the army deteriorated as the number of emigrants on the overland trails swelled. As conflicts grew, the army launched major campaigns from Fort Laramie against the Northern Plains tribes, who fiercely defended their homeland against further encroachment by a nation moving west. With the end of the Indian Wars, Fort Laramie's importance diminished. In 1890 the US Army abandoned the post and sold it at public auction.

Trappers and Traders



Trappers lived hard lives, spending months wading in cold mountain streams trapping beaver and other fur-bearing mammals. Beginning in 1825 and continuing for 16 years, trappers met at an annual "rendezvous" to exchange their year's catch of furs for supplies and trade goods and celebrate a successful trapping season.

The heyday of the beaver trade, driven largely by fashions in Europe, would last less than 30 years, and by the late 1830s buffalo robes had replaced beaver pelts as the sought-after fur.

Traders supplanted trappers and fixed trading posts like Forts William and John ended the rendezvous system. Indians camped near the fort and traded buffalo robes for a variety of goods including blankets, tobacco, powder, lead, sugar, and beads.

Alfred Jacob Miller painted the region's hunters and trappers.
BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER
GIFT OF THE COE FOUNDATION 36.64

Emigrants

Overland emigration peaked in the early 1850s at 50,000 annual travelers. The weary emigrants and gold-seekers eagerly awaited Fort Laramie, because it was one of their long journey's few supply points.

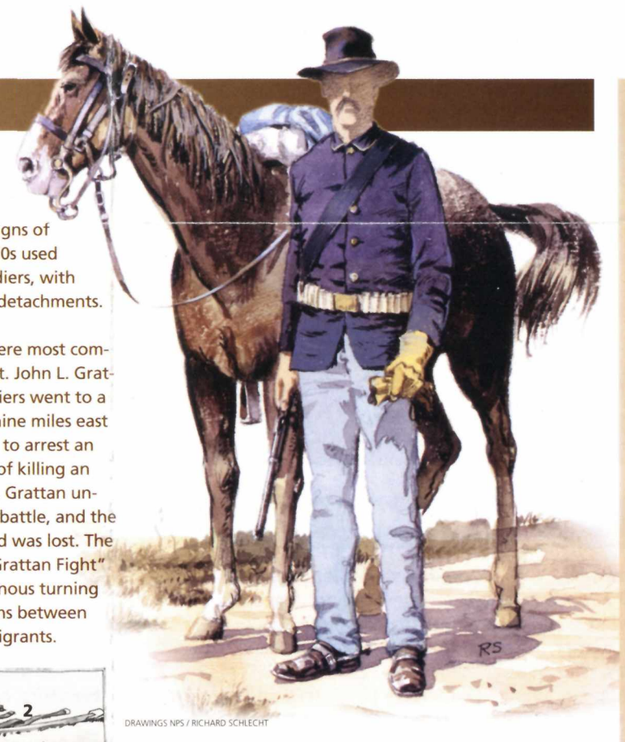
Set on the approaches to the Rocky Mountains, this was a natural stop. It was about a third of the way between their Missouri River "jumping-off places" and their destinations in Oregon or California, or halfway for those bound to Utah.

Fort Laramie's emigrant season lasted only about 45 days each year, in the late spring and early summer. These were days of intense activity. After weeks on the trail, the emigrants bathed and washed clothes in the clear waters of the Laramie River. They rested, bought fresh supplies, replaced worn-out draft animals, and made repairs to their wagons before setting out on the rest of their journey.



Encampment on the Plains **(detail), by Thomas Worthington Whittredge.** AUTRY NATIONAL CENTER 88.108.17

Soldiers



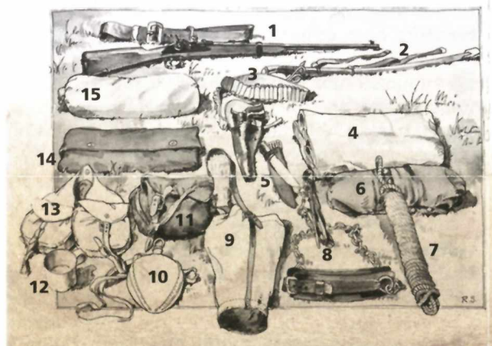
Combat was rare in the frontier army. Instead the enlisted men's days were a rigid routine of drill and "fatigue duties." Discipline was harsh and minor infractions could mean severe penalties.

Garrison life quickly made five-year enlistments seem endless. The frontier army's desertion rate was 33 percent from 1865 to 1890—although Ordnance Sgt. Leodegar Schnyder served 37 years here.

Most soldiers stationed at Fort Laramie served in the infantry, like the men of the 7th US Infantry shown below. The big summer campaigns of the 1860s and 70s used mostly foot soldiers, with smaller cavalry detachments.

Short patrols were most common. On one, Lt. John L. Grattan and 29 soldiers went to a Lakota village nine miles east of Fort Laramie to arrest an Indian accused of killing an emigrant's cow. Grattan unwisely forced a battle, and the entire command was lost. The August 1854 "Grattan Fight" marked an ominous turning point in relations between Indians and emigrants.

DRAWINGS NPS / RICHARD SCHLECHT



Soldier's Field Gear

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*



7th US Infantry soldiers, 1887. FORT LARAMIE NHS, HARTSHORN COLLECTION

Northern Plains Indians

As the 1800s began, the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe tribes dominated the Fort Laramie region. Through the 1830s and 40s relations between tribes and traders were for the most part friendly. By the 1850s, after Fort Laramie had become a military post and emigrant traffic on the overland trails had mushroomed, tensions escalated. Still, the tribes rarely attacked wagon trains.



Buffalo Hunt **by Alfred Jacob Miller.** AMON CARTER MUSEUM



Lakota Chief Red Cloud
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

In 1851, Congress sought to keep the peace by authorizing a treaty council. Over 10,000 Northern Plains tribes from many nations gathered near the fort. They pledged not to harass emigrants in return for $50,000 in annuity goods, but just two years later, incidents near the fort resulted in deaths on both sides.

Periods of warfare continued to alternate with peaceful interludes. Indian resentment intensified in the 1860s as thousands of miners headed north on the Bozeman Trail to gold and silver finds in Montana. To protect the miners the army built three forts along the trail, which led to Red Cloud's War of 1866–68.

In a new treaty signed here in 1868, the United States agreed to Red Cloud's demand to abandon the forts on the Bozeman Trail, and set up the Great Sioux Reservation in western South Dakota. Gold finds in the Black Hills led to the breaking of that treaty by 1874.

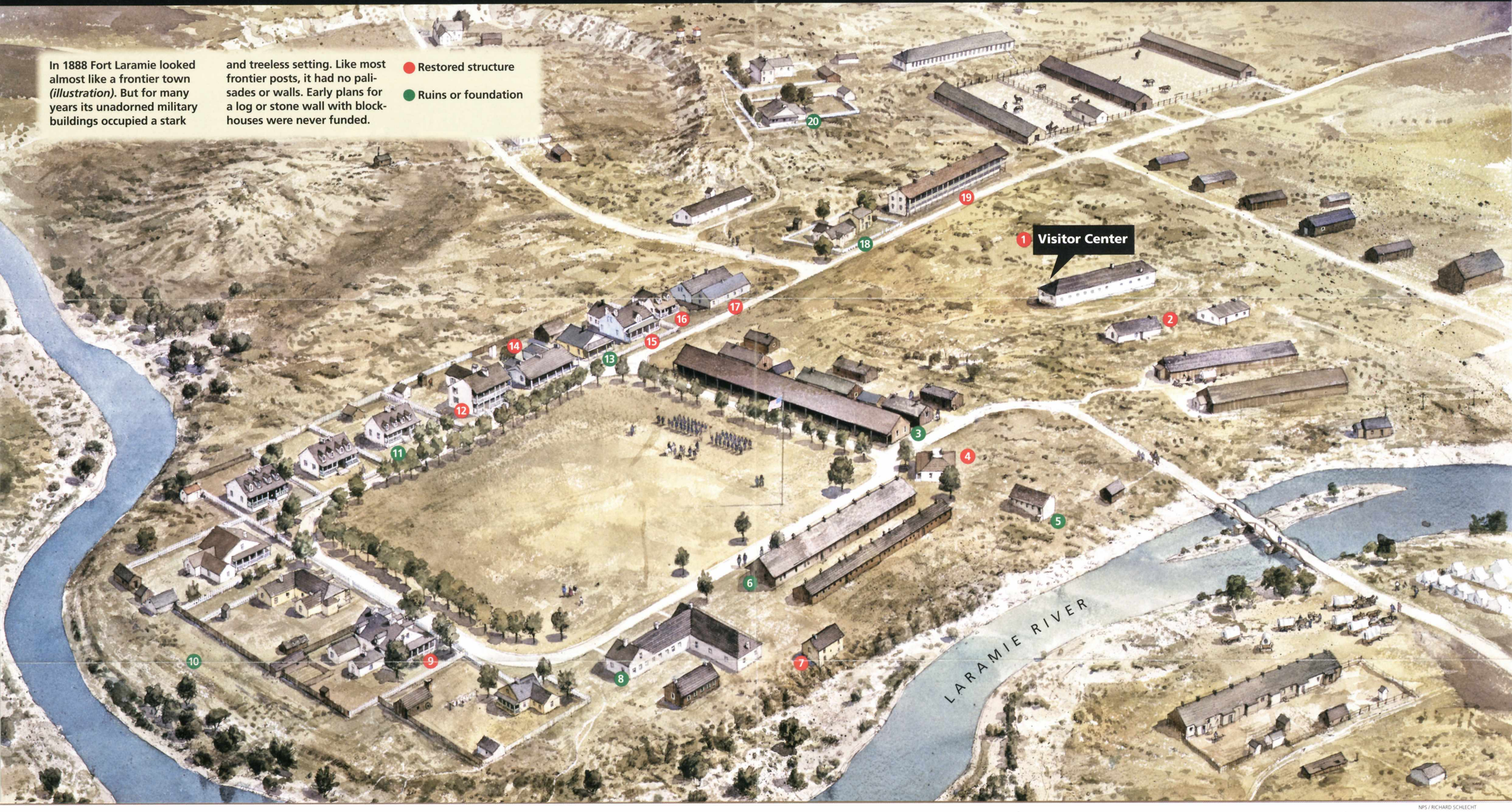


1868 treaty council near Fort Laramie. NEWBERRY LIBRARY AP2800

Touring Fort Laramie

In 1888 Fort Laramie looked almost like a frontier town *(illustration)*. But for many years its unadorned military buildings occupied a stark and treeless setting. Like most frontier posts, it had no palisades or walls. Early plans for a log or stone wall with blockhouses were never funded.

- Restored structure
- Ruins or foundation



NPS / RICHARD SCHLECHT

Fort Laramie Today

Fort Laramie's riverside setting on the approaches to the Rocky Mountains looks much like it did when the post was active. Buildings from its military period, some dating to 1849, survived intact because homesteaders bought and lived in them and public agencies later worked to preserve them.

Eleven structures are now restored and refurnished to their historic appearances.

The national historic site is three miles southwest of the town of Fort Laramie, WY, off US 26. There are no camping facilities. Nearby towns offer RV parks, motels, and restaurants.

Accessibility: We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Call or check our website.

The visitor center in the old Commissary Storehouse (tour stop 1) is open 8 am to 4:30 pm daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1, with longer hours from early June to Labor Day. (The parking lot and walkway do not appear on this historical illustration.) The visitor center offers historical information and literature, or visit our park website *(below)*.

Safety and Management Concerns
Don't let an accident spoil your visit. Be careful on footpaths and stairs and stay alert to hazards. Your safety is your responsibility. Historic ruins are fragile. You can help us preserve them by not walking or climbing on them. Possession, removal, or disturbance of any artifact is prohibited. For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

More Information
Fort Laramie National Historic Site
956 Gray Rocks Road
Fort Laramie, WY 82212
307-837-2221
www.nps.gov/fola

Fort Laramie is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, please visit www.nps.gov.

Touring the Fort

1 Commissary Storehouse (1884) This lime-concrete building served as a food warehouse for the army. It now houses park offices and the visitor center.

2 Old Bakery (1876, *left)* and New Bakery Ruins (1883) Bread was a staple of the soldier's diet. Here, in big double-brick ovens, bakers made up to 700 18-ounce loaves daily.

3 Infantry Barracks Foundation (1867) This one-story frame building housed three companies, with mess halls and kitchens for each in the back.

4 New Guardhouse (1876) After many complaints by the post surgeon this new guardhouse replaced an unhealthy, overcrowded older one. It held both major and minor offenders.

5 General Sink (Latrine) Ruins (1886) To protect the post's drinking water supply, a privy or general sink was built for four companies, with sewage channeled to the Laramie River.

6 Two-Company Infantry Barracks Foundation (1866) Ruins are all that are left of this big adobe barracks building.

7 Old Guardhouse (1866) Fort Laramie's second guardhouse, built to house 40 prisoners, often held more. The upper story had quarters for the guard and the Officer of the Guard. The first floor had the general confinement area and two small solitary-confinement cells. Prisoners had no furniture, heat, or light.

8 Administration Building Ruins (1885) Headquarters and the post school were moved here in 1885. Concerts, religious services, dances, plays, and lectures were held here in the post theater.

9 Captain's Quarters (1870) Planned as the Commanding Officer's quarters, this building became a duplex for company-grade officers.

10 Fort John Site (1841–62) The American Fur Co. built Fort John here of adobe brick reinforced with wooden beams. It had 15-foot walls and blockhouses on two corners. Abandoned and in ruins by 1858, it was demolished in 1862.

11 Officers' Quarters Ruins (1881) These large buildings, two duplexes and the Commanding Officer's quarters, were additions to smaller 1855 adobe buildings.

12 "Old Bedlam" (1849) Built to house bachelor officers, "Old Bedlam" is Wyoming's oldest documented building. The right side is restored to bachelor officers' quarters in the 1850s; the left side to post headquarters in 1863–64, when fort commander Lt. Col. William O. Collins and his wife lived on the second floor.

13 Officers' Quarters Ruins (1882) The first building south of the Surgeon's Quarters on "Officers' Row," a mix of frame, adobe, concrete, and stone, was built from an existing powder magazine.

14 Magazine (1850) The stone magazine, restored to 1850–62, held post weapons and ammunition, except large field pieces.

15 Post Surgeon's Quarters (1875) Post Surgeon Louis Brechemin and his family normally lived in half of this duplex from 1885 to 1889. His study held his scientific collections, and most patients were treated there before being sent to the hospital to recuperate.

16 Lt. Colonel's Quarters (Burt House, 1884) Lt. Col. Andrew Burt, a 7th US Infantry officer, and his wife Elizabeth lived in the home 1887–88. They liked relatively plain furnishings rather than the ornate decor used in most officers' houses during the Victorian period.

17 Post Trader's Store (1849) and Complex Built and run by a civilian licensed by the army, the post trader's store did a profitable business with soldiers, Indians, gold seekers, and emigrants. The north section, built of stone in 1852, was the sutler's headquarters and, for a time, post office. An 1883 addition housed the officers' club and an enlisted men and civilians' bar. The store is restored to its 1860s appearance.

18 Post Trader's (Sutler) House Foundation (1863) Owned by the post trader/sutler at Fort Laramie, this house was among the more ornate at the post.

19 Cavalry Barracks (1874) Fort Laramie's largest building was built to add housing during the Indian Wars. Soldiers slept in two large squad bays upstairs. The kitchen and mess room were downstairs.

20 Hospital Ruins (1873) The 12-bed facility had a dispensary, kitchen, dining room, isolation rooms, and surgeon's office. This was the first lime-concrete building at Fort Laramie.

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