



Fort Laramie as photographed around 1870 by William Henry Jackson. He gave a keynote address at the 1938 ceremony proclaiming the fort a national monument.

In 1834 Robert Campbell and William Sublette built the first fort, a trading post, near the confluence of the Laramie and North Platte rivers. Fort William measured 100 by 80 feet. Cottonwood logs 15 feet high formed its protective wall. The post 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.

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 thousands 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 westward-bound emigrants arrived. Over the next two decades tens of thousands stopped at the fort on their way 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 purchased 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, bakery, and guardhouse to house and support the men stationed here.

As its size and importance grew, Fort Laramie quickly became the principal military post on the Northern Plains. The fort was also the transportation and communication hub for the central Rocky Mountain region. Stage

lines, the Pony Express, and the transcontinental telegraph all passed through the post.

Fort Laramie hosted treaty negotiations between the US and Tribal Nations of the Northern Plains. The most significant treaties were the Horse Creek Treaty of 1851 and the Treaty of 1868—the latter remains controversial and contested to this day (see below).

Relations between the Tribes and the army deteriorated as the United States moved westward. Northern Plains Tribes defended their homelands from this encroachment.

In response, the army launched major campaigns from Fort Laramie against the Tribes.

As the Indian Wars came to an end, the fort’s importance diminished. In 1890 the US Army closed the post and sold it at public auction. Homesteaders bought what was left of the buildings, tore down most for lumber, and turned others into homes and businesses.

In 1938 President Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed Fort Laramie a national monument. It was designated a national historic site in 1960.

Trappers and Traders

Trappers spent months wading in mountain streams to trap beaver and other fur-bearing mammals. They met each year at a rendezvous to exchange their year’s catch of furs for supplies and trade goods and celebrate a successful trapping season.

The beaver trade was driven by fashions in Europe and lasted less than 30 years. By the late 1830s buffalo robes replaced beaver pelts as the most important fur.

Traders supplanted trappers, and trading posts like Forts William and John ended the rendezvous system. Native people 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.

Emigrants

Overland emigration peaked in the early 1850s at 50,000 annual travelers. Weary emigrants and gold seekers eagerly awaited their arrival at Fort Laramie. It was a major supply point on the trails.

Set on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, the fort was about a third of the way for those going to Oregon or California, and halfway for those heading 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

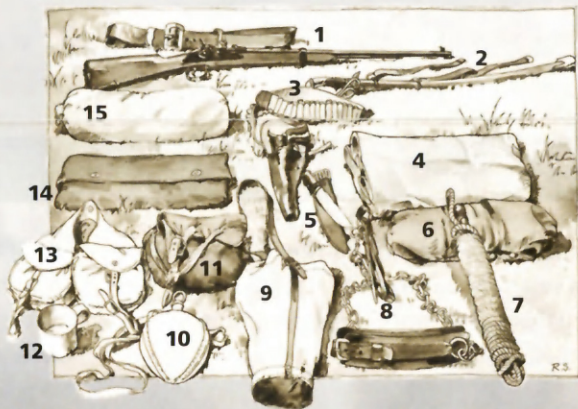
Soldiers

Combat was rare in the frontier army. Instead the enlisted men’s days were a rigid routine of drills, military duties, and labor. Discipline was harsh, and penalties could be severe.

Post life quickly made five-year enlistments seem endless. The frontier army’s desertion rate was as high as 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 campaigns of the 1860s and 1870s used mostly foot soldiers, with smaller detachments of cavalry.

Skirmishes were common. On one, Lt. John L. Grattan and 29 soldiers went to a Lakota village nine miles east of Fort Laramie to arrest a warrior accused of killing an emigrant’s cow. Grattan and all his men were killed in the ensuing fight. The August 1854 “Grattan Fight” was an ominous turning point in relations between Northern Plains Tribes and the US government.



Soldier’s Field Gear

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1 .45/55 carbine and sling | 8 Side line (hobble) |
| 2 Saber in scabbard | 9 Feedbag for horse |
| 3 .45 Colt revolver and cartridge belt | 10 Canteen |
| 4 Tent | 11 Haversack |
| 5 Knife and sheath | 12 Tin cup |
| 6 Overcoat | 13 Saddle bags |
| 7 Picket pin and lariat | 14 Poncho |
| | 15 Grain bag |



7th US Infantry soldiers, 1887

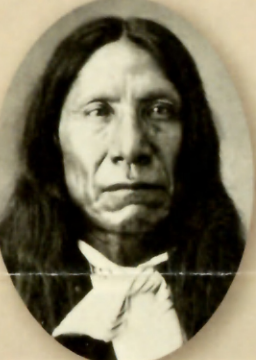
Northern Plains Tribes

As the 1800s began, the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Tribes dominated the region. Through the 1830s and 1840s relations between Tribes and traders were for the most part friendly. By the 1850s, tensions had escalated. Fort Laramie had become a military post, and emigrant traffic on the overland trails had increased greatly. Still, the Tribes rarely attacked wagon trains, forts, or settlements.



Buffalo Hunt by Alfred Jacob Miller

In 1851, Congress sought to keep the peace by authorizing a treaty council. Over 10,000 people from many Northern Plains Nations gathered near the fort. They pledged to allow emigrants safe passage in return for \$50,000 in annuity goods. Just two years later, the peace was broken.



Lakota Chief Red Cloud

Periods of warfare continued to alternate with peaceful interludes. Native Nations’ resentment intensified in the 1860s when thousands of US citizens 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.

A new treaty, signed here, ended the war in 1868. The US 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 in 1874 led to the breaking of that treaty.

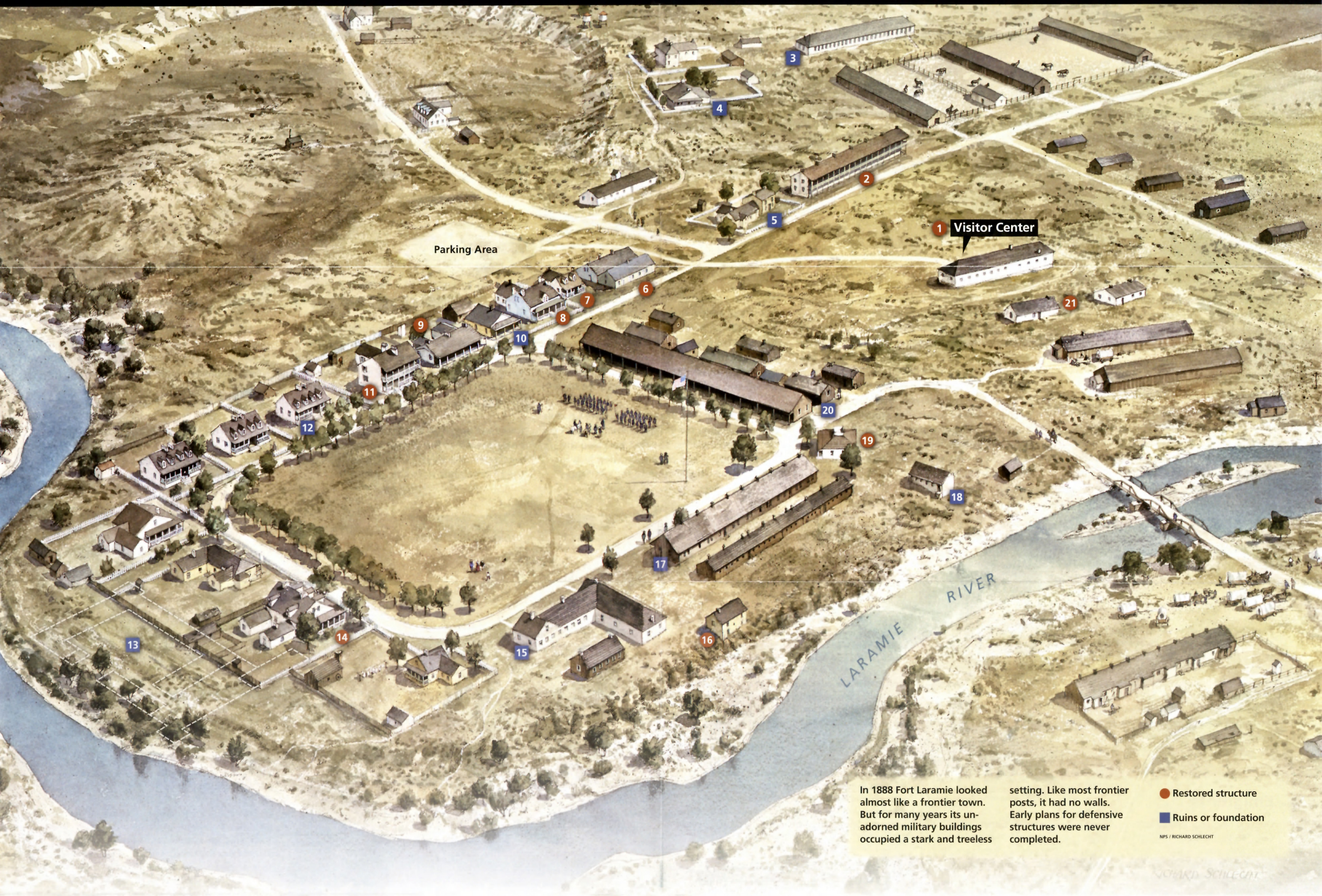


1868 treaty council near Fort Laramie



Restored structures

Touring Fort Laramie



In 1888 Fort Laramie looked almost like a frontier town. But for many years its unadorned military buildings occupied a stark and treeless

setting. Like most frontier posts, it had no walls. Early plans for defensive structures were never completed.

● Restored structure
■ Ruins or foundation

NPS / RICHARD SCHLECHT

Fort Laramie Today

Fort Laramie's riverside looks much like it did when the post was active. Buildings from its military period date as far back as 1849. Some survived intact after homesteaders bought them. Later, public agencies worked to preserve them. Eleven structures are now restored and furnished to their historic appearances.

Getting Here Fort Laramie National Historic Site is three miles southwest of the town of Fort Laramie, WY, off US 26. Camping, lodging, and services are available in nearby towns.

Visitor Center Located at tour stop 1 in the historic Commissary Storehouse. Open daily except for Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Hours vary seasonally; check the park website or NPS App. Stop here for exhibits, displays of artifacts, a short film, and a bookstore.

The park grounds are open daily sunrise to sunset.

Explore More Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.

Be Safe and Protect the Park 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. • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. • For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a ranger.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Call or email us at fola_visitor_information@nps.gov.

More Information
Fort Laramie National Historic Site
965 Gray Rocks Rd.
Fort Laramie, WY 82212
307-837-2221
www.nps.gov/foia

Emergencies call 911

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Touring the Fort

1 Commissary Storehouse (1884) Once the army's food warehouse, it now houses the visitor center.

2 Enlisted Barracks (1874) Fort Laramie's largest remaining building, it was built to add housing during the height of the Northern Plains Indian Wars. Soldiers slept upstairs; the kitchen and mess room were downstairs. The south half of this building is refurbished to the 1876 period when cavalry soldiers lived here.

3 Noncommissioned Officers' (NCO) Quarters (1884) This apartment building was for the post's senior NCOs.

4 Hospital Ruins (1873) The 12-bed facility had a dispensary, kitchen, dining room, isolation rooms, and surgeon's office.

5 Post Trader's House Foundation (1863) Built by the post trader, who was a civilian licensed by the US government. This house was among the more ornate at Fort Laramie.

6 Post Trader's Store (1849) and Complex Built and run by the post trader, the store did a profitable business with soldiers, Native Americans, gold seekers, and emigrants. The north section, built in 1852, was the trader's headquarters and, for a time, a post office. An 1883

addition housed the officers' club and a separate bar for enlisted men and civilians. The store is restored to its 1860s appearance.

7 Lt. Colonel's Quarters (1884) Lt. Col. Andrew Burt, an infantry officer, and his wife Elizabeth lived in the home 1887–88. They liked relatively plain furnishings rather than the ornate Victorian decor in most officers' houses.

8 Post Surgeon's Quarters (1875) The post surgeon and his family usually lived in half of this duplex. He treated most patients here. If necessary, he sent them to the hospital to recuperate.

9 Magazine (1850) Restored to 1850–62, this magazine safely stored ammunition for the post.

10 Officers' Quarters Ruins (1882) This building was partially constructed from the 1850 powder magazine after it was abandoned.

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

12 Officers' Quarters Ruins (1881) These large buildings were the commanding officer's quarters and duplexes for lower-ranked officers. They were additions to smaller 1855 buildings.

13 Fort John Site (1841–62) The American Fur Company built its trading fort here of adobe brick. White lines on the map show its size. In ruins by 1858, the fort was demolished in 1862.

14 Captain's Quarters (1870) This duplex was originally planned as the commanding officer's quarters. Instead it became a duplex for lower-ranked officers.

15 Administration Building Ruins (1885) For a short time this building served as the fort's headquarters, theater, and school.

16 Old Guardhouse (1866) Fort Laramie's second guardhouse was built to house 40 prisoners but often held more. The general confinement area was on the first floor; two small solitary-confinement cells were below.

17 Enlisted Barracks Foundation (1866) Ruins are all that are left of this big adobe barracks building. At one time it housed two companies of soldiers—about 120 men.

18 General Sink (Latrine) Ruins (1886) To protect the post's drinking water supply, a privy or general sink was built for four companies (over 200 men).

19 New Guardhouse (1876) This new guardhouse replaced the unhealthy, overcrowded older one (stop 16). It held both major and minor offenders.

20 Enlisted Barracks Foundation (1867) This one-story frame building housed three companies of soldiers. Each company had a mess hall and kitchen behind the building.

21 Old Bakery (1876, left) and New Bakery Ruins (1883) Each day bakers used brick ovens to make as many as 700 18-ounce loaves of bread.

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