

THE ARMY YEARS

1886-1918



Soldiers drilling in front of Bachelor Officers' quarters, circa 1910

FORT YELLOWSTONE HISTORIC DISTRICT
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, WYOMING

PRICE: \$.50 DONATION

For the decade after 1872 when Yellowstone National Park was established, the park was under serious threat from those who would exploit, rather than protect, its resources. Poachers killed animals. Souvenir hunters broke large pieces off the geysers and hot springs. Developers set up camps for tourists, along with bath and laundry facilities at hot springs. Civilian superintendents were hired to preserve and protect this land from 1872 through 1886. The good intentions of these early administrators, however, were no match for their lack of experience, funds and manpower. Word got back to Congress that the park was in trouble and legislators refused to appropriate any funds for the park's administration in 1886.



Guard duty at Roosevelt's Camp in Yellowstone, 1903

Yellowstone National Park turned to the U.S. Army for help. Invoking the Sundry Civil Act of 1883, the Secretary of the Interior called upon the Secretary of War for assistance in protecting the park. The Army came to the rescue, and in 1886 men from Company M, First United States Cavalry, Fort Custer, Montana Territory under Captain Moses Harris came to Yellowstone to begin what would be more than 30 years of military presence in Yellowstone.

When Company M arrived in August, 1886 they lived in temporary frame buildings at Camp Sheridan, established at the foot of the Mammoth Hot Spring Terraces. After enduring five cold, harsh winters, the cavalry realized there was no end in sight to this assignment. Therefore, in 1890, Congress appropriated \$50,000 for a permanent post. So the days of Fort Yellowstone began.

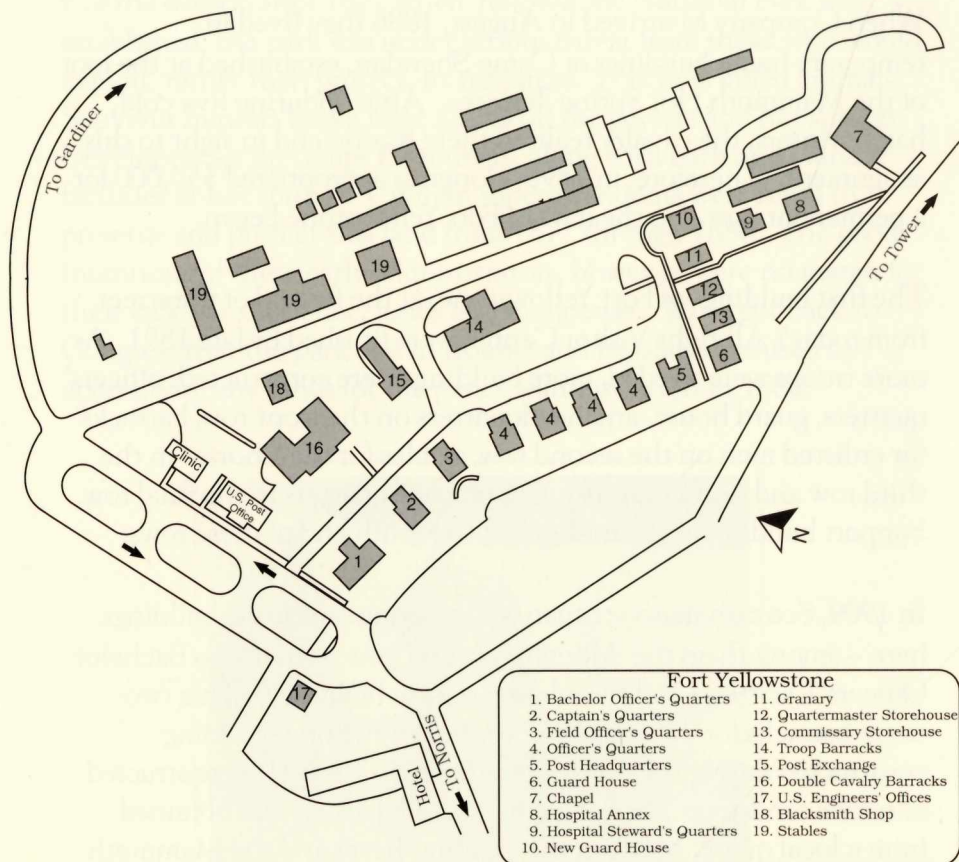
The first buildings of Fort Yellowstone, at the far end of the street from today's Albright Visitor Center, were finished by late 1891. As more troops were needed, more buildings were constructed: officers' quarters, guard house, and headquarters on the front row, barracks for enlisted men on the second row, stables for their horses in the third row and non-commissioned officers' quarters in the final row. Support buildings were arranged at the south end of these rows.

In 1909, Scottish masons began constructing sandstone buildings here – among them the Albright Visitor Center (then the Bachelor Officers' Quarters) and the administration building (then a two-troop barracks for 200 men). The Chapel, the final building constructed during the Army's tenure (1913), was also constructed of native sandstone. The stone for these buildings was obtained from a local quarry between the Gardner River and the Mammoth Campground.

In 1910, at the height of the Army's presence in Yellowstone, there were 324 soldiers here – plus some families and numerous civilian employees. These troops staffed not only Fort Yellowstone, but were stationed throughout the park in small details at various outposts.



Mammoth Chapel



Most of the buildings constructed during the Army era are still standing and used by the National Park Service as its headquarters. Many of the interiors have been modernized, while the exteriors have been maintained and/or restored. You may wish to follow an established walking tour through the major parts of the Fort. The accompanying map shows how the Fort buildings were used in 1916, just before the National Park Service took over the park's administration. Some of the buildings are gone, and others have been constructed since that time – however, much of the Fort remains intact today.

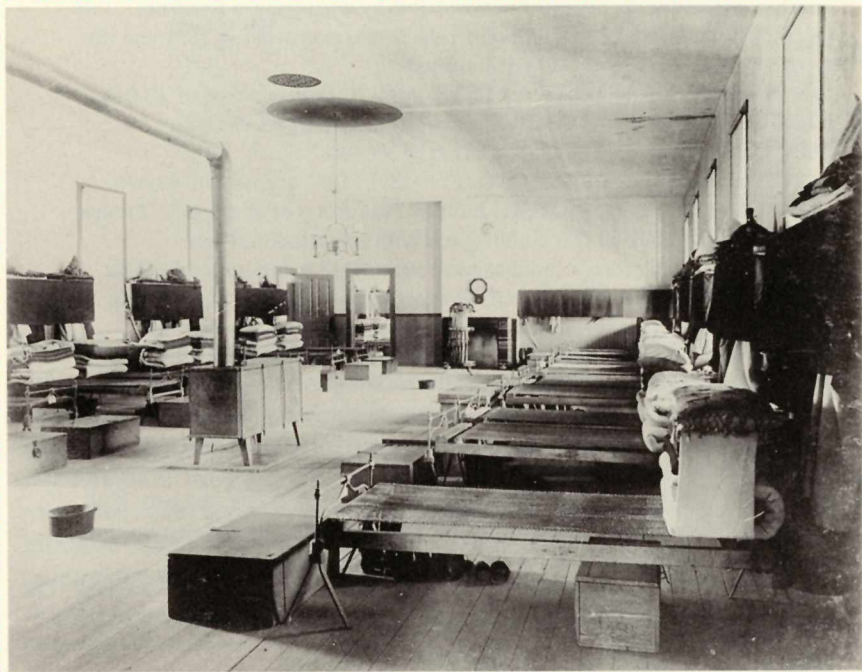
At present, most structures in the Fort Yellowstone Historic District are employee residences and not open to public use. Please respect the privacy of residents by staying on the paved route and treating their living areas with courtesy and discretion.

1. **BACHELOR OFFICERS' QUARTERS.** Built in 1909 at a cost of \$38,022. Now the Albright Visitor Center, this building had a mess or club, kitchen, sitting room, and apartments for six single officers. The Army planned this building large enough to house temporary visitors as well.
2. **CAPTAINS' QUARTERS.** Built in 1909. This building housed two apartments – each with kitchen, living room, dining room, 6 bedrooms, 2 baths, pantry and laundry. The finished attic was used for a children's playroom or maids' quarters.
3. **FIELD OFFICER'S QUARTERS.** Built in 1909 at a cost of \$20,624. This was once the residence of the acting superintendent/Post Commander of the park; today it houses the civilian superintendent.
4. **OFFICERS' QUARTERS.** The two at the far end (built in 1891) were among the first Fort Yellowstone buildings. The later two (built in 1897 at a cost of \$6,829) were designed for captains but were often used for officers of lesser rank.
5. **POST HEADQUARTERS.** Built in 1891 at a cost of \$1,550. This was the office for the post commander/acting superintendent, the post adjutant and the sergeant major. As the post grew, a new administration building was established and this became a storehouse, and is now a residence.
6. **GUARD HOUSE.** Built in 1891 at a cost of \$4,950. This was built to hold 15 prisoners and 10 guards until the present Jail replaced it in 1911. Every visitor had to check in at this building after entering the park from Gardiner, Montana.
7. **CHAPEL.** Built in 1913 at a cost of \$21,000 – \$23,000. The last building completed during the Army era. Native stone, slate roof and oak furnishings are still in use today, making this the best-preserved building – inside and out. The bell was added in 1928 and two stained glass windows were placed in 1939.
8. **HOSPITAL ANNEX.** Built in 1901 at a cost of \$9,814. This was built as quarters for personnel assigned to hospital duty and is now a residence. Two hospitals were built at Ft. Yellowstone; the first constructed in 1894 and the second built in 1913; both were demolished.
9. **HOSPITAL STEWARD'S QUARTERS.** Built in 1894 at a cost of \$1,945.
10. **NEW GUARD HOUSE (JAIL).** Built in 1911 at a cost of \$16,348.
11. **GRANARY.** Completed in 1891 at a cost of \$1,560.
12. **QUARTERMASTER STOREHOUSE.** Built in 1891 at a cost of \$3,820.
13. **COMMISSARY STOREHOUSE.** Built in 1891 at a cost of \$4,198. Troops acquired their rations at this building and both commissioned and non-commissioned officers' families were authorized to buy groceries here.
14. **TROOP BARRACKS.** The first of these wood barracks no longer exists. The northern-most barracks (built in 1897 at a cost of \$13,187) is now the Yellowstone Center for Resources. Originally built to house 68, in 1909 a basement was built under one wing so the building could house 100 men.
15. **POST EXCHANGE.** Built in 1905 at a cost of \$20,950. This was constructed as a gymnasium, reading room, canteen, and barbershop in a colonial style that is not typical of other buildings in the Fort.
16. **DOUBLE CAVALRY BARRACKS.** Built in 1909 at a cost of \$95,469. The largest building in Fort Yellowstone, this structure once housed two cavalry troops (200 men) and now is the administration building.
17. **U.S. ENGINEERS' OFFICES.** Built in 1903 at an estimated cost of \$10,000. The Engineer Officer who designed this structure, locally known as the Pagoda, was Capt. Hiram Chittenden.
18. **BLACKSMITH SHOP.** Built in 1901 at a cost of \$7,632.
19. **STABLES.**

These buildings remind us of the long history of our first national park and stand as a living memory of the important role the Army played in preserving it for the future. They remind us that the resources we find within Yellowstone's boundaries are not only natural ones, but cultural as well. Our interactions with this wilderness continue to shape our idea of what a national park should be, just as they did during the days of Fort Yellowstone.

LAW AND ORDERS

Some soldiers considered Yellowstone to be a good duty station. The men of the "snowshoe cavalry" liked their rough life in the remote recesses of the mountains and applied freely for detached service. The life was demanding and often isolated, rugged and dangerous, and very different from that most of them had known before. Fort facilities were better than most. Discipline was more relaxed than at other Army posts – especially in the field. Duties were varied and interesting...and the scenery couldn't be beat!



Barracks Interior, Yellowstone, circa 1910

Edwin Kelsey, who served as a soldier in Yellowstone in 1898, later became the editor of the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Private Kelsey's letters to his niece describe a difficult but very enjoyable life as a Yellowstone soldier.

"December 3, 1898...Left here for the Post [Fort Yellowstone] the Sunday before Thanksgiving...I made 26 miles the first day, staying all night at Norris Station. The next morning it was 22° below zero, but I pulled out for the Post, which I reached about two p.m. after a cold hard ride of 20 miles. It is not so much sport riding when the snow is so deep that your horse has to work all the time. Stayed at the Post for Thanksgiving dinner and it was a beaut. The cook more than threw himself. Turkey, roast pork, sweet spuds, cranberry sauce, oyster stew, chocolate, three kinds of cake, pie, pickles, nuts and apples - how's that for soldiers?...there is something about life in the wilderness that fascinates me. I saddle my beast, and go off on long rides through the forest where everything is so quiet that one can almost hear the solitude...Don't suppose you will hear from me again before Xmas, so I'll wish you all a Merry one - am sorry that I have no chance to send you my remembrance. One can buy nothing here and as the troop has not been paid for two months I have no money or I would send it to you to spend with my compliments. Love to all the family and Mable, and regards to friends. Edwin"

Most of the recruits came here from dusty, dry, hot duty in the Southwest or Western plains. Yellowstone weather was quite a change for them, and quite a relief in many ways. Some had never seen mountains or snow and they had much to learn. Ten different cavalry units served at Fort Yellowstone over the 30 years – troops from the First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Eleventh and Thirteenth Cavalries as well as an experimental unit of men selected because of their particular skills in mountain living.

George Anderson, the third military superintendent of the park, wrote in 1897, "As a consequence of their good work, the beauties of the park are no longer defaced; no fires have ravaged the forests; poaching has diminished to a small percentage of what it was ten years ago; and more than all, order exists everywhere..." Just a few years after its establishment, the Fort Yellowstone administration was effective.

LIFE AT THE FORT

Life at the Fort during the tourist season, provided lots of company for the officers – visitors and friends and houseguests. Carriage rides and picnics took place during the warm months and sleigh rides and ice skating were favorite pastimes during the cold months. There was much socializing, particularly among the officers' families; lunches and dinners together were common. With domestic help, these social events weren't a problem for the high ranking officers – but a lot of work for the new second lieutenant's wife who could not afford help! The isolation of the Fort was softened in the summer by this busy social schedule.

Children went to school at the Fort. Teachers were found among the soldier ranks when possible or families with children paid the expenses of a civilian teacher. In 1910 when no teacher could be found, the children were boarded out to relatives and friends for school in places as far away as Portland, Oregon.

One of the challenges of Fort life was keeping supplies on hand. The wife of Captain F. J. Arnold wrote:

"We ordered staples, meats, canned goods, bread, etc. from the Commissary and the order would be delivered and put in the kitchen. For special occasions in the winter, we would put in a special order for turkey and then hang it outside to keep it frozen as we only had a large icebox on the back porch....The soldiers cut the ice in the winter up on Swan Lake Flat, then stored it in the ice house dug into the side of Capitol Hill....The four-horse freight wagons hauled hay and coal up from Gardiner, and many other supplies came on the market wagon. There were some fresh foods available at Hall's Grocery store and the Van Dyke's Meat Market....Clothing and household items were usually ordered by catalog and some things through the PX. Whittaker's store near the Mammoth Hotel had novelties and many smaller items and they also had the Post Office. There was no delivery, so we would either walk, or ski over in the wintertime, to pick up our mail."

Enlisted men spent their free time in a number of ways. Most weren't married – the Army discouraged marriage and seldom provided allowances or rations for families – so they had plenty of free time. Both men and women bowled. The ladies thought they were doing really well at the sport until they discovered that the person setting the pins was placing the pins closer together for them than for the men! As early as 1903, moving pictures were shown on Thursday evenings. Despite the breaks when the reel was changed, attendance was good, especially in the winter. One soldier wrote, *"Most any kind of entertainment is interesting these long winter nights."*

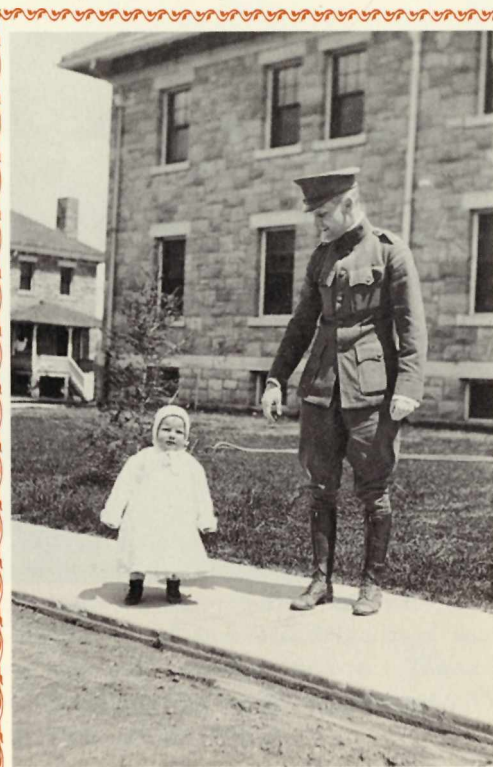


Fort Yellowstone Gymnastics Team, circa 1910

As soon as the first heavy snow fell, the entire community donned skis. Some sidewalks were kept shoveled, but anyone wishing to go elsewhere had to ski. The porches of the officer's quarters were lined with a graduated collections of skis – from long to medium, short to very short – and the officers bought new skis regularly for their children just as they did new shoes.

Clippings from *The Army and Navy Journal* report on post social life in those days:

"Capt. and Mrs. Arnold received the officers and ladies of the post at noon on New Year's. Eggnog and refreshments were enjoyed...The Post Exchange is open again for basketball and [roller] skating. A railing has been built around the gymnasium, protecting the heaters and lending assurance to the skaters...To celebrate the holidays, the soldiers gave a dance at the Post Exchange, which was attractively decorated with Christmas trees and flags."



Capt. Bloomburg & child, 1912



Shield of Troop 8, who were stationed in Yellowstone, 1910

A JOB WELL DONE

Charles Dudley Warner, correspondent for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* wrote in 1896, "The Interior Department made stringent rules, with adequate penalties for their infraction, and the military arm in command has enforced them splendidly. The good citizen rejoices that there is at least one spot in the United States where law is promptly enforced. In this respect Yellowstone Park is a moral lesson of the highest value to the United States...the whole country will have reason to be proud of the Yellowstone Park and its condition." The Army took a very active role in developing the policies, procedures and philosophies that today determine how we run our parks.

In 1916 when Congress created the National Park Service, the Army turned Fort Yellowstone over to the new agency. After local resistance made this transition difficult, the Army returned in 1917 until 1918 when the park was fully under National Park Service control. The Fort has served the park well; both as administrative headquarters and as a constant reminder of the debt Yellowstone National Park owes the officers and enlisted men of the United States Army for protecting and preserving this region for future generations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Refer to these publications, available at park visitor centers –

The Yellowstone Story Volume II by *Aubrey Haines*

Yellowstone, A Wilderness Besieged by *Richard A. Bartlett*

Old Yellowstone Days edited by *Paul Schullery*

The park will generally accept donations of materials that pertain to Yellowstone National Park. Your donation can become an integral part of the park collection and can be used to preserve history for future generations. Please contact the park archives at (307)344-2261 or the museum collection at (307)344-2262 for more information. The Yellowstone National Park archives may be accessed at <http://www.nps.gov/yell/archives.html>.

The National Park Service in cooperation with the Yellowstone Park Foundation and The Yellowstone Association published this guide. These organizations are non-profit and serve the park and its visitors. For more information contact the Yellowstone Park Foundation at 109 East Main Suite 2, Bozeman, MT 59715 (406)586-6303 or The Yellowstone Association at Box 117, Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190.

Your donation will be used for future printings of this publication.

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