

“WE LIVED AT FORT LARAMIE”; INTERVIEWS WITH OLD-TIMERS

By
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While serving as Superintendent of the then Fort Laramie National Monument from May 1947 to June 1958 both my office and our living quarters were in the only partially rehabilitated Cavalry Barracks built in 1875. From that vantage point we not only learned to appreciate the conditions which the military and other earlier occupants of the Fort had endured, but also found a unique opportunity to interview on the ground former military period residents of the Fort and its environs. These we called Old-Timers.

Since the major rolls of Fort Laramie in the pageant of the west from 1834 to 1890 are well documented and have been the subjects of thousands of pages by historians from Parkman to Hebard to Hafer and Mattes, the products of Old-Timer interviews are largely sidelights on history. They are sidelights, however, which deepen our perspective and wet our appetites to more fully appreciate that history. In this case they also provided information essential to accurate restoration of military buildings at the Fort.

Aside from some Old timers who were still local residents and will be mentioned later the most productive of our interviews was among the first. We will never forget the portly, but still active gentleman who arrived at the Fort in a red Buick convertible on July 24, 1948 and introduced himself as Col. Louis Brechemin, Jr., U.S. Army retired. Colonel Brechemin had lived at Fort Laramie as a boy of 8 to 12, from 1885 to 1889 while his father, then Capt. Louis Brechemin, 7th Infantry, was Assistant Surgeon, the ranking Post and Regimental medical officer of that period. Moreover, the Colonel was blessed with an almost photographic memory of the scenes and events of his happy boyhood years at the Fort. Having duplicated his father's career as an Army Medical Officer he had had lifelong contact with the families of the then tiny officer corp which no doubt added to his retention of facts and stories about Fort Laramie.

Colonel Brechemin had come back to the scenes of his boyhood and he was in no hurry. Nearly every day for ten days he returned to the Fort and we had time to go over every building and ruin on the grounds together, discussing details of each structure and its usage. He helped us work out a complete floor plan of the ruined hospital, noting specifically as a doctor, that no special operating room was provided. He indicated that surgery, such as it was, was performed in his father's office or on one of the beds in a ward. He corrected some current misinformation and provided other data about the Sutler's Store and the Officer's Club therein which was later followed almost to the letter in the structural restoration and refurbishing of that interesting multi-purpose structure.

The colonel soon became practically a member of our family. He amazed us by naming virtually every man, woman, child, horse and dog in group pictures from the 1880s in our collection. Later, as we corresponded with him at his homes in Deer Harbor, Washington and Belfast, Maine he sent us many more fine photographs to copy. One of these depicts a group of three officer's daughters (one being his teen age sister) and two handsome young Lieutenants and a young rancher who he said were around together all the time and were nicknamed "The Kindergarten."

During our conversations Colonel Brechemin often alluded to stories he remembered from his years at the Fort and which he said he would write up and send to us. Finally, over two years later, two batches of them arrived and with a minimum of editing here are the best.

"Barney, or Horse Racing at Fort Laramie in 1885"

There was no circular race track at the Post. The races that year were straight, on the flat, about a quarter of a mile, with the start at the Stage Barn and the finish in front of the Rustic Hotel. One day that fall there were a number of scrub races there. It was pay day and soldiers and cowboys were down there betting. Suddenly a queer looking man drove up in a rickety wagon with a horse tied behind. It was a woe begone skate covered with mud and long hair.

This man got to arguing around the crowd and wanted to enter the horse in the next race. He was laughed at, but he bet that his horse would not come in last. He was taken up on that and then went around again betting that his horse would come in second. Finally he went around betting that his horse would come in first. He was taken up on many bets and put up his money. After the betting was completed he went to his wagon and gave the horse a bath and grooming. This revealed a beautiful chestnut sorrel race horse and a jockey saddle and bridle. He himself appeared in jockey silks of brilliant colors. The crowd was astonished and of course the stranger cleaned up in the race, winning all bets.

Mr. Eli Hall, manager of the Post Trader's interests, was among those

who lost on the race, but he agreed to let the man quarter the horse 'Barney' in Mr. London's stable in the back yard of the Post Trader's house. Mr. Hall lived in that yard in a small house. About midnight Mr. Hall was awakened by the stranger who said he had lost all his money in a poker game with some soldiers and wanted to borrow \$500 leaving the horse 'Barney' as security. Mr. Hall loaned the man the money and never saw him again. However, he had the horse and soon put him up in a raffle. Lt. Tommy Tompkins won the raffle and in a month or so put 'Barney' up for another raffle and Mr. Hall won him back. My father also put up his horse 'Larry' in a raffle and Mr. Hall won him too. By that time the Post was somewhat suspicious but nothing was proved. 'Barney' won every race except one at Fort Laramie. The exception was losing to a cowpuncher named Poak from the 4P Ranch on a roan horse. Each owner rode his own horse and Mr. Hall rode 'Barney.' The whole Post blamed Mr. Hall for not picking a real jockey.

Around the Fort 'Barney' was frequently ridden by Neeley Williams, the daughter of Capt. Constant Williams, who married Louis Kittson, son of Commodore Kittson of St. Paul. They were married in the Burt house next to the Post Trader's Store by Dr. Rafter the Episcopal Minister from Cheyenne. Mrs. Kittson then laid siege to Mr. Hall to buy 'Barney' and he was finally shipped to St. Paul.

Colonel Brechemin's next story he dates November 1885 and titles:

"The Lachlin-Flannery Fight."

I was 8 years old and walking from the London house towards the Store and saw two soldiers and a huge cowpuncher standing by the back yard gate. They were quarreling violently and the cowpuncher drew his Colt revolver and threatened one of the soldiers. Just then Mr. London came up the walk from his house and stepped into the road. He called to them "boys, stop that quarreling". Al Lachlin, the cowpuncher, walked towards Mr. London putting his revolver back in its holster. As he continued towards the Store, Flannery, one of the soldiers called after him, "I'm not afraid of your so and so revolver" and continued cursing him. Lachlin said nothing and went into the Store. Flannery and the other soldier Clements, both of H Company followed to the steps of the Post Office talking loudly.

Lieutenant Tompkins came by, heard the men talking and ordered Flannery to "Go to his quarters." Flannery started for his quarters and disappeared until Lieutenant Tompkins walked on. Then Flannery returned to the Post Office steps and was storming with Clements when Al Lachlin came out of the Store with a package of sugar. He stopped in front of the Post Office and Flannery insulted him again. Then Lachlin pulled out his revolver and struck Flannery over the head with it. Flannery

jumped on him and they both fell over the dirt from a small ditch. Flannery captured the revolver and beat Lachlin over the head with it. Clements told Flannery to take the revolver to the Commanding Officer and they started up the Officer's walk, but met Lieutenant Kendrick and gave the gun to him. Flannery came back and found Lachlin standing on the Store steps and started cussing him out again when Lachlin reached down and smashed him in the face. Flannery was up like a flash and after Lachlin, but the Sergeant of the Guard stopped him and Kendrick ordered Lachlin taken to the Guardhouse.

My father was called to the Guardhouse and he took Lachlin to the Hospital and stitched up his scalp for the man was in pretty bad shape. Father also had to stitch up Flannery's scalp. We boys were horrified at the fight and so much bloodshed.

The next morning Lachlin's revolver was returned to him and he left the Post. My father sent a cowboy after him about 10 days later to tell him to come back and get the stitches taken out. Then father heard that Al had an infected wound and concussion and had nearly died. However, we saw him many times later at the Post and he was all right.

Many years later in 1900 at Corregidor Hospital in Manila I was making Ward Rounds one morning and came to a new admission, Ordnance Sergeant Flannery standing at his bunk. I told him to turn his head around and said to him, "There are the old Al Lachlin scars, Sergeant." Needless to say Flannery was somewhat astonished.

"The Tramp Sprinter."

In the summer and fall of 1887 the Post went wild about footraces. They were 100 yard dashes in front of the Rustic Hotel.

One day two men showed up dressed as awkward looking tramps. They talked around the Rustic Hotel and found out that our best sprinter was Duffy of the Band; the snare drummer and also the Post Barber. One of the tramps went to the Barber Shop to see Duffy and arranged a foot race between the two for the next morning. Everyone went to the Rustic and Duffy appeared in trunks and spiked shoes but the tramp wore his overalls and ran in stocking feet. From the start the tramp ran awkwardly and quit after a few steps claiming it was not a fair start and that he had hurt his foot. He was overruled and Duffy won the money.

Then the tramp challenged our next best sprinter, Corporal Long and his confederate circulated around the crowd making bets. After the money was put up the tramp peeled off his clothes and appeared in running trunks and spiked shoes. At the starting gun the tramp jumped in front of Long and kept a yard ahead down the course winning by exactly one yard. Long couldn't pass him without running into his spike shoes. Of course the soldiers yelled foul and there was one of the hottest arguments you ever

heard. Finally, Lieutenant D.L. Howell our best umpire came down and heard all sides. He ruled against Long and the tramp got all the money. Of course both the tramps made a hasty exit from the Post and were never seen again.

Here Colonel Brechemin added this comment:—"You might think the soldiers would have learned to look with suspicion on all sporting strangers in that old western time but they never did. Every summer some gambler appeared and took them in."

Our final story from Colonel Brechemin is quite different in that it details a documented historic event.

"The Saw Mill Fire of 1887."

The Fort Laramie Fire Department was organized as follows with the following equipment:—7th Infantry Band—Axes; Co. A 7th Infantry—Hose Cart; Co. H 7th Infantry—Hose Cart. These units were quartered in the upper garrison. In the Cavalry Barracks were:—Co. D 7th Infantry—Hook and Ladder; Co. F 7th Infantry—Buckets. That was the entire garrison that year. The two hose carts were stored at the northeast corner of the parade and covered with tarpaulins. There was no hook and ladder truck so D Company carried the ladders on their shoulders.

On this memorable evening in May 1887 the entire battalion stood Dress Parade. The men in complete full dress, helmets, white gloves, etc. were all in formation. The Band was trooping down the center of the formation in helmets with white plumes. There were the usual spectators in the officers row; ladies, children and housemaids. On the porch of the wooden Barracks east of the parade ground were a number of cowpunchers, ranchers and other civilians watching the parade. Fire alarms at the Post consisted of a big locomotive bell at the Sawmill, Trumpeter of the Guard sounding fire call and Corporal of the Guard firing the evening gun.

I was on the porch of the house we lived in at that time—the old magazine now in ruins. Everybody was watching the parade when suddenly the Sawmill bell began to ring. Little Eddie Rain the Commissary Sergeants son came running up wild with excitement yelling, "The Sawmill is on fire!" The cowpunchers started to run in front of the Trader's Store and turned into the road leading to the Sawmill and the Rustic Hotel. Then 'Keno' the C. Company dog and 'Shep', Mr. Eli Hall's dog took it into their heads to stage the biggest dog fight I ever saw in the midst of the running crowd. As we turned the corner by the Trader's Store we saw the Sawmill, an old wooden building, blazing from the roof with huge flames high up. Major Freeman was commanding the parade and was a long time understanding what was up. Then the Trumpeter blew Fire Call and he came to life. He dismissed the battalion and the men came off the parade ground whooping and hollering. They tore into the Barracks and tried to change

from full dress to overalls. They got the hose carts under way, but had hitched on to the hydrant at the corner and that cart's hose didn't reach and the second carts hose was not the same size. They tried to couple the two hoses in the road in front of the saloon but no go! When the men got down to the Sawmill they were ordered away until Sergeant Wilson opened the steam valves. A boiler explosion was feared. The building burned to the ground destroying the pumps for our water supply and for some time afterwards the water wagon went around filling barrels until the new Mill was built of concrete and made fireproof.

We boys had the wildest excitement and the best time you ever saw and I cannot forget any detail of that wild scene, the rush, the dog fight and the fire. Mr. Sanderock was our Post Engineer until his death and he was the only man at the Post that was of the modern age or understood machinery or plumbing either. There was a soldier helper who lived at the Mill but was standing parade that evening and the fire got started from saw dust."

Colonel Brechemins mention of Mr. Sanderock introduces the next of our interviewees: actually a family rather than one individual. When Thomas B. Sanderock, at the age of 42, he left a widow and eight children ranging in age from four months to 18 years. Widowed and with only two or three of her children old enough to work, Harriet Sanderock managed to live on at the Fort until its abandonment by the army in 1890. At the auction of the Fort buildings in April of that year the other bidders saw to it that she should acquire a twelve room officer's quarters duplex for about \$50. Later, she and her oldest son, George, were able to homestead the sites of that house and the Old Guardhouse and a sizeable tract extending from the Fort grounds across the Laramie River and up Deer Creek. Also, the widow soon became Postmistress, the post office fixtures being moved to a room in her home from the Sutler's Store. There, at the south end of the old parade ground the Sanderock family grew up; the boys becoming cowboys or ranchers; the girls to marry and move away.

Harriet Sanderock lived at the Fort until her death in 1934 at the age of 88. She was preceded in death by George, and another son died in 1943. All the rest of the Sanderock children were well known to us and contributed varying amounts of historical information during the years.

Mrs. Maime Robertson, the oldest daughter, had worked for several officer's families following her fathers death and provided considerable insight into the make up of life of their households. She always recalled vividly the removal of the soldiers bodies to Fort McPherson National Cemetery from the Fort Laramie Cemetery and the Gratton Massacre mass burial; probably because one of the contractors workmen had given her a bent iron arrowhead from the skull of one of Gratton's men.

Stella, the youngest daughter, married Emery Bright, who as a young cowboy had helped bring one of the last big trail herds from Texas to the

Powder River valley and later settled in London Flats, east of Fort Laramie and near the Gratton Massacre site. Emery had seen the last years of the Fort only as a cowboy on the outside, but Stella was able to provide helpful information about her old home, Officer's Quarters 'A', before we began its restoration.

Oddly, it may seem to you, it was Mead, the youngest of the Sanderocks who was to provide the most helpful information about the Fort. Born in 1886, only a few months before his father's death, he had grown up in Officer's Quarters 'A' and then moved to his ranch two miles south. Thus he had seen all the changes in the Fort following its abandonment. He became a close friend and frequent companion on fishing and hunting trips, and to community activities of varying kinds. He was blessed with an excellent memory and was always willing to stop in and help us determine the originality of a feature of any building we were restoring or planning to restore. A unique and amusing example relates to Officer's Quarters 'A' which we restored in 1956 to 1958. The original long, straight, double stairway had been torn out and replaced with one winding stairway, for his mother, about 1916. But, from physical remains we had been able to duplicate the originals excepting one detail—newel posts. Mead stopped by and I posed the question to him. His response was quick and positive. "That side (west) had a plain ball-top post, but this side (east) had no post at all—just a nice smooth end on the rail. I remember that because we boys always slid down the rail on this side but couldn't on the other." To prove his point he proceeded to demonstrate stair rail sliding at age 70. Just to be sure, I checked Mead's story with two of his sisters who confirmed it with the comment that their brothers "never walked down stairs in that house."

Occasionally, the chance to interview an Old Timer took me away from the Fort and on December 8, 1949 I drove some 45 miles to 'Dutch Flats' near Mitchell, Nebraska. There I located and talked at length with one Jacob Gompert, 87 years young, and one of the original 'Dutchmen' for whom the flats were named.

Jacom Gompert came to America in 1887 after having served for three years in a Westphalian Hussar Regiment of the Imperial German Army. After a few months in San Antonio, Texas he came to Alliance, Nebraska, then the railhead, and in the spring of 1888 homesteaded in 'Dutch Flats' and found intermittent employment as a cowboy on the PF (Pratt & Ferris) Ranch which included most of the valley land north of the North Platte river from the site of Henry, Nebraska to Torrington, Wyoming with an upper ranch or feed farm where Lingle, Wyoming now stands.

In the spring of 1890, Jacob Gompert and his brother, Gerhardt, who had followed him over from Germany, attended the sale of buildings at Fort Laramie. They purchased one building for \$75. There followed many trips to the Fort to remove lumber from this building and haul it, one wagon load at a time, over the 40 miles of sandy road to 'Dutch Flats'.

There it was used to improve their dug-out homes and for fuel. Mr. Gompert emphasized the great importance of fuel to the homesteaders of the North Platte valley and the difficulty which they had in getting it prior to the coming of the railroad about 1900. Cow chips and wood hauled from the hills northwest of Lingle were their sole supplies for many years.

On one of the first trips with lumber from the Fort, a wardrobe from the house they were dismantling was placed on top of the load. In crossing Rawhide Creek where the banks were very steep the wardrobe fell into the creek. Mr. Gompert being alone had to walk about a mile to the homestead shack of Tom Powers to get his aid in reloading it. I hauled that wardrobe back to Fort Laramie in my pickup; a donation to the Fort from the Gompert family. The Tom Powers just mentioned was an oft quoted Old Timer who had died before my years at Fort Laramie. It developed that Mr. Gompert had worked with him on the PF and he told of having drawn the short straw during a card game with Powers and one Al Kelly and having to ride from the upper ranch to Fort Laramie in the middle of the night after two bottles of whiskey.

During his many trips to the Fort in 1890 and 1891, Jacob Gompert became well acquainted with some other Germans. Joe Wilde, the ex-bull whacker, road ranch operator and peerless rough and tumble fighter had acquired the old Cavalry Barracks and converted it into a combination hotel, tavern and dance hall. There the Gompert brothers often stayed and ate during their lumber salvaging trips and there they met Miss Elizabeth Haubruk, a German girl who lived with the Wildes as a member of their family. In 1892 she became Mr. Jacob Gompert.

The Gompert brothers hauled one load of heavy planks from Fort Laramie to the river bank north of Gering, Nebraska. There they were used on a bridge over the north Platte built cooperatively to give the settlers north of the river access to Gering. Before that, difficulty in crossing the river had forced the homesteaders to trade at Alliance, Nebraska, a five day round trip according to Mr. Gompert. He recalled that one outfit had tried to raft timbers from the Fort down the river to Gering, but had so much trouble that no one else tried it.

Mr. Gompert repeatedly mentioned that by fencing the bottom lands north of the river from near Lingle to the Nebraska line the PF Ranch had closed the old Mormon Trail and forced the road up onto the sandhills adding greatly to the difficulty of hauling their lumber from the Fort to 'Dutch Flats'.

On August 19, 1950 Mr. Gompert and several members of his family came to Fort Laramie and toured the grounds with us. Mr. Gompert seemed confused by all the changes that had taken place since his early visits, but he was able to identify the building he had bought and dismantled as the ruin of Officers' Quarters 'B', the former Commanding Officer's Quarters and one time home of such notables as Brevet major Generals

Wesley Merrit and John Gibbon. Mr. Gompert indicated that all fixtures, good doors and window sash had been removed from the building before the auction at which he bought it for \$75.

The long porches of the Cavalry Barracks caused him to recall walking over or around numerous drunken or sleeping cowboys in walking to Joe Wilde's hotel dining room at the north end of the building. He thought that Joe Wilde had a "gold mine" in his tavern operations in the 1890s in spite of having to act as his own bouncer.

Sometimes Old Timers arrived at the Fort in batches and a notable example was the visit to the Fort in September 1950 of George O. Reid of High River, Alberta and Jacob J. Tomamichel of Medora, North Dakota.

George Reid was known to us through his long letter of December 20, 1945 to Merrill Mattes which was published in *Annals of Wyoming* in July 1946. We will not repeat Reid's many interesting comments on Fort Laramie in that letter but his credentials as an Old Timer are impressive. He was born in 1872 at Fort McPherson, Nebraska where his father was corral boss. He lived at Fort Laramie from 1875 to 1880, where his father was similarly employed until fired for knifing a gambler, (self defense according to George) and then on nearby ranches, notably that at Register Cliff, until 1892. The Reids then moved north to the Little Missouri River country near Medora, North Dakota. There George was to serve as Sheriff of Billings County for four years before moving to Canada. In Canada he served 23 years in the Royal North West Police (sic) and four years as Chief Guard at a Royal Canadian Air Force Base.

Jake Tomamichel we recognized as the son of Hospital Steward John Tomamichel who had served at Fort Laramie from 1878 to 1889. Born in 1873, Jake had lived with his parents at the Fort only part of that time, leaving home to live with the Reids at Register Cliff and become a cowboy. He too moved to Medora with the Reids and acquired a small ranch. Later, we learned from several sources that Jake was known for many years as one of the best ropers on the northern plains.

These two Old Timers both well past 75, lead us on a merry chase around the Fort area. They were intent on seeing all their old haunts and pointed out things they remembered and answered questions as we went.

They remembered the rifle range and pointed out its location north of the Fort Builders with eight target butts against the hills and firing points at distances up to 1000 yards. This range is not shown on any of the old Army ground plans of the Fort. They also claimed that at one time the range officer had permitted them to pick up lead slugs and brass shells from the range to sell at 15¢ and 17¢ a pound.

George Reid remembered a big cottonwood tree full of Indian burials across the river south of the old corral, but said it was cut down when he was very small. Probably late in 1876. He also remembered seeing squaws scavenging in the fort dump for condemned bacon, etc.

Jake Tomamichel remembered eating in the Cavalry Barracks with his future brother-in-law Sergeant William Kelley and that the soldiers were issued individual jars of oleomargarine at that time.

Both men remembered going to school in various buildings and both left school at an early age to avoid rough treatment by soldier teachers who often got drunk trying to avoid teaching duty. They also remembered seeing the hay contractors wagons stopping by the river to throw sand in the hay to increase the weight before checking in over the Quartermasters scales.

Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Snyder who served at Fort Laramie from 1849 to 1886 was remembered by both men. Reid stated that in 1876, while most of the troops were in the field, Indians raided close to the fort and that Snyder cleaned up and loaded some of the obsolete cannon. When Indians appeared on the hills near the fort a few shells from those cannon scattered them. He also recalled that at that time civilians living near the fort were encouraged to come in at night. The Reids did so one night, but when George and his brother found bed bugs in their bed their mother packed them all off home with the remark that she would rather fight Indians than bed bugs!

As noted earlier, not all our Old Timers were men and on August 20, 1953 we were pleased to visit at length with Mrs. John Oliger of Denver who was brought to Fort Laramie by a friend from Cheyenne. Mrs. Oliger first came to Fort Laramie in 1887 as Ingrid Carlson, a domestic servant in the household of Col. Henry C. Merriam, Commanding Officer of Fort Laramie and the 7th Infantry. On October 10, 1889 she was married to Pvt. John Oliger, 'H' Company, 7th Infantry. The wedding was held in the Rustic Hotel with B.A. Hart, Justice of the Peace, officiating. In this connection, Mrs. Oliger stated that during the years she was at Fort Laramie there was no chapel or chaplain, but that occasionally Colonel Merriam had an Episcopalian Minister from Cheyenne come up and conduct services in his home.

While looking at photographs from the 1880s Mrs. Oliger was able to confirm many of the identifications made by Colonel Brechemin and others. On visiting the Fort buildings she was only able to provide new information in the case of the Commanding Officer's house. There she was the first person able to provide a reasonable ground plan of the missing kitchen wing. She confirmed statements by Maime Sanderock Robertson and others that the C.O.'s house was the only one with inside plumbing, having a full bathroom upstairs and water piped into the kitchen. All others had only hydrants at the back doors. She questioned our identification of a small building behind this house as a Stable. She stated that Colonel Merriam had a stable farther back in which he usually kept four personal horses. She felt that our 'Stable' was part of the chickenhouse which was closer and frequently raided by skunks.

Mr. Oliger described the Colonel's household as usually consisting of Col. & Mrs. Merriam, their five children; Miss Kitty Boyd, the Colonel's neice; his cousin, Charles Merriam, a civilian engineer; a governess and four servants. Quite a housefull, even with seven bedrooms available!

She remembered most of the barracks as having bunks, not cots, and that the soldiers used straw ticks which they were required to refill monthly. A Private's pay was \$25. each two months, but with 50¢ deducted in Washington her husband only got \$12.25 per month. He retired from the army in 1914 as a sergeant.

Our next Old Timer had no connections with the military at Fort Laramie but we had looked forward to interviewing him for a number of years. Louis Wilde was born in 1884 on a ranch eight miles up the Laramie river from the Fort. His father was the Joe Wilde remembered by Jacob Gompert, George Reid and others as a bull whacker, peerless rough and tumble fighter and one of the major bidders of the Army's sale of fortbuildings in 1890. At that sale he purchased the Cavalry Barracks and several other buildings. Moreover, he soon acquired at least 320 acres of the best land in the former military reservation. In addition to converting the barracks into a hotel, dance hall and saloon, the Wildes also irrigated and farmed the bottom lands east of the Fort until about 1917. Louis Wilde had lived with his parents at the Fort until about 1915, hence, he was able to point out and explain changes made in the Cavalry Barracks and the Commissary Storehouse during those years. Information which was very valuable in our on-going structural restoration program.

Louis Wilde advised us that a tornadic wind had destroyed about one third of the Barracks veranda roof in about 1910 necessitating reroofing and some structural changes we had deduced from photographs and physical evidence. He also stated that when purchased by his father the barracks was without window sash, but that he had bought some back from the Army and obtained some from other buildings. This tends to confirm a statement made by Jacob Gompert about the condition of the building he purchased.

We asked Mr. Wilde about a missing 'elevator' in the Commissary Storehouse and he stated that it had never been an elevator, just a hoist. He then described a large wooden wheel built up of boards with 2" x 6" spokes on an 8 to 10 inch shaft on which wound the hoist rope with an iron hook on the end. An endless rope making a full turn around the large wheel extended through the existing holes in the floor into the basement so the hoist could be operated from there or upstairs. We later reconstructed this hoist from his description and much to the surprise of some of our workmen it functioned quite well.

Now the source of our last Fort Laramie story can hardly be considered an Old Timer since he had never been to the Fort before, but his story so impressed me at the time that I recorded it in detail as follows:

On May 23, 1951 we were pleased to have a visit from Colonel P. W.

Allison, U.S. Army retired, of Salem, Oregon. Colonel Allison's interest in Fort Laramie stemmed from the fact that his father had been stationed here in 1872 as a Second Lieutenant of the 2nd Cavalry, soon after graduating from West Point. Colonel Allison related a number of tales of Army life which his father had told him about Fort Laramie, but only one we found sufficiently different and interesting to set down here.

In June of 1872 Lieutenant James Nicholas Allison of 'K' Company, 2nd U.S. Cavalry arrived at Fort Laramie equipped with a fine thoroughbred horse and a large hunting dog which was half Russian Wolfhound.

Soon after his arrival he joined a small party of young officers on a wolf hunt along the hills east of the fort. The dogs soon sighted a wolf and Allison being better mounted than his companions outdistanced and lost them in the ensuing chase.

Later, as he picked his way down from the hills toward the Oregon Trail to return to the fort his horse went lame and he stopped, removed a stone from one of her shoes, and turning to remount he saw a lone horeman riding rapidly eastward on the trail. Allison's path intersected that of the lone rider who he took at first to be an Indian with a flapping blanket, but as he came nearer, saw was a young woman in an old fashioned long riding habit and feathery hat. Thinking that she was a newly arrived visitor at the fort, he sought to stop her to warn her against riding so far out alone, but she raised her quirt which glittered in the sun and whipped her great black horse to dash past him and out of sight over a rise of ground. Dashing in pursuit, Allison was amazed on topping the rise to find no one in sight, and his amazement grew as he examined the little used trail and found no tracks, while his great wolf-hound cowered against him in an unprecedented show of fear.

As he looked about in astonishment, a shout from a ridge to the south appraised him of the fact that one of his officer friends was at hand. Soon another Lieutenant was beside him, first chaffing him about the lady who had given him the go-by, and then sharing his perplexity at the lack of any tracks or trace of her.

Returned to the Fort and dining with the assembled officers, their ladies and guests, Allison assured himself that no lady present could have been the mysterious rider. Then fully aware that he might be made the butt of many jokes, he told the group of his queer adventure. Before any jocular comments could be made the Commanding Officer (probably Bvt. Maj. Gen. John E. Smith, 14th Inf.) spoke up with "Well Allison, you have just seen the 'Laramie Ghost,' " and told the following story.

Back in the days when Fort Laramie was a fur trading post a factor of the post brought with him his beautiful daughter who had been educated in eastern schools and was an accomplished horse woman. The factor warned his daughter never to ride out alone and ordered his assistants to see that

she did not leave the fort alone at any time. However, there came a day when the factor was away and his daughter mounted her favorite horse, a beautiful black, and despite the protests of the people in the fort rode eastward down the Oregon Trail and was never seen again. Her father returned and searched for her for weeks but no trace was found. Then in the years that followed a legend grew among the Indians and traders of the valley that every seven years the ghost of the factor's daughter would be seen riding down the old trail.

Still incredulous, Lieutenant Allison inquired about until he found an old Indian squaw who had been at the fort when the factor's daughter rode out never to return. He asked the old squaw how the girl had been dressed and his amazement grew as she chanted out a description of a girl in a long dark green riding habit with a feathered hat and a jeweled handled quirt such as he had seen as the mysterious lady had whipped her mount to dash away from him on the trail. So, Allison was convinced that he had seen the 'Laramie Ghost' and buried the incident in his memory until years later. Then as he rode the train through Wyoming he heard cowboys on a depot platform talking about how a rancher had just seen the 'Laramie Ghost' but his train started up so he could question them for details of the incident.

Now you may not believe in ghosts and in our eleven years at the old Fort we did not see the ghost just described. However, if any place in the West deserves a few ghosts I am sure you will agree that it is Fort Laramie. So, if and when you recall any of the stories you have heard tonight, remember that you heard them from a certified, 180 proof, Fort Laramie ghost.

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Some names and dates were obtained from stones in the Fort Laramie Cemetery. Other names and dates, etc. were obtained or corrected by reference to the "Post Returns" and other Fort Laramie records.