

FORT LARAMIE, THE EMIGRANT'S HOPE ON THE OREGON TRAIL

By

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PREFACE

The story of Fort Laramie is an important chapter in the chronicles of the conquest of Western America. Founded in the days of the fur-trapper, it faded only with the passing of the American frontier, and during that interval was identified with the principal phases of western expansion. Located on the mighty Oregon Trail, it watched the great caravans pass and gave succor. Guardian and outpost of the overland trail, protector of the emigrant train, supplier of mail service and telegraph line, it was the extended hand of a distant government.

The part that Fort Laramie played in western migration is therefore very complex, and in this brief study only a small but important segment of this historical drama has been included. The years 1849 to 1852 have been selected because this period saw thousands of emigrants move west, and Fort Laramie became a great oasis in a land filled with uncertainty and despair.

The role of Fort Laramie as a military establishment has been dealt with by many authors, including Virginia Trenholm, LeRoy Hafen, and William Ghent. Therefore, the author of this thesis purposely did not dwell upon that particular aspect of the fort's history. Instead, in this brief study the emphasis has been placed on the other role of Fort Laramie, that of aiding thousands of pioneers, trappers, and Indians as they passed along the Oregon, Cheyenne-Deadwood, and Bozeman trails. For many years there has been some question as to the feelings of these westbound travellers towards the army. The research for this thesis has been devoted to answering this question.

The author is indebted to Mr. David L. Hieb of the National Park Service for originating the idea of this study and for the use of the fine collection of diaries and reference works made available at Fort Laramie National Monument. Mr. Merrill Mattes, Historian of Region Two of the National Park Service and Dr. Robert L. Munkres of the University of Wisconsin read parts of the manuscript and made helpful suggestions. Extensive use was also made of newspaper files, and personal interviews were conducted with elderly residents now living in the Fort Laramie area.

Most of the illustrative media used in this thesis are from the William H. Jackson Collection in The National Archives. The staff of that agency were most helpful in collecting requested research materials.

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Mrs. Molly Reid typed the finished manuscript, and Masoner^os of Tulsa prepared the illustrations and photostats. To all others who helped make this thesis possible, the author extends his grateful appreciation.

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All plates are courtesy of The National Archives.

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

I'll scrape the mountains clean, old girl,
I'll drain the rivers dry.
I'm off for California, Susannah, don't you cry.
Oh, Susannah, don't you cry for me.
I'm off to California with my washbowl on my knee.¹

Gold had been discovered in California and the infectious disease known as "gold fever" had spread, its intensity increasing with each mile, from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Thousands prepared for the journey west. Behind them were the crowded living conditions and the played-out farms of the east coast, but before them lay the exciting and unknown frontier. The midway point, away from the old but not yet in the new, where the excitement was at its height, was St. Louis, Missouri. Even in 1846, while on a visit to St. Louis, Francis Parkman found the city to be virtually pulsating with the business of caring for emigrants preparing for the trip to Oregon.²

Three years later this same scene of clamor over future farms, freighting, and gold, and the excited hurry to "start the wagons rolling" had increased several fold. The city swarmed with people but the man most in demand was the gunsmith or the saddler. The United States Bureau of the Census for 1850 reported 35,979 people in St. Louis County in 1840.

¹James A. Barnes, Wealth of the American People (New York, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1949), 180.

²Francis Parkman, The Oregon Trail (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), 1.

By 1850, this figure had jumped to 104,978.³ Hotels overflowed with excited adventurers who had the cold chills of anticipation, but who were blissfully unaware of the difficulties ahead--for awaiting these pioneers was the Oregon Trail.

European emigrants arriving in the United States in 1849 brought with them the dread cholera which soon spread to St. Louis.⁴ The fear of this disease and the hunger for gold prompted the pioneers to leave as soon as possible for the frontier. Missouri River steamboats, crowded beyond capacity, left daily bound for outfitting towns such as St. Joseph and Independence. These passengers, hastily departing to escape a fearful disease, found that even on the river, cholera did not abate. While journeying upstream by steamboat in 1849, Major Osborne Cross of the Mounted Riflemen, passed a steamboat that had been entirely abandoned after losing nearly thirty passengers due to cholera.⁵ Other obstacles such as thieves, outlaws, and mechanical mishaps, were encountered during the river passage. One gentleman, while sleeping on a crowded deck, was relieved of one hundred dollars.⁶ Exploding boilers frequently took the lives of many steamboat passengers. The thin sheet metal used in boiler construction could not stand the pressures called for by the river captains. On April 27, 1852, while on a river boat steaming upstream to St. Joseph, Lodisa Frizzell noted the wreck of the steamer Saluda which had exploded on April 9, killing two hundred people. She

³United States Census Report, 1850, 2.

⁴Major Osborne Cross, The March of the Mounted Riflemen, Raymond W. Settle, ed. (Glendale, The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1940), 33.

⁵Ibid., 34.

⁶James O. Olson, ed., "The Diary of James Mason, Ohio to California, 1850," Nebraska History (Lincoln) XXXIII, 106.

wrote that men were still busily digging graves and hanging on a long line muddy clothing taken from the bodies.⁷ In spite of disease, crowded quarters and boiler explosions, the Missouri River side-wheelers managed to land a great number of passengers at the various river towns.⁸

When the pioneer disembarked at a Missouri River town, he immediately found himself in a bedlam of activity. An Eastern traveler left the following impression of St. Joseph:

St. Joseph is a perfect jam, with sharpers 'takin 'em in,' horses, mules, oxen, men, women, children, wagons, wheelbarrows, hand-carts, auctioneers, runners, stool pigeons, greenhorns, and everything else you can imagine, and a thousand other things your imagination will fail to conceive. Everything is very high; board at a 'one-horse' hotel \$2.00 per day, and little rats of mules \$1.50. The folks think the whole United States will be here in a few days. Ten days ago, a man could fit out here at a reasonable rate. There are hundreds starting from here, but they are the poorest of creation. I would not have believed it, but it is a fact, that there are hundreds now starting on foot with nothing but a cotton sack and a few pounds of crackers and meat, and many with hand carts and wheelbarrows.⁹

At Independence and Westport landing, the crowded conditions and high prices also prevailed. By early May, Independence had become a confused jumble of human beings and bellowing cattle. While passing through this river town in May of 1850, Captain J. A. Pritchard of the United States Army, wrote that:

"Such were the crowded condition of the streets of Independence by

⁷Mrs. Lodisa Frizzell, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument, Fort Laramie, Wyoming (Copy of MS. in Templeton Crocker Collection, California Historical Society Library, San Francisco, California), 2.

⁸Irene D. Paden, The Wake of the Prairie Schooner (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1953), 8.

⁹William J. Petersen, "Steamboating on the Missouri River," Nebraska History (Lincoln) XXXV, Number 4, 262-263.

long trains of ox teams and mule teams, men there with stock for sale and men there to purchase stock that it was all most impossible to pass along."¹⁰ Gambling ran riot and the noise of gunshots was simply a part of the general hubbub of the spring outfitting season. In order to be ready for the uncertainties of the period, such as outlaws, Indians, and rattlesnakes, many men carried guns; some for the first time in their lives. One young wife, Lucy Cooke, wrote to her sister that: "Our men are all well armed. William carries a brace of pistols and a bowie knife. Ain't that blood curdling? Hope he won't hurt himself."¹¹ The job of "fitting out", whether for an individual or for a family, was serious business and took time. Families waited at the supply town, endured the inconveniences, settled starting dates, and those with animals hoped that the grass was turning green on the prairie.¹²

While the men purchased the wagons and animals, the women packed the food supplies and the family necessities. Dishes were packed in barrels of flour. Eggs found a safe riding place in the corn meal which could be used up as the eggs vanished.¹³ The women were more particular than the men about foodstuffs and included potatoes, squash, rice, preserves, pickles and dried fruits.¹⁴ Many unnecessary items of household furniture and farm equipment were also loaded into the already complaining

¹⁰Captain J. A. Pritchard, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (MS. in poss. Hon. John I. Williamson, Kansas City, Missouri), 1.

¹¹Lucy Rutledge Cook, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (MS. in Public Library, Modesto, California), 5.

¹²Paden, The Prairie Schooner, 5.

¹³Ibid., 15.

¹⁴Ibid.

wagons. These bits of furniture and farmer's gear signified a tie with the past and were, perhaps, the hope of future but distant homes. Often symbols of loved ones and former homes--beds, chests, and cribs, were left by the roadside as loads were lightened to aid the faltering beasts. Many trail meals were prepared over fires made from furniture discarded by sorrowful wives.¹⁵

Through trial and error, certain items soon became standard trail equipment. Those experienced in trail conditions suggested a list of equipment and supplies which consisted of:

1. A good rifle and ammunition;
2. Salt, flour, bacon, sugar, coffee, and tea;
3. Wagon with bows and projections (about \$78.00);
4. Oxen, with yokes and chains (from \$70.00 to \$85.00 per yoke), and
5. Cows (from \$16.00 to \$25.00 each).¹⁶

A very important part of starting westward was the organization of the wagon train. Leaders had to be elected and train membership determined. If it happened to be a Mormon train, its officers consisted of a captain and council of ten.¹⁷ To assure adequate protection against Indians, most companies started with about fifty men of fighting age. These large companies could, however, become burdensome because they encouraged the spread of disease and made organization and discipline more difficult. The men who made up these wagon trains were, for the most part, men of character and determination. Many had taken great care in

¹⁵Evidence of this statement may be found in the furniture museum at Fort Laramie National Monument, Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Many items of farm equipment, such as plows, forges, rakes, and grindstones have been found along the Oregon Trail and have been donated to The National Park Service for display at Fort Laramie National Monument.

¹⁶LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis M. Young, Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West (Glendale, The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), 218-219.

¹⁷Ibid., 100.

purchasing and outfitting their wagons and the fact that they brought their families attested to their stability. These people were welcomed into any wagon train. Occasionally, members of a wagon train had to refuse an applicant membership in their group. The hardest to refuse but surest to be a dangerous drag if admitted to a train was the unsuccessful man: one who, having failed in life, was hoping to get a fresh start in Oregon or to strike it rich in the western mines. He was frequently poorly equipped, undersupplied with food, and not a welcome addition to any company.¹⁸

By the first week in May, groups had been organized into wagon trains and men and families were ready to leave civilization and comforts behind. If all went well, Fort Laramie would be sighted in forty-five days.

¹⁸Paden, The Prairie Schooner, 11.

CHAPTER II

THE ROAD TO LARAMIE

From Independence, Missouri, the trail headed west along a "hogback" known as the Blue Ridge, a landmark still visible near Raytown, Missouri. By keeping to high ground, and avoiding the uneven prairie with its streams and rivers, the pioneers were able to cover thirty miles the first day and camp at the Lone Elm, which was near the present day town of Olathe, Kansas. This was a familiar spot, and was often used as a rendezvous.¹

As the wagons rolled across the often monotonous prairie, the days passed into weeks and trail life became somewhat routine. Occasionally the worry of caring for their families or the uncertainties of the days ahead caused members of a train to fight among themselves. Each member of a company had certain tasks assigned by the elected leader but, even under this plan, violence occasionally broke out over these work details.² To help alleviate the strain of prairie travel, many of the groups had entertainment around the campfire, and some of the leaders even insisted that the people hold dances when possible. Brigham Young, for instance, urged this practice on his Mormon followers as a means of fighting apathy and boredom, two problems that were perhaps as dangerous

¹ Paden, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, 26.

² James Bennett, "Diary", Typewritten copy on file at Fort Laramie National Monument (Original MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 3.

as were the hostile Indians.³

Daybreak turned thoughts to the day's march, and many wondered what was in store for them. Some groups, such as the Mormons, formed the custom of meeting together for morning prayer. As soon as the breakfast dishes had been washed, busy mothers began rounding up their large families. By this time, the men had hitched up the teams and the train was ready for another day's march. This typical camp routine was repeated day after day.

Except for the quiet moments around the evening campfire, homes and relatives became part of the past and were all but forgotten, as thoughts turned toward gold and the more pressing matters of food, fuel, Indians, and water. Creeks and steams now became the most important landmarks for the thirsty pioneers.⁴

If the trails were packed hard, the trains usually traveled eighteen to twenty miles during the course of the day.⁵ However, when streams had to be forded or sickness and death delayed departure, ten miles a day was not uncommon.

During the early stages of the journey, it was not unusual, when reaching a stream, to find a toll bridge operated by Indians from a nearby reservation. Such a business enterprise was operated by the Pottawatomies at the Cross Creek ford,⁶ which was not far from present day Topeka, Kansas. Some travellers, not wishing to pay the toll, resorted

³Ray B. West, Jr., Kingdom of the Saints (New York, The Viking Press, 1957), 185.

⁴Paden, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, 29.

⁵James Bennett, "Diary", 3.

⁶Paden, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, 39.

to calked wagon beds and luck and attempted to ford the river. Many wagons were not constructed to be used as ferry boats and along the Platte, several pioneers drowned when their flimsy wagons overturned while fording the river. C. A. Kirkpatrick, arriving at Deer Creek in June of 1849, wrote that: "Already within our hearing today, twelve men have found a watery grave while crossing with their stock and effects; and yet this makes no impression on the survivors."⁷

However, in spite of the trouble caused by rivers and streams, these watering places, clear in the spring and usually contaminated by August, meant camp sites, grass for stock, and a chance to fill water casks. Those starting early in the spring months did not have to contend with the contaminated water holes that plagued the groups that followed later in the summer. Emigrants would often think that the clear but stagnant water found in pools and holes dug in the sand was preferable to the running water of the Platte, which was often muddy.⁸ It was this clear but polluted water that was given the blame for the cholera and dysentery which were so prevalent along the trail and, which made the family medicine chest a necessity. Henry A. Cox, a traveler in 1849, posted a letter from Fort Laramie in which he thanked his wife for including paregoric, opium pills, and cholera powders among his trail supplies.⁹

Cattle had to have grass, an item which was often difficult to find. Since the grass on the plains, in some cases, was not green until the

⁷Charles Alexander Kirkpatrick, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Original MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 4.

⁸Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 163.

⁹Henry A. Cox, "Letter", (Original MS. in files at Fort Laramie National Monument), 5.

first week in June, the trains that started early in May had to carry hay and grain for their animals. Those that started early, and did not bring sufficient feed, found themselves in serious trouble. James A. Blood, in his diary of Sunday, May 26, 1850 wrote: "Grass, grass, where is the grass, we are too early for its growth."¹⁰ The early starters that did bring sufficient feed benefited, however, in that they found natural forage for the remainder of the journey, while those starting later, in many cases, lost a tremendous number of animals from lack of grass as grasslands around watering stops became overgrazed and barren. In June of 1850, while near the Platte River, Franklin Langworthy wrote to his wife in Springfield, Ohio. "The number of carcasses of dead animals increases as we proceed. I think an average of those lying near the road would be one each half mile. The odor is quite annoying, and with it the atmosphere seems everywhere to be charged."¹¹

For the first three weeks of the journey, the trains followed a route along the Big Blue River, heading northwest toward the Platte River. There was usually great rejoicing upon reaching the Platte, for this source of water was followed westward for nearly four hundred miles. However, in addition to the dreaded cholera, it now became necessary to post a heavy guard to prevent the Pawnees from stealing cattle.¹²

The road along the Platte was often so sandy that the poorly constructed wagons soon began to break down. Many wagons were driven into

¹⁰James A. Blood, "Diary", Copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Typescript of MS. in California State Library, San Francisco, California), 1.

¹¹Franklin Langworthy, "Letter", Copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Copy of MS. in California Historical Library, San Francisco), 2.

¹²Paden, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, 41.

the river at night so that the water might cause loose spokes to swell tight in the holes in the wagon tires.¹³ When heavy sand made progress difficult along the river, the trains moved to higher ground. Ridges and hogbacks were utilized also during the early summer when rains turned the river valleys into quagmires. Pests such as mosquitoes and gnats made life miserable for both animals and human beings and frequently forced entire companies to seek higher ground and a refreshing breeze.¹⁴ Even along the river, it was difficult to carry fresh drinking water. Many pioneers, such as Mrs. Rebecca Walters, boiled their drinking water to kill the "wiggie tails".¹⁵ This was a wise precaution, and the boiling of water for tea and coffee probably killed some of the cholera and dysentery germs.¹⁶

Trail life was frequently marred by death and accident. The fear of cholera was so great that many emigrants shuddered to think of making camp at night. As the blazing hot days and long, cold nights turned into weeks, many mounds large and small appeared beside the trail as lonely monuments to those who would not finish the journey. In one instance cholera was so bad in the train that graves were dug during the evening to accommodate the remains of those expected to expire during the night.¹⁷ On another occasion, a man who had buried his wife and

¹³Ibid., 52.

¹⁴Evidence of this statement may be found near Fort Laramie and Scott's Bluffs National Monuments. Several sets of Oregon Trail ruts are seen, some along the river and some along the ridges, but it is impossible to say that any one set of ruts is the true trail.

¹⁵Paden, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, 22.

¹⁶Ibid., 17.

¹⁷Oliver Goldsmith, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Copy of MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 4.

child, found that he could no longer endure the hardships of the trail. A self-inflicted bullet wound ended his unbearable grief and the following morning a group of men, including E. S. Engalls, laid the body to rest in a lonely, unmarked trailside grave.¹⁸ This particular suicide occurred within sight of Fort Kearney.¹⁹

Occasionally a train crossing the empty plains would meet a company returning to "the states." The experienced but disappointed party would tell of the hardships ahead, the disease, the Indians, and the storms. Often these stories would induce some the less stalwart in the west-bound train to lose their courage and return home with those who had given up. While on their way to California in 1850, James Bennett and his group met such a train returning to Independence. This train had been hit by cholera, and only twenty-five of the original fifty-two men were left, and half of the women and children had also been killed by this deadly disease.²⁰

The scent of the newly dead attracted wolves. These shadowy dwellers of the plains became a nightmare to the harrassed travellers. Coffins were not to be had, unless some one could spare the boards from a wagon bed. Grief-stricken relatives had only to look around them to know that by tomorrow there might be a large burrow leading down into the

¹⁸E. S. Engalls, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Copy of MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 4.

¹⁹Fort Kearney, Nebraska, established in 1848 as the first of three forts located to guard the overland trails. The others, Forts Laramie and Hall, were garrisoned the following year. Abandoned in 1871, the site of Fort Kearney, now a state park, was south of the Platte River about seven miles Southwest of the city of Kearney. See Lyle E. Mantor, "Fort Kearney and the Westward Movement," Nebraska History, XXIX (1948), 175-207.

²⁰James Bennett, "Diary", 3.

grave. The scattered, sun-bleached bones from other graves told this tale of horror. By burying children in metal or rawhide trunks, an effort was made to defeat the wolves and their fiendish appetites.²¹

The cholera scourge along the trail practically ended at Fort Laramie. The correspondent, "Cheyenne" wrote from Fort Laramie on July 8, 1850 that: "Sickness had been severe as far as Laramie, but beyond there was little mortality." He went on to explain that of the seven hundred "Who now lie buried between here and the Missouri," nine-tenths died of carelessness and lack of experience and cleanliness.²²

As the daily activities became more and more routine, many men sought activity in hunting wild game. Companies that left the Missouri River towns early in May found that, along the Platte, wild game was fairly plentiful. Many pioneers had the good fortune to enjoy roast bear, roast antelope, fried hare, and fried fowl.²³ Thus, for a few at least, it was possible to break the monotony of salt pork. Those who travelled later, however, found just the reverse to be true. By July what little wild game there was had either been killed or had disappeared into the hills. In 1850, Henry J. Coke described an interesting trail meal as: "Jim killed a hare and a rattlesnake. They were all capital eating, not excepting the snake, which the parson cooked and thought as good as eel."²⁴

For those that were short of provisions but had cash, several enterprising trappers had set up trading posts along the trail. As early

²¹Henry J. Coke, A Ride Over the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California (London, 1852), 101.

²²Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 163.

²³Coke, A Ride Over the Rocky Mountains, 119.

²⁴Ibid., 120.

as 1848, one of these roadside merchants, Antoine Robidoux, had displayed a sign advertising tinware at his trading post near present day Scotts Bluff, Nebraska.²⁵ Margaret Stuart Bailey passed this establishment in 1852 and wrote in her diary that: "Passed a Frenchman's blacksmith shop. His wife, a squaw of the Sioux tribe, sat in the door of their hut rolled in a scarlet blanket. Looked rather sober but well. Another squaw was on horseback chasing a drove of horses and mules. She was only half dressed."²⁶ The lack of dress on the part of Indian squaws annoyed the white women.

It was common knowledge, however, that prices at these wayside mercantile houses were much higher than prices for similar articles sold at Fort Laramie. At the fort, the commanding officer was empowered to set a fair price on goods sold at the sutler's store and to make sure that the sutler kept an adequate supply of trail necessities such as sugar and flour.²⁷ In 1853, prices at the store were: "Dried apples, twelve dollars per bushel, vinigar [sic] two dollars per gallon. Everything else in proportion."²⁸

Even if food was obtainable, it was difficult to find fuel over which to cook a meal. Fuel was very scarce on the treeless plains, and

²⁵Paden, Wake of the Prairie Schooner, 119. This 1848 billboard simply read, "Tineware, by a Rubidue." His roadside store was located at Rubidue Pass near the present town of Scotts Bluff, Nebraska.

²⁶Margaret Stuart Bailey, "Diary", Copy of MS. in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Original MS. at Huntington Library, San Marino, California), 6.

²⁷The records from Fort Laramie show that the commanding officer appointed a monthly committee of junior officers to tariff the goods sold at the sutler's store. (Courtesy National Archives.) June 14, 1850 Adjutant's report.

²⁸Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 202.

buffalo chips were found to be a good substitute for firewood.²⁹ By 1850, Ash Hollow,³⁰ a favorite campsite, was stripped of all vegetation that could be used as fuel.³¹

By stopping at campsites such as Ash Hollow, emigrants had a chance to repair wagons and equipment or to wait out a famous Platte Valley storm as it loosened its deluge of rain and hail on man and beast.³² Occasionally, upon reaching a good campsite, there was a tendency among some companies to remain in camp for several days so that members of the train could repair wagons or nurse the sick. However, most leaders realized that there were many trains on west and that each delay meant less grass and more polluted water ahead, so they had their trains rolling by dawn.

As the trains proceeded west, following the Platte River valley, the scenery that had been flat prairie now began to take on a more forelorn but distinct outline of windswept sand hills and broad, flat mesas. This change in the character of the surroundings announced to all travellers that they were entering the realm of the mighty Sioux, a warlike tribe

²⁹The dried excreta of buffalo, referred to as buffalo chips, is mentioned in many of the letters and diaries of the pioneers. This term, buffalo chips, also applied to the excreta of cattle and animals in general.

³⁰Ash Hollow, one of the famous and favored camping spots on the Oregon-California Trail, could be reached from the North Platte Valley to the east only by crossing a range of hills. This approach, however, is much less spectacular than that down the famed "Windless Hill" on the trail from the "Lower" California Crossing near Brule, Nebraska.

³¹James Abbey, "Diary", Typewritten copy on file at Fort Laramie National Monument (MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 1.

³²Carlisle S. Abbott, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Original MS. located in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 2.

that had not been civilized. Fortunately for the pioneers, 1849, 1850, and 1851 were fairly peaceful years along the trail as far as the Sioux were concerned. Indians were seen nearby and at times entire Sioux villages were within trading distance of the trail. In spite of this nearness of Indians, however, the majority of the trains had little serious trouble with them during the very early years of westward migration.

Travellers found that Indian customs were quite different from those practiced by the whites and at times might prove disturbing to an Illinois farmer. For example, one that was most unusual was the way in which the Sioux buried their dead. The departed Sioux were "buried" in trees, and on moonlight nights it was often disconcerting to the pioneer to awaken, look up into the branches above him, and find that he had camped beneath a burial tree. The bodies were bound in smoked buffalo hide and a few simple items such as a pipe or a few hawk bells were often included to help the departed's spirit on its way to the great beyond. If these were recent burials, the awakened traveller would have to move up wind.³³

John G. Ellenbecker, passing through Sioux territory in 1849, wrote that: "A joker in the crowd almost lost his wife to a Sioux brave." It seems that a party of Sioux had entered the emigrant camp to trade for whiskey. One fellow jokingly offered to trade his attractive wife for five Sioux ponies. The brave that he was negotiating with said "no trade" and left to get the ponies. The brave soon returned with the ponies and the situation turned explosive as the Indians were going to fight for the white woman. The Indians, however, were given food, which was ill spared, and left in a disgruntled frame of mind. The man who had started the

³³Oliver Goldsmith "Diary", 4.

whole affair was severely chastised by his fellow emigrants.³⁴

When the wagons finally rolled past Chimney Rock,³⁵ which is near present day Bayard, Nebraska, and Scott's Bluffs, the pioneers knew that Fort Laramie was less than ten days journey. The pioneer wife had stood beside her husband against the Sioux, she had fought wolves, and she had seen her children laid to rest in trailside graves. Now, she and the other weary emigrants could look forward to getting supplies, repairing wagons, and above all, having an opportunity to send and receive mail. In 1850, Cornelius Knapp reached Fort Laramie and posted a letter to his brother, Charles Knapp in Albany, Illinois. Knapp wrote that: "If I had in the States what I have throwed away since I left the Bluffs, I would have a small fortune--wagons, harness, clothing, all but provisions."³⁶

Henry J. Coke, near Fort Laramie in 1850, wrote:

Most of us are suffering from severe dysentery; I for one have swallowed nearly an apothecary's shop full of paregoric, opium pills, and cholera powders. The sickness is possibly owing to the change of diet and general mode of living. It is fortunate that we are so near medical advice; such severe attacks in the prairies would no doubt have left one of us by the roadside.³⁷

On June 21, 1852, Claire Warner Churchill paused near Fort Laramie and wrote in her diary that: "We sat under a tree and ate dinner the first time for several months, and how pleasant to sit under a shade

³⁴John G. Ellenbecker, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 2.

³⁵Chimney Rock, one of the great landmarks and scenic curiosities of the North Platte Valley, is mentioned by virtually all journalists travelling the nearby trails.

³⁶Cornelius Knapp, "Letter", Original in files at Fort Laramie National Monument, 2.

³⁷Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 160.

once more. It seemed like our old home where we were raised."³⁸

Another pioneer, who was fortunate enough to survive the trip to Fort Laramie, wrote home in 1852 and gave the following advice:

If any one wished to take hens, they can manage a half dozen or so with little trouble. There are some in our company, and they ride well, being let out at evening, and have laid nearly all the way. Good butter cannot be made on the road and such as we have is little cared for. A can holding six to twenty quarts keeps our sour milk and cream, and makes our butter by the motion of our wagon. Everything should be carried in tin cans and bags. Pickles, and, I presume, pork, can be kept in cans while air tight. The dried eggs were a failure with us. Take nothing for use after getting through excepting money, of course, tho' I can assure you, you will have much less of that than you expected, when you get there.³⁹

One traveller described the first sight of Fort Laramie as: "The first sight of stone buildings was very exhilarating. The Yankee flags, the lines of tents, and the attempts at cultivation, were undeniable proofs that the first stage of our journey was at an end."⁴⁰ The emigrants usually circled their wagons about one mile from the fort,⁴¹ and for a few hours they could rest and perhaps receive new courage and stamina for the long journey ahead.

³⁸Ibid., 202.

³⁹Ibid., 203.

⁴⁰Ibid., 160.

⁴¹Due to the terrain near Fort Laramie, the only suitable area for camping that was not under cultivation was situated one mile west of the post. Today, such articles as wagon tires, water cask lids and rusty guns give mute evidence of the westward bound pioneers who paused for a few hours or for a few days at the largest military post on the Oregon Trail.

CHAPTER III

FORT LARAMIE

To the pioneers struggling across the plains, Fort Laramie had come to represent rest, safety, and hope. Now that they were actually camped nearby, many found it difficult to wait for daylight when they could pay a visit to the fort and its blacksmith shop and sutler's store.¹

Sunrise, accompanied by distant sounds of bugles and barking dogs, announced that Fort Laramie was ready to play host to the multitude of wondering people.

As they approached the fort, the travellers noticed that the main buildings were situated on high ground, surrounded on three sides by the Laramie River. It was also evident that the fort was ideally situated from a military point of view because it was surrounded on all sides by high, barren hills which made it impossible for anyone to approach within gunshot without being seen by the guards. To the experienced Indian fighter, this natural protection meant that a wooden stockade was not necessary, but to many emigrants in 1849 Fort Laramie looked very

¹The word sutler is of German origin and means store keeper, American military posts usually had a sutler who sold such necessities as tobacco, soap, blacking, and clothing. At the larger posts, these stores became a small-time version of the present P.X. and sold toys, tonics of all types, hardware, and candy besides keeping an adequate stock of soldiers' needs. The sutler received his commission from the Secretary of War and those that received a lucrative post, such as Fort Laramie, were often able to retire after a few years and live comfortably. Besides his regular store duties, the sutler at Fort Laramie also had charge of Indian treaty goods. (For additional information concerning the sutlership at Fort Laramie, see Merrill J. Mattes, The Post Sutler, U.S. National Park Service Bulletin No. 16, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1948).

unpretentious.² The old fur trading post, Fort John,³ now used as a storehouse, dominated the entire scene, but the tepees of the Indians camped near the fort also caught the glance of the approaching pioneers. The Indians were there to trade, just as they had been doing since 1834 when the first Fort Laramie was built, but now they were greatly excited because the American Fur Company had sold out to the soldiers; and the advancing pioneers had brought cholera to kill all Indians.⁴

After passing the advance guards, the visitor of 1849 found an atmosphere of busy unconcern as the troops worked to finish their new barracks before the winter snows. The lumber used in these quarters was made from timber hauled from nearby hills and sawed in the water-powered

²On the map of Fort Laramie, which accompanies this thesis, a projected log stockade is included. However, like the majority of western forts, Fort Laramie, while under military control, had no stockade. In the case of Fort Laramie, the following reasons have been advanced as to the lack of a fortified wall: 1. Emigrants passed by but did not settle nearby. Therefore, they did not require the type of protection rendered pioneers along the Mohawk Valley where, at the sound of the alarm gun, the farmers rushed into the fort; 2. The troops wanted freedom of movement to and from the fort and did not want to ride in and out of gates; 3. Since western forts were used for treaty making purposes and since Indians got free food with each treaty, there was no reason for the Indians to fight at the fort and lose this free food, and 4. Western tribes just did not attack large numbers of armed men in a large number of buildings. Until 1854, Fort Laramie was always garrisoned with less than one hundred men and was more of an aid station to pioneers. However, after 1854 the garrison strength of this post was always over six hundred men. The author of this thesis thinks that the reason is most likely a combination of numbers three and four, because when Lieutenant John Gratten and twenty-nine men were killed by Sioux in August of 1854, near Fort Laramie, the fort was left with less than fifty men; but instead of attacking the fort that had sent men out to arrest them, the Indians remembered their treaty food and withdrew.

³Named after John Sarpy, secretary of the American Fur Company.

⁴Correspondence dated August 14, 1848 between Eneas Mackay and Major General Thos. S. Jesup, Quartermaster General, Washington, D. C. (National Archives, Washington, D. C.).

sawmill down by the river.⁵

The activity of Willard Richard's Company was doubtless typical of some of the parties that passed through Fort Laramie in 1849. Blacksmithing and general repair work engaged part of the men, some did trading at the fort, others went fishing in the Platte or Laramie River. Many of the women busied themselves with washing and baking while others gathered chokecherries and currants.⁶ In all probability, many of the group also paid a visit to the long, low, adobe sutler's store.

To accommodate all customers, the store hours were from guard mount until retreat.⁷ It was also understood that the sutler would not "sell or dispose of articles intended for the command, until the same shall be submitted to the council, tariffed, and the proceedings approved by the commanding officer."⁸ The store must have held great attraction for all ages. Flour, salt, bacon, and other foodstuffs essential to the journey could be obtained. Eggs, when available, were sold by the pound, not by the dozen.⁹ It was here also that Ayer's Sarsaparilla, Red School

⁵A prime reason for selecting Fort Laramie as a military post was its nearness to a source of timber and limestone. Both of these items were found thirteen miles northwest of the fort near the present town of Gurnsey, Wyoming.

⁶Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 130.

⁷Fort Laramie "Orders 119", September 4, 1850 (War Department Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C.).

⁸Ibid.

⁹While employed as a ranger-historian at Fort Laramie, the author had the good fortune to locate several small pictorial cards which advertised the products mentioned. These cards, which were lithographed in 1850 and 1851, were found while repairing the store building. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that the products so advertised were sold and used in and around the sutler's store. According to a cookbook published during this time by the Granite Iron Ware Corporation, ten average size eggs made a pound of eggs.

brand shoes, White's Perfumed Soap, long braided black licorice, and liquor could be purchased.

The store building was only forty feet long and twenty-five feet wide and was always crowded during the emigrant season which started in May and did not slacken until September. The walls, which were made of adobe brick, were over two feet thick and were constructed for strength and insulation, not for protection from Indians. It was probably interesting to the Eastern housewives to find splay type windows used in this isolated building on the western plains. This feature let in more light, which was important since the long room was lighted by a single lantern hanging from the ceiling. Three long racks, made of iron rods, also hung from the ceiling. These were the dressgoods display racks that kept buckskin shirts, ribbons and lace, and military clothing out of reach of dirty hands and shoplifting Indians. A fireplace at the north end of the room provided the only warmth. This simple room became the department store of the west.¹⁰ Behind this salesroom, the sutler had a few shacks for his employees, a hen house, and a log corral to hold

¹⁰In 1849 and 1850, no one dreamed of the important role that Fort Laramie was to play in the formative years of the new west. By 1870, this fort was at the junction of five important trails, and it was virtually impossible to travel east or west or north or south in the west and not pass through Fort Laramie. These five trails included: the short lived Pony Express of 1860; the Bozeman; the Mormon; the Oregon; and the Overland. By 1877, the Cheyenne to Deadwood Stage was also making Fort Laramie a regular stop. The sutler's store, built in 1849, served the needs of all. This store building is still standing and is now referred to as the "oldest building standing on the western plains." The adobe brick used for construction of this and other buildings at Fort Laramie is thought by some, including Irene Paden, to have come from the old American Fur Company fort which was handy at the South end of the parade ground. Through the years, the store played host to the famous and the infamous including: Brigham Young; William F. Cody; James B. Hickok; Martha Jane Canary; Mark Twain; Horace Greeley, J.E.B. Stuart; W. T. Sherman, and Kit Carson. Indian chiefs such as Spotted Tail, Crazy Horse, and Red Cloud visited the fort many times and probably traded at the store.

stock taken in on trade.

While at Fort Laramie in 1849, Mrs. John Hardenstein described the interior of the sutler's store:

The long counter was a scene of seeming confusion, not surpassed in any popular, overcrowded store of Omaha itself, Indians, dressed and half dressed and undressed; squaws, dressed to the same degree of completeness as their noble lords; papooses, absolutely nude, slightly not nude, or wrapped in calico, buckskin, or furs, mingled with soldiers of the garrison, teamsters, emigrants, speculators, half-breeds, and interpreters. The room was redolent of cheese and herring, and 'heap of smoke'; while the debris of the munched crackers lying loose under foot furnished both nutriment and employment for little bits of Indians too big to ride on mamma's back, and too little to reach the good things on counter or shelves.¹¹

By 1850, the military had made some provisions for the repair of wagons and, while the women were in the store, the men probably worked in the blacksmith shop, which was located north of the main group of buildings. In May, Captain Stewart Van Vliet, Quartermaster at the post, had written to his superiors requesting that the sum of five thousand dollars be appropriated "for the purpose of erecting suitable work shops for the use of the emigrants who annually go over this route toward California and Oregon."¹² Captain Van Vliet continued his letter as follows:

This is the most important point on the entire route, & some 650 miles from the frontiers of Missouri. By the time the emigrants reach here they generally find that they have many alterations to make before entering the mountains, & the government should offer them every facility for doing so.

¹¹Louise Hardenstein, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Copy of MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 7.

¹²Official correspondence between Captain Stewart Van Vliet, A.Q.M. at Fort Laramie and Major General Thos. S. Jesup, Quartermaster General U.S.A. Washington, D.C. (Military Records, National Archives, Washington).

These people require considerable assistance in the way of repairs, which I render, as far as it is in my power to do so. Knowing from my experience of last year that such would be the case, I burnt during the winter a large amount of coal, collected a large quantity of old iron which had been thrown away by the last emigration, & prepared temporary workshops for their use.

Loads are generally lightened & rearranged at this place & such things as are not absolutely necessary are either sold or thrown away. Wagons which in the states cost a hundred dollars are sold for five. The sacrifice of property on the plains is immense. I should think at the least calculation that over one half of the transportation which leaves the states is entirely lost.¹³

While most of the men were repairing equipment and the women were purchasing supplies, other members of the train were in line at the post office hoping to be among the fortunate who received letters from the east. Perhaps of all the services provided by the government at Fort Laramie, that of mail service was the most appreciated.¹⁴ Official mail service by way of Fort Laramie to Salt Lake City was inaugurated in the summer of 1850. Samuel H. Woodson was awarded a contract for transportation of the United States mail from Independence, Missouri, to the Mormon capital, monthly each way on a thirty-day schedule, for \$19,500 per year. No mail stations were maintained and one team or set of pack animals was used for the entire trip.¹⁵ Quite often, a letter to the east was simply entrusted to the care of a teamster or a wagon train captain. Many of the diarists to whom we are indebted for accounts of California in 1849 and 1850 mention receiving and mailing letters at Fort Laramie.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Robert W. Richmond, "Development Along the Overland Trail From the Missouri River to Fort Laramie, Before 1854," Nebraska History (Lincoln) XXXIII, 157.

¹⁵Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 171.

After purchasing supplies, repairing equipment, and checking the post office, many men took time to stroll around this newest military fort on the Oregon Trail.¹⁶ The travellers of 1849 and 1850 were frequently disappointed at the small scale of the operations carried on at Fort Laramie but by August of 1850, at least a dozen buildings had been finished or were under construction, and these were admired by the pioneers.

As they walked south from the store, the sightseers soon approached the first building of interest, the powder magazine. This little building was finished in 1850 and was made out of stone and lime concrete.¹⁷ The unusual feature about the magazine was its roof which was constructed of a triple layer of wood supports, sand in the middle, and flat stones on top.

After leaving the powder magazine, it was only a short distance to

¹⁶Fort Laramie, originally Fort William, had been built in 1834 by William Sublette, and Robert Campbell as a fur trading post. The log stockade was situated on the Laramie River and became known as the fort on the Laramie or Fort Laramie. In 1835, the fort was sold to Jim Bridger, who in turn sold out to the American Fur Company in 1836. In 1841, the original log structure was abandoned and a new fort made of adobe brick was constructed nearby. This fort cost the American Fur Company \$10,000 and was called Fort John in honor of John Sarpy, secretary of the company. This adobe fort was sold to the United States Government on July 26, 1849 and became military Fort Laramie, Oregon Route. For additional information on the early history of Fort Laramie, see LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis M. Young, Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West (Glendale, The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938).

¹⁷The powder magazine is still standing at Fort Laramie and has recently been restored complete with a three layer roof. From 1850 until July of 1876, this building was used for storage of powder and shot. By 1876, other structures, mostly officers' quarters had surrounded the magazine and it was deemed unsafe to have gunpowder so near women and children. In July of 1876, the old guardhouse by the river was turned into the magazine and instead of the powder being near the officers' quarters, it was now directly behind the enlisted barracks. For additional information on the old powder magazine, see the engineer's plans on file at the National Archives, Washington, D. C.

the next building, a newly erected officers' quarters called Old Bedlam because of the many wild officers' parties held under its roof. Bedlam was a large wooden structure with wings on either side and stairs coming down from the balcony. This had been the first building constructed outside of the old fur trading post and was said to have cost over thirty thousand dollars.¹⁸ For the first few years that Fort Laramie was under military control, Old Bedlam served as post headquarters, home of the commanding officer, and home of the bachelor officers. This officers' quarters also housed the officers' club and was the scene of many gay dances.¹⁹

Continuing on their tour of inspection, the pioneers turned at the south end of the parade ground and walked past old Fort John. Turning north, the men next continued along the east side of the parade area past the two stables and probably noticed the new guard house down by the river. The enlisted men who had been confined in charge of the guard were probably walking punishment tours with sacks of grain on their backs and a ball and chain on their leg.²⁰

The excursion around the fort ended at the store, and after a few pleasant goodbyes, the companies hitched up their repaired wagons and

¹⁸Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 156.

¹⁹Of all the remnants of the fort none so embodies the past of the early western military period as does Old Bedlam, first officers' quarters. It is the one survival of the original military establishment and is now being restored. Built in 1849, it was for years the center of the social life of the post. In his historical novel, Laramie, or the Queen of Bedlam, Captain Charles King has recreated the life in the barracks and woven romance about Bedlam.

²⁰The complete records of courts martial cases from 1849 through 1854 and 1857 through 1890 are on microfilm at Fort Laramie National Monument. The original documents pertaining to these cases are in the National Archives, Washington, D. C.

started back to camp. Horses and mules had been traded for fresh stock, supplies had been procured at the store, and the women left in camp had had time to do the family laundry and to bake bread for the journey ahead. California was still eight hundred miles away, and they would not get there sitting around the campfire at Fort Laramie; so the order went around to "start the wagons rolling." As the train moved slowly to the north toward a junction with the Platte, many an emigrant turned for a last longing look at the tiny piece of civilization, Fort Laramie, with its few troops drilling on the parade ground, and its American flag fluttering in the breeze.²¹

From Fort Laramie on west, traffic along the trail became more and more congested. It took several days for the larger number of wagons that had camped at Fort Laramie to get spread out along the trail in orderly fashion. John Carr left Fort Laramie in July of 1850 and later wrote in his diary that: "From the time we left Fort Laramie, we were never out of sight of trains, before and behind us, until we reached Sacramento City."²² Most folks looked forward to seeing Independence Rock²³ and The Devils Gate²⁴ but others such as Mary Homsley were already

²¹The first three years of military occupation found less than one hundred men stationed at Fort Laramie. As late as August, 1854, fewer than fifty men garrisoned the post and, at that time, General Winfield Scott thought seriously of returning the fort to civilian control.

²²John Carr, "Diary", Typewritten copy in files at Fort Laramie National Monument (Copy of MS. in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), 3.

²³Independence Rock, a famous landmark on the trail west of Fort Laramie, was called "register of the plains" because many emigrants stopped to carve their names on its turtle-shaped surface.

²⁴The Devils Gate was a gorge cut by the Sweetwater River and was located on the trail five miles west of Independence Rock.

wornout and knew that they would not see the Pacific.²⁵

It has been estimated that, during the travel period of 1850, nearly fifty-five thousand emigrants, driving twelve thousand wagons, passed Fort Laramie.²⁶ Although this was the largest number of people to be counted in any one year, covered wagons still used the Oregon Trail as late as 1892.²⁷

Due to this increase in the number of pioneers passing through their territory, the Indians soon noticed a sharp decrease in the available supply of game. These dwellers of the plains, of course, needed this wild game for food and, from time to time, minor skirmishes occurred between the redmen, who needed the game to survive, and the white "invaders", who frequently killed for sport. In an effort to avert serious hostilities, the federal government decided to call a treaty council to be held at Fort Laramie in the fall of 1851.²⁸

²⁵Mary Homsley died of measles on June 10, 1852 and was buried, wrapped in a feather tick, on a little knoll beside the lonely trail not far from Fort Laramie. She was only twenty-eight. The feather bed held the earth away from her body, and when the grave was opened in 1925, to quiet rumors that the story of finding the headstone was a newspaper hoax her skeleton was found perfectly preserved in the little earth-walled mausoleum formed by the mattress-together with locks of long black hair, bits of colored cloth and ornamental trinkets. Nothing was disturbed.

²⁶Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 164.

²⁷During my three summers as ranger-historian at Fort Laramie National Monument, I encountered several elderly residents who mentioned that they crossed the plains by wagon after 1890. Mr. Edward T. Von Forrell, owner of the large Von Forrell Ranch near Chugwater, Wyoming, said that, in 1892 his parents came across by wagon because train fare was too expensive.

²⁸Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 177.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT TREATY

The conversion of Fort Laramie into a military post and the unprecedented rush of covered wagon emigrants across the plains emphasized the importance of relations with the Indians. The game that made it possible for the red men to exist had been driven back from the Platte River Trail, and for miles along its course grass had been chopped close by the emigrants' cattle and horses. It had been the established policy of the United States government to make some reimbursement to Indians for losses of game and grass caused by white invasion; however, it was now necessary to take further steps to placate the indignant Indians. The safety of the emigrant trains was at stake.¹

Numerous volumes of accessible military records suggest to the casual reader that Fort Laramie served only as a base of operations against hostile Indians and, to a limited extent, as a place of rest and supply for the dusty travelers along the Oregon Trail.² There can be no doubt but that Fort Laramie did provide such services. In fact, the prime reason that the federal government purchased the fort was its desire to be able to offer protection to those emigrants passing overland to California.³ However, it must also be noted that the local residents

¹Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 177.

²See footnotes, chapters I, II, and III.

³*Ibid.*, 137.

--- the Sioux and the Arapaho --- also made use of the fort as a trading post and as a council site where they might meet with government agents to obtain redress of grievances.

For years government agents had been assigned to the tribes along the Missouri, the lower Platte and the Kansas rivers; but not until 1847 was an official representative placed among the tribes of the high plains. For these Indians --- principally the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and the Sioux -- an excellent government representative was chosen. Thomas Fitzpatrick,⁴ for more than twenty years a trapper and guide in the far West, received the appointment as the first agent to the tribes.

Fitzpatrick early began laying plans for a general treaty with the Indians under his jurisdiction. He wanted to provide against outbreaks and to secure the pledged word of the Indians to keep the peace. In the summer of 1849, he went to Washington and presented his proposal to the Indian office. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of the Interior endorsed his plan and recommended it in their annual reports. However, congress failed to pass the necessary appropriations, and Fitzpatrick had to resort to making a strong appeal for his program in his annual report of September, 1850.⁵

⁴In 1823, William H. Ashley organized an expedition which included at least three men whose names were to become legendary in western history. One of these three was Thomas Fitzpatrick who was to have an exciting thirty-one years on the frontier as trapper, Indian fighter, a partner in the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, an employee of the American Fur Company, guide to the party of Father de Smet in 1841, to that of Dr. Elijah White in the following year, to the second Fremont expedition and to Kearney's southwestern expedition as far as Socorro, New Mexico. He was known to the Indians as the Bad or Broken Hand because of an injury suffered through the bursting of a gun. (See Robert L. Munkres, "Mountain Men", Goshen County News, Torrington, Wyoming, July 5, 1958).

⁵Excerpts from a bound volume of original correspondence between Secretary of the Interior A. H. Stuart, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and D. D. Mitchell. These letters are now on file at Fort Laramie National Monument.

"I regret exceedingly," he wrote, "that the whole arrangement has not been completed the last summer, as I am confident that the Indians of that country will never be found in better training, or their dispositions more pliable, or better suited to enter into amicable arrangements with the government, than they are at the present time."

He urged compensation for the Indians' losses. "The immense emigration," he said, "traveling through that country for the past two years had desolated and impoverished it to an enormous extent." Thus far the Indians had remained peaceful. "Under these circumstances," Fitzpatrick concluded, "would it not be just as well as an economical policy for the government at this time to show some little liberality, if not justice, to their passive submission?"⁶

Congress finally acceded, and in February, 1851, appropriated \$100,000 for the holding of a treaty council.⁷ D. D. Mitchell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, and agent Fitzpatrick were designated commissioners for the government. They chose Fort Laramie as the place for the meeting and September 1, 1851, as the date. During the summer, agent Fitzpatrick journeyed up the Arkansas and north to the Platte, visiting his charges, spreading the news and issuing a call for the council. Upon reaching Fort Laramie, on July 25, 1851, he sent out runners in various directions to notify the different bands of the coming meeting.⁸

On September first, superintendent Mitchell arrived at the fort.

⁶Ibid., 4, 17, and 18.

⁷From the original field copy of the treaty of 1851. (Courtesy National Archives, Washington, D. C.).

⁸LeRoy Hafen and William J. Ghent, Broken Hand; the Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick, (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1931), 83.

With him came Colonel Samuel Cooper of the regular army;⁹ Colonel A. B. Chambers, editor of the Missouri Republican; Robert Campbell;¹⁰ and B. Gratz Brown, a newspaper reporter at the meeting.¹¹

The wagon train that was to bring the presents and supplies for distribution at the council was late in starting from the Missouri frontier and could not arrive at the treaty grounds until the middle of September.¹² This was unfortunate, for the Indians were responsive to issues of presents, and the commissioners relied on the distribution of supplies to promote good feeling and to insure success for the treaty-making. In the meantime, however, the council could convene and get organized.

For days preceding the appointed date, Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahos had been arriving at the fort. These first arrivals, being friendly, mingled freely. Soon, however, their hereditary enemies, the Snakes and Crows, would come in; and then the real test would come. Two

⁹Because of a warm friendship for Jefferson Davis, Samuel Cooper, a northerner by birth, cast his lot with the Confederate States. He was immediately made a full general and was senior southern officer throughout the war. During the retreat from Richmond it was a wise General Cooper, thinking of posterity, who saved many valuable Confederate records from destruction. Hafen and Ghent, Broken Hand, 71.

¹⁰Robert Campbell, one of the founders of the original Fort Laramie or Fort William, was born in Aughlane, County Tyrone, Ireland, and came to St. Louis in 1824. A year later he was near death with a hemorrhage of the lungs and, upon the advice of physicians, undertook a trip to the mountains in one of Ashley's parties. He remained in the mountain trade for the next twenty years or more, but personally withdrew from conduct of operations in the field in 1835. Campbell later became one of the foremost business men of St. Louis. In the course of his career, he was president of the old State Bank. (See Robert L. Munkres, "Mountain Men", Goshen County News, Torrington, Wyoming, July 5, 1958).

¹¹Benjamin Gratz Brown, a reporter for the Missouri Democrat from 1851 to 1854, later became involved in politics. From 1863 to 1867, he served as United States senator from Missouri. In 1872, Brown was nominated for vice president on the Liberal Republican ticket. Hafen and Ghent, Broken Hand, 85.

¹²Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 179.

hundred twenty-eight white soldiers were at hand as an insurance for peace under such circumstances.¹³

When word came that the Snakes, led by Chief Washakie, were approaching, excitement spread among the Indian bands. The general atmosphere was filled with bow-string tight tension, for some insignificant act might precipitate a fight. Private P. G. Lowe, who was stationed with the Dragoons to the west of the fort, pictures the arrival of the mountain Indians.

About noon one bright day, a long line of dust was seen from our camp, looking west, towards Laramie Peak. Soon a long line of Indians came moving slowly down in battle array, arms ready for use and every man apparently expectant, the women and children and baggage bringing up the rear well guarded. It turned out that Major Jim Bridger, the interpreter, had reported to headquarters the approach of the Snakes, and he had been directed to lead them down near to our camp. All the head men of the Sioux and Cheyennes had given assurance that they [sic] should not be molested, so down they came, moving very slowly and cautiously, the chief alone a short distance in advance. They were dressed in their best, riding fine war horses, and made a grandly savage appearance. In the absence of Major Chilton down at the post, seeing all this caution on the part of the Snakes, Lieutenant Hastings had 'boots and saddles' sounded so as to be ready whatever happened. Just below us was a large Sioux camp, and the people were showing great interest and some excitement at the approach of their hereditary enemies, and a few squaws howled in anguish for lost friends who had died in battle with these same cautiously moving warriors. When the Snakes reached the brow of the hill overlooking the beautiful Laramie, less than a mile away, the chief commenced the descent, a Sioux sprang upon his horse, bow and arrows in hand,¹⁴

¹³Morning Report for September 3, 1851. This report lists two hundred ten enlisted men, eighteen officers, five civilians and five hundred thirty-two horses as being fit for duty. It is unusual that no men were reported as sick, but this was probably to bring the garrison up to maximum strength. (Typed copy of this morning report is on file at Fort Laramie National Monument, and the original is in the National Archives, Washington, D. C.).

¹⁴Very few stone arrow heads, other than small bird points, have been found near Fort Laramie. Instead of using stone tips, the Sioux resorted to arrows tipped with sheet iron points. The sheet iron was obtained in trade from trappers in the area.

and rushed towards him. A Frenchman, an interpreter, had been watching this Sioux, expecting trouble, and he, too, mounted his horse and was instantly in pursuit. The Snake column stopped and sent up a wild shout of defiance, the chief moved a few steps farther and raised his gun ready to fire just as the intrepid Frenchman reached the reckless Sioux, pulled him from his horse, disarmed and stood over him. Then ensued a harangue between interpreters and chiefs. The wild Sioux, who sought to revenge himself on the Snake chief who had killed his father some time before, was led back to camp while the Snakes held their ground. Their position was a good one; every man had a good gun, plenty of ammunition, and the Snakes, though not one to five of the Sioux would have defended themselves successfully, and the battle would have been the most bloody ever known amongst the wild tribes.¹⁵

Lowe met Bridger at the treaty council, became attached to the old scout, and thus reports the old fighter in a subsequent conversation:

Well, you seen that fool Sioux make the run, didn't you?

Yes sir.

Well, ---, [referring to the brave interpreter, ...] saved that fellow from hell; my chief would 'er killed him quick, and then the fool Sioux would 'er got their backs up, and there wouldn't have been room to camp 'round here for dead Sioux. You Dragoons acted nice, but you wouldn't have had no show if the fight had commenced - no making peace then. And I tell you another thing: the Sioux ain't goin' to try it again. They see how the Snakes are armed. I got them guns for 'um, and they are good ones. It'll be a proud day for the Snakes if any of these prairie tribes pitch into 'um, and they are not a bit afraid. Uncle Sam told 'um to come down here and they'd be safe, but they ain't takin' his word for it altogether.¹⁶

The Snakes set up their lodges near the tents of the Dragoons and, for the time being, all was peaceful. However, with 10,000 Indians in one group, certain difficulties could be expected, and one of these arose at once.¹⁷ The thousands of Indian ponies¹⁸ added to the hundreds

¹⁵Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 181.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷During their visits to Fort Laramie National Monument, visitors frequently stop to view a giant bulletin board which depicts the highlights of Fort Laramie history. It is here that today's traveller may read about the 10,000 Indians gathered for the treaty of 1851.

¹⁸It is general knowledge that braves kept several ponies for trading purposes. In fact, the wealth of a plains brave was measured in terms of the number of horses and, in some instances, the number

of soldiers' horses rapidly cropped the grass for miles around the fort. The matter of forage was considered and, in view of the probable length of the council, it was decided that another place where grass was more abundant must be found.¹⁹ News of the decision to move spread quickly through the Indian camps, and preparations were made for a general trek on the fourth of September.

For the commissioners much planning was necessary. Not only must provisions for two or three weeks be taken from the fort to the treaty grounds, but some presents and supplies must be available for distribution to the Indians. There must be tobacco to smoke, sugar and coffee to give out, and a few blankets, knives, beads and trinkets to distribute. "Without these," wrote B. G. Brown, the newspaper reporter at the meeting, "no man living -- not even the president of the United States -- would have any influence with them, nor could he get them into council or keep them together a day . . . Provisions are the great and most important item. I have yet to see the first Indian, whether chief or notorious brave, that is not hungry or wanting something to eat."²⁰

Even a Cecil B. DeMille extravaganza could not do justice to the procession that moved down the Platte along the dusty Oregon Trail. Two companies of troops were in the lead; then followed the white dignitaries riding in fancy carriages prepared for the grand occasion. Heavy wagons creaking under their loads of supplies followed, while all about were

squaws that he had. A conservative estimate by David L. Hieb of the National Park Service sets the number of ponies at the 1851 council at 20,000 head.

¹⁹Because of the abundant grass, the bottomlands about the mouth of Horse Creek were reported as favorable. This area was near the present town of Mitchell, Nebraska.

²⁰Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 182.

Indian villages on the move.²¹

As was the Indian custom, the burden of camp moving had fallen upon the squaws and girls. After taking down the lodges, they had attached horses to their travois and on these placed their lodge skins, camp equipment, and small children. Even the larger dogs got into the act and were harnessed to small travois which carried light articles.²² The cavalcade stretched out for several miles and created a cloud of dust, thick and stifling.

The afternoon of the second day brought the procession to the council ground, located near present day Mitchell, Nebraska. Each tribe was assigned a suitable place, and soon the various villages were set up in the usual fashion. To act as a quieting influence, troops were placed between the camps of the Snakes and the Plains tribes.²³ Since there were but 228 soldiers at hand and the Indian bands totaled more than 10,000, the hope of peace depended upon good will. This seemed to grow as the tribes mingled.²⁴

As soon as the new camp ground was reached, the chiefs gathered at the headquarters tent, but this being Friday, they were told that the first formal council would be held on Monday, September 9. The chiefs returned to their tribes and gave the signal to commence two days of visiting and social gatherings. In the afternoon of the following day, the Oglala Sioux were hosts to the Snakes, Arapahos and Cheyennes at a

²¹Ibid., 183.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 184.

great dog feast.²⁵ No epoch in Indian annals, probably, witnessed a greater massacre of the canine race.²⁶

Even here, the grazing grounds were fast becoming a barren plain and, with camp refuse everywhere, the stench was becoming so unbearable that the military felt obliged to move two miles down the river to escape some of the filth. The commissioners, however, stayed on the actual camp grounds until all negotiations were completed.²⁷

On Monday, Superintendent Mitchell addressed the council and presented the government's stipulations for negotiating a treaty. In general, the territorial limits of each tribe were to be defined, and a lasting peace was to be established between the various nations.²⁸ Also, the white man was to have unmolested passage over the roads leading to the west and was to have the right to build military posts for protection of travellers on these trails. If the tribes would agree to these terms, they were to receive \$50,000 in annuities each year, for fifty years.²⁹ After several days of discussion, the chiefs accepted Mitchell's terms and signed the treaty on September 17, 1851. Except for minor incidents,

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Hafen and Ghent, Broken Hand, 85.

²⁷Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 187.

²⁸While the dwindling supply of wild game did worry the plains tribes, it was frequently the hatred that existed between the various tribes, even within tribes, that caused raiding parties to set forth to slaughter or to be slaughtered. If a raid into another tribe's territory proved fruitless, then the animal-like hysteria was sometimes taken out on a passing wagon train. This raiding was what the government wanted to prevent. (Brief of Treaty of 1851).

²⁹Taken from the original field copy of the treaty. (Courtesy of the National Archives).

peace prevailed until the now famous Grattan massacre of August 19, 1854.³⁰

After the Indians had signed the treaty, the emigrants had fewer misgivings about starting west and, in 1852, outfitting points were alive with activity.³¹ For several years thereafter, the forts along the Oregon Trail continued to supply the westbound traveler with food, medical aid, and other necessities and comforts. Indeed, pioneers who were outfitting at St. Joseph and other trail towns were frequently warned "not to load their wagons too heavily as supplies were procurable at Forts Kearny, Laramie and Bridger."³² As in previous years, Fort Laramie continued to be the symbol of rest, security, and communication to those trekking the Oregon Trail.

³⁰This unnecessary and bloody battle took place eight miles from Fort Laramie. Mari Sandoz and Ray H. Mattison agree that this dispute over a Mormon cow was the beginning of a series of Indian wars that did not end until the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. For further information see Lloyd E. McCann, "The Grattan Massacre", Nebraska History, XXXVII, March, 1956, 114-119.

³¹St. Joseph Gazette, September 8, 1852, 1. (This paper may be seen in the city museum at St. Joseph, Missouri.)

³²Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 197.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

During the years 1849 to 1852, thousands of westward-bound emigrants passed Fort Laramie. This thesis has been written to help the reader understand how these pioneers of another century felt when, after six weeks of monotonous, wearisome travel, they saw and visited this establishment located on the wind-swept plains of Wyoming.

The author realizes that in approaching the problem he has departed from the position taken by LeRoy Hafen, the only historian who has written a general history of this famous fort. Mr. Hafen has employed the postulate that western history can best be written and studied by using the chronology of military campaigns. In this thesis, the author has taken what he considers to be a more logical position. He maintains that either the Indians or the white men, or both, had first to get into trouble, whereupon the military would be summoned to preserve law and order. Except for scientific enterprises such as Fremont's mapping expedition, there was no need for the army until greedy outthroats arrived at the goldfields or until Indians raided a wagon train. It must be remembered that the nearest civilian peace officer was located in Missouri, six hundred miles to the East. Thus when the peace and quiet of the plains was broken, the army would arrive.

What did these early settlers think of their protectors in uniform? In his book, Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834 to 1890, Mr. Hafen gives the impression that from 1849 until 1890 Fort Laramie was always considered as a military post by all groups travelling the

Oregon Trail.¹ From the knowledge gained by reading dozens of diaries written by emigrants travelling west, this author feels that, until the Sioux wars of 1854, these pioneers considered the Fort more as a place of barter and repair than as a place of military operations. This theory is frequently borne out by trail logbooks whose opening sentences would often state sentiments such as "now we can secure medical aid, repair broken wagons, and receive and send mail."

These migrating people thought of Fort Laramie as their government away from home. Here many of the customary services connected with civilized institutions could be obtained. However, the saddler, blacksmith, and the teamster -- representing occupations formerly associated with private enterprise -- now wore the garb of the military. Moreover, this misunderstanding of the fort's purpose was quite natural, since Fort Laramie had been operated as a trading post from 1834 to 1849. It was, between 1849 and 1852, indeed the emigrant's hope on the Oregon Trail.

¹Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie,* 156.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

DOCUMENT COLLECTIONS

A collection of Fort Laramie military records, including general orders, medical reports, and morning reports for the years 1849 to 1852. National Archives, Washington, D. C.

These enlightening reports cover many aspects of the activities, both routine and unusual, of Fort Laramie and its men. These documents also proved to be a valuable source of information as to the necessity of establishing and maintaining Fort Laramie during the gold rush period.

Records of the Department of the Interior, Lands Division. National Archives, Washington, D. C.

These were most helpful because they helped pinpoint the transfer of Fort Laramie from the War Department to the Department of the Interior under whose authority it was subsequently sold to settlers in the area.

Treaty of 1851. National Archives, Washington, D. C.

This six page document provided the source for the final chapter of this thesis and stated the government's position at the treaty council.

United States Census Reports, 1850.

These records were of value in emphasizing the rapid growth of frontier river towns in the year 1849.

MILITARY CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence between Thomas Fitzpatrick, D. D. Mitchell, and A. H. Stuart, Fort Laramie National Monument.

This exchange of information between a famous Indian agent and his superiors helped shed understanding on the Indian problems of a century ago.

Official correspondence between Captain Stewart Van Vliet, A.Q.M. at Fort Laramie, and Major General Thos. S. Jesup, Quartermaster General U.S.A., Washington, D. C. National Archives, Washington, D. C.

These letters pointedly stated the army's position of providing necessities to all passerby.

Goshen County News, Torrington, Wyoming, July 5, 1958.

This is a tri-weekly paper which devotes space to local events and places such as Fort Laramie. For several years the staff at Fort Laramie National Monument have contributed articles concerning events of historical importance to the area.

St. Joseph Gazette, St. Joseph, Missouri, September 8, 1852.

A weekly publication which devoted space to events concerned with the Oregon Trail. Interesting, but flowerly written.

INTERVIEWS

Flannery, Pat. Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

As a boy, Mr. Flannery used to sit near the sutler's store and watch soldiers drill on the parade ground. The old gentleman now lives across the road from the fort which he has known so long.

Hieb, David L. Omaha, Nebraska.

For eight years, Mr. Hieb served as Superintendent of Fort Laramie National Monument. During these eight years, he was ever cognizant of any diary, letter or publication that might pertain to Fort Laramie. Through his efforts, the historical library at the Monument gradually developed into a valuable collection.

Sandercock, Meade. Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

Mr. Sandercock was born and raised in one of the officer's quarters at old Fort Laramie. By talking to soldiers and keeping records of these discussions, he was able to preserve important facts about the fort and western homesteading. These bits of information were passed on to this author during the course of many conversations.

GENERAL PUBLISHED WORKS

Barnes, James A. Wealth of the American People. New York: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1949.

This work provided general sketches of travel across the plains during the gold rush period of 1849.

Coke, Henry J. A Ride Over the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California. London: New Place House, 1852.

An excellent diary which pointed out several of the more unusual difficulties encountered along the Oregon Trail.

Cross, Major Osborne, The March of the Mounted Riflemen, Raymond W. Settle, ed. Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1940.

This fascinating study was useful in that it presented a detailed account of military travel and exploration in the early Wyoming Territory.

Hafen, LeRoy and Ghent, William J. Broken Hand: the Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick. Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1931.

This well written biography brought out Fitzpatrick's feeling of responsibility to his Indian charges.

Hafen, LeRoy R. and Young, Francis M. Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834 to 1890. Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938.

Hafen is the only authority to have published a general work on Fort Laramie. The chapters pertaining to the handcart expeditions were especially well written.

McCann, Lloyd E. "The Grattan Massacre," Nebraska History. Lincoln: The Nebraska State Historical Society, XXXVII, Number 1.

An excellent account of the famous Grattan affair of August 19, 1854. Mr. McCann has done a thorough job of research and the article has since been reproduced in pamphlet form and is sold at most of the western national parks and monuments.

Olson, James C., ed. "The Diary of James Mason, Ohio to California in 1850." Nebraska History. Lincoln: The Nebraska State Historical Society, XXXIII, Number 2.

This well edited diary proved to be of great value by pointing out that all types of people made the trek west. It was in this work that the emphasis was placed on the difficulty of even getting to the frontier towns.

Paden, Irene D. The Wake of the Prairie Schooner. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953.

Mrs. Paden's book has become a must for the casual reader of western history. In 1936, Mrs. Paden and her husband made an extensive trip over the Oregon Trail and found many of the old water holes and campgrounds that have since been lost to civilization.

Parkman, Francis. The Oregon Trail. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1924.

Parkman's work provides an interesting account of plains life in 1847. The pages pertaining to Fort Laramie cast detail into life at the trading post.

Petersen, William J. "Steamboating on the Missouri River." Nebraska History. Lincoln: The Nebraska State Historical Society, XXXV, Number 4.

This article gave an extremely interesting account of early-day travel on the Missouri River. Particular attention was given to the dangers due to poor boiler construction.

West, Ray B. Jr., Kingdom of the Saints. New York: The Viking Press, 1957.

In this well written and informative work, which deals with the Mormon Church and its leader, Brigham Young, Mr. West has presented the development of what is today the Western part of the United States, especially Utah.

PAMPHLETS

Mattes, Merrill J. The Post Sutler. U.S. National Park Service, Bulletin Number 16. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948.

This is an interesting general work covering the duties of sutlers at forts along the Oregon Trail.

PERSONAL LETTERS AND DIARIES

Abbey, James. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

In his diary, Mr. Abbey describes a trip across the plains in the spring of 1850. This work was of help because it gave detailed information concerning the campsites near Fort Laramie.

Abbott, Carlisle S. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Original MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

This diary was of particular interest in that it described a Platte River Valley storm. Mr. Abbott mentioned the trouble he had in herding the cattle so they would not stampede.

Bailey, Margaret Stuart. "Diary". Copy of MS at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Original MS in Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

Margaret Bailey wrote her diary with typical feminine touch. She took great pains to describe the clothing worn by the Indian squaws. This was one of the few diaries that specifically mentioned the independent trading posts along the trail.

Bennett, James. "Diary". Typewritten copy on file at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Original MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

This diary, written on the Overland Trail in 1850, was very helpful because it gave details as to how wagon trains were organized.

Blood, James A. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Typescript of MS in California State Library, San Francisco, California).

Feed was always a problem, and this diary, written in 1850, told of the agonizing worry for fear that the grass would not be green on the plains.

Carr, John. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

This work told of the vast numbers of covered wagons encountered between Fort Laramie and Independence Rock.

Cook, Lucy Rutledge. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (MS in Public Library, Modesto, California).

In her diary, Lucy Cook vividly described the outfitting town of Westport Landing as one of excitement and guns.

Cox, Henry A. "Letter". Original MS at Fort Laramie National Monument.

In his letter of June 24, 1849, Henry Cox thanked his wife in Clinton, Ohio for including certain medicines in his trail kit. This letter provided additional information concerning the hardships suffered on the trail to Fort Laramie and the expectations of services to be found at that post.

Ellenbecker, John G. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

This diary contained information relating to an Indian disturbance along the trail.

Engalls, E. S. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS at Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

This diary also paid particular attention to the suffering encountered along the trail. In his diary, Engalls frequently mentioned that he had helped bury some unknown person.

Goldsmith, Oliver. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

This diary was very helpful in describing the terrible toll taken by cholera during the 1849 and 1850 travel periods.

Hardenstein, Louise. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

Mrs. Hardenstein's diary proved both interesting and helpful because she did such an excellent job of describing the sutler's store at Fort Laramie.

Kirkpatrick, Charles Alexander. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Original MS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

From Kirkpatrick's diary, it seems that people in a rush to get to the gold fields had little regard for life and property. This diary proved useful in an attempt to show the types that made the trip in 1849.

Knapp, Cornelius. "Letter". Original at Fort Laramie National Monument.

Besides helping to pinpoint the vast waste encountered along the trail, this letter also illustrated the importance of Fort Laramie as a post office.

Langworthy, Franklin. "Letter". Copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (Copy of MS in California Historical Library, San Francisco).

This letter pointed to the severe hardships endured along the trail, and was very important because it mentioned that the trail took a heavy toll in cattle.

Pritchard, Captain J. A. "Diary". Typewritten copy at Fort Laramie National Monument. (MS in poss. Hon. John I. Williamson, Kansas City, Missouri).

Captain Pritchard described the crowded conditions found in Independence in 1849.

APPENDIX A

FORT LARAMIE AFTER 1854

Following the Grattan massacre of 1854, the Indian attacks along the Oregon trail grew in number and intensity and during the next twenty years the fort became headquarters for numerous punitive expeditions against the red man. At length the power of the Indian was broken. He had made a determined stand in defense of his land and his ancient manner of life, but the odds were against him. Now he was corralled on a reservation.

With the cessation of the Indian wars, Fort Laramie was given the difficult task of protecting and supplying the miners, teamsters, and camp followers who swarmed into the Black Hills in 1875. Probably no other stagecoach in American history was held up so often as was the Black Hills Stage Line's treasure coach on its run from Deadwood to Fort Laramie.

However, even in the late 'seventies and early 'eighties, the Fort Laramie scene was undergoing a change. The covered wagon era had passed and the Indian wars were over. The settlement period had begun.

The beginning of the end for Fort Laramie was apparent in 1886. On February 9 of that year, Major General J. M. Schofield wrote the commanding officer at Fort Laramie: "The fact that the Elkhorn Valley Railroad will pass Fort Laramie at a distance of forty-five miles, while Fort Robinson is immediately on that road, greatly diminishes the value of the former and increases that of the latter post."¹

¹Adjutant general's office, Fort Laramie files, 1886. (Courtesy the National Archives.)

On August 31, 1889, the final decision was reached and the War Department issued general order number sixty-nine which states: "The garrisons of Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory; Fort Hays, Kansas; and Fort Lyon, Colorado, will be withdrawn; and, the several posts named will be abandoned; and, the troops thus withdrawn will be assigned to other stations by the division commander

"By Command of
Major-General Schofield"²

However, even the issuance of these orders failed to destroy the old fort. On November 9, 1889, Governor Francis E. Warren of Wyoming wrote to Washington asking that:

If consistant [sic] with the necessities and conveniences of the army. I respectfully suggest that these companies may be allowed to remain until next spring or summer.

Fort Laramie is situated nearly 100 miles from the county seat of Laramie county and there is in that vicinity but one justice of the peace and no other civil officers.³

On April 20, 1890, Fort Laramie was abandoned as a military post, and a few weeks later the buildings and other property were sold to homesteaders in the area. In its final days the old post again was the scene of the auction block of the pioneers.

Thus on a spring day in 1890, the official story of Fort Laramie came to an end. The post that once presided on the Oregon trail had relinquished rule. The Indians would come no more, their travois laden with buffalo robes. Packs of furs would never again be launched in bullboats on the Platte. The white-topped caravans, gone from the plains, would not circle beside the Laramie, nor would the handcart pioneer look

²Fort Laramie Files. (Courtsey the National Archives).

³Records of the Department of the Interior, lands division. (Courtsey the National Archives).

longingly after the rider of the Poney Express. The spring weeds had already taken over the parade ground where once Indians danced and troops passed in review. Fort Laramie now patiently waited the ax of the timber-seeking homesteader.

From 1890 until 1938 this one-time guardian of the frontier was left to the whims of souvenir hunters and to nature. Since 1938, Fort Laramie has been a national monument and, under government supervision, has been partially restored. Several buildings are still standing and, with a little imagination, visitors can picture the busy fort of another day. Of all the remnants of the fort, none so embodies the past of Fort Laramie as does Old Bedlam, first officer's quarters.

Beside the trickle that was once the ferried Laramie, the dwindling remnant of a once proud fort dreams in the sun. Today, Fort Laramie is only a shell, but like a sea-born shell, it still resounds with the music and voices that nurtured it. In the high Wyoming winds, it whistles and moans with the throb of Sioux tom-toms and the ghost-like music of forgotten fifes and drums.⁴

⁴Hafen and Young, Fort Laramie, 398.

John C. Fremont's map made during his westward journey of 1842. Note the location of the Indian tribes in the Fort Laramie area.

NEW
 OR AN
 EXPLORING EXPEDITION
 TO THE
ROCKY MOUNTAINS in the YEAR 1842
 AND TO
OREGON & NORTH CALIFORNIA in the YEARS 1843-44
 BY
 BREVET CAPT J. C. FREMONT OF THE CORPS OF TOPOGRAPHICAL ENGINEERS
 Under the orders of
 COL. J. J. ABERT, CHIEF OF THE TOPOGRAPHICAL BUREAU.

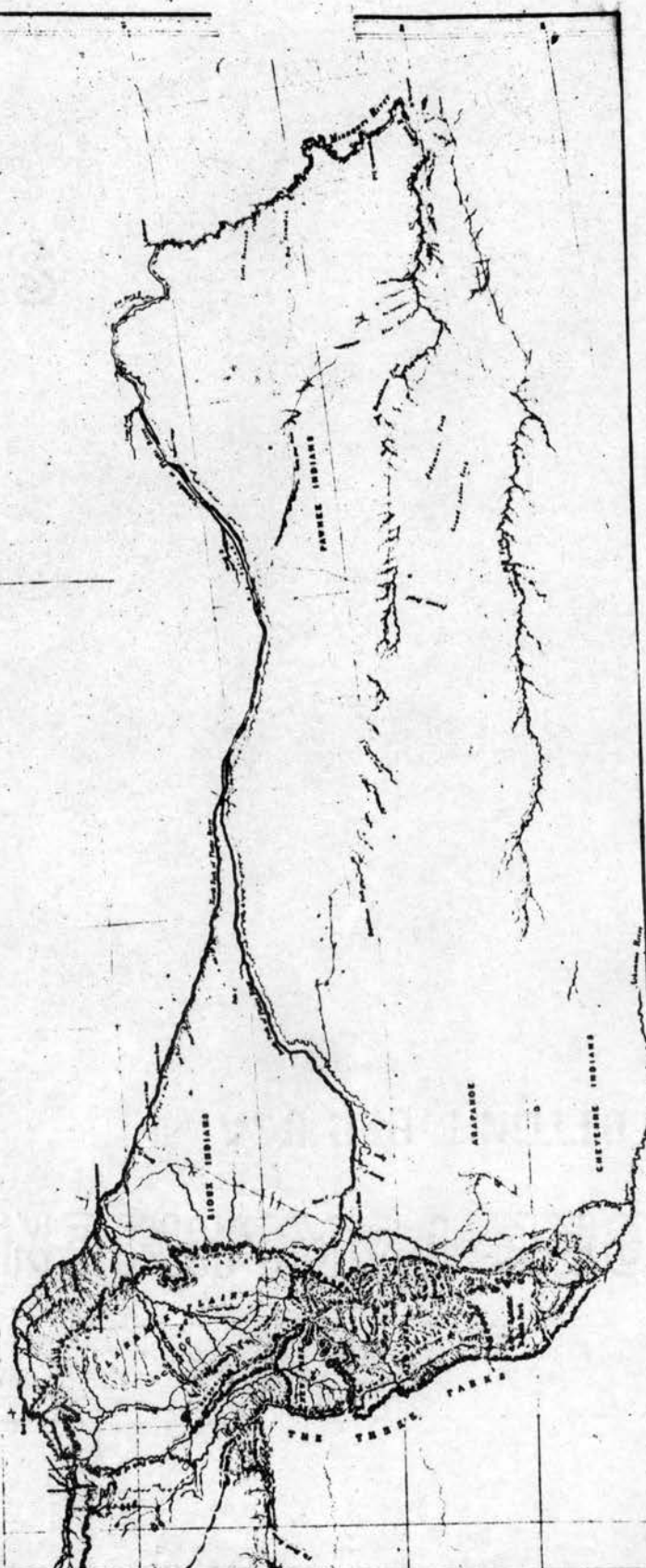


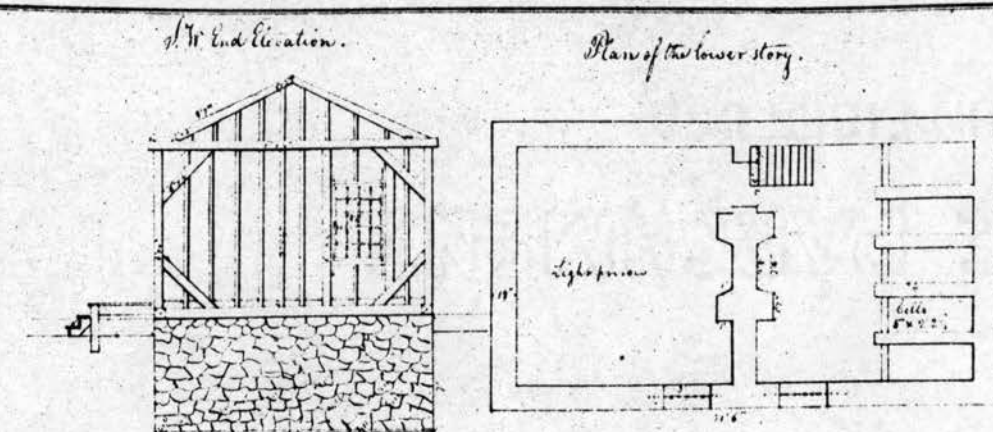
PLATE II

Plans for the Guard House, Fort Laramie,
Oregon Route, 1852

Drawer 152.

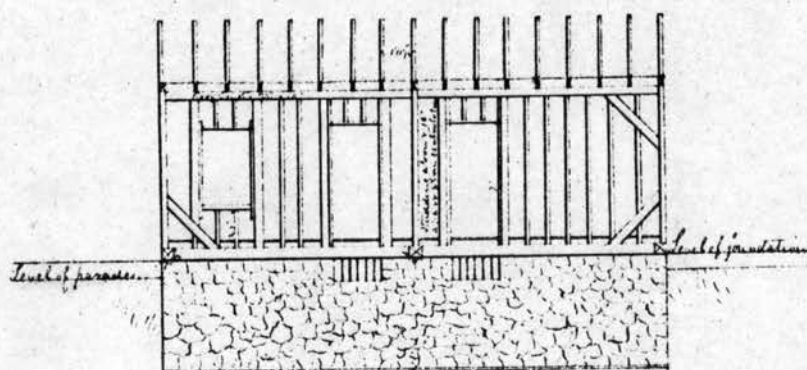
Sept 7.

Guard House, Fort Laramie. Ravine at top 'Sep.' 1882.
(the W 1005).

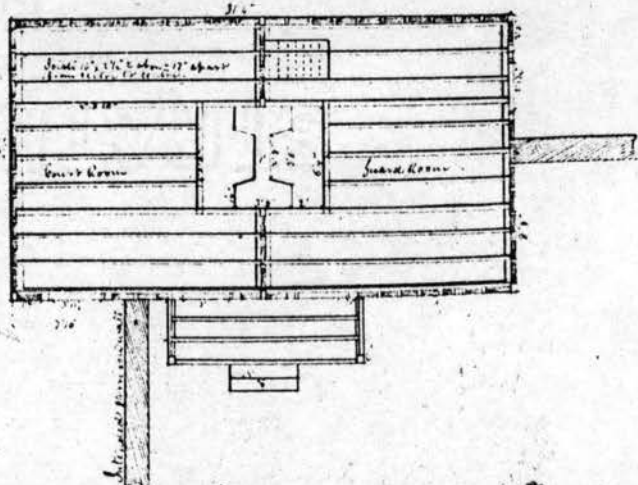


152-7

Front Elevation



Plan of the upper story.



Scale one inch to five feet.

Jan. 1st 1850
Drawn by Dr. A. S. Davenport Corp. Ingers.

PLATE III

Plan of Fort Laramie, 1852

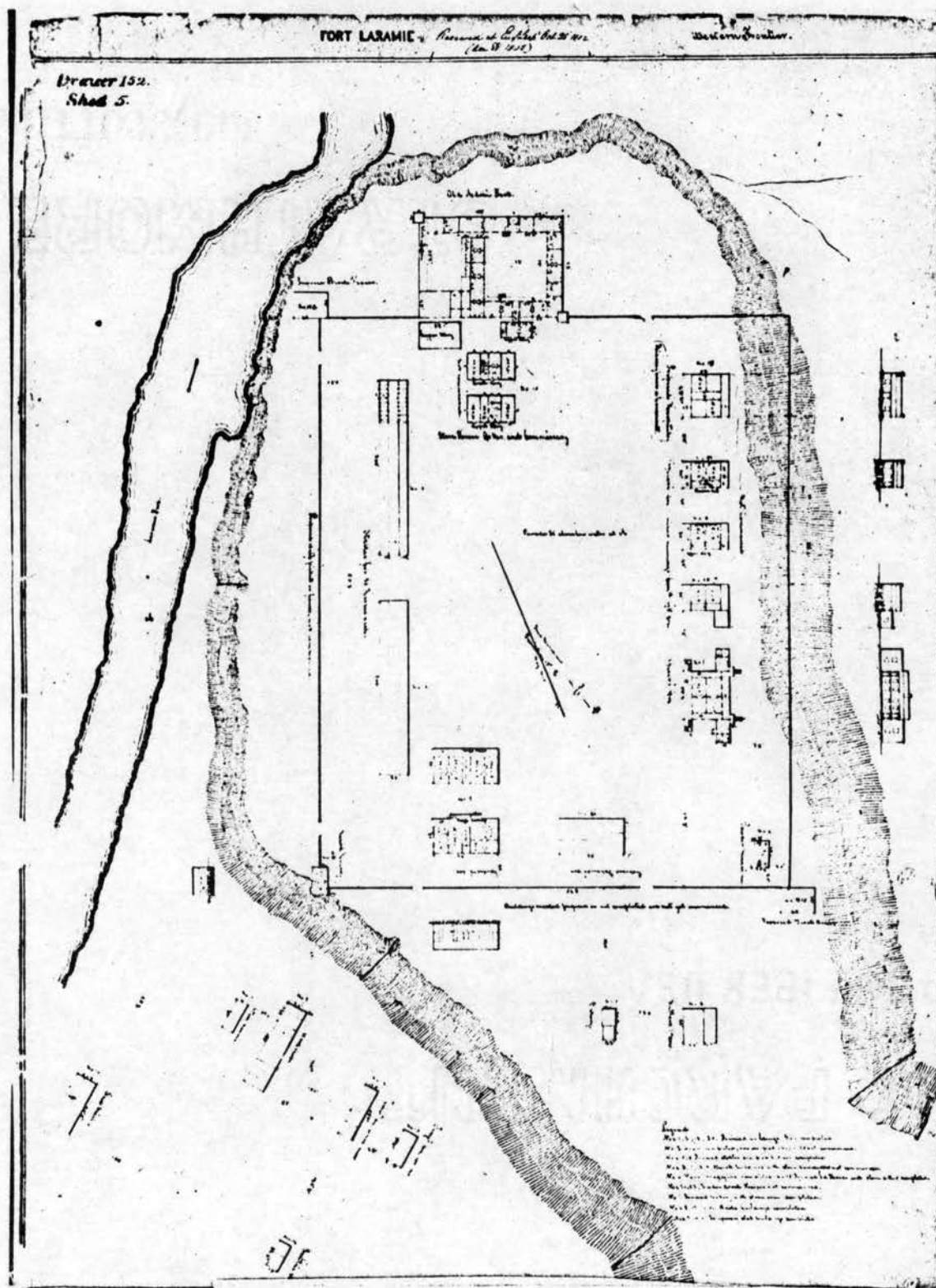


PLATE IV

Treaty of 1851

Articles of a Treaty made and concluded at Fort Laramie in the Indian Territory between D. D. Mitchell, Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Thomas Fitzpatrick, Indian Agent - Commissioners specially appointed and authorized by the President of the United States of the first part, and the Chiefs, Head-men and Braves of the following Indian Nations residing South of the Missouri river, east of the Rocky Mountains; and North of the Line of Texas and New Mexico: viz, the Sioux, or Dak-otahs, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Crows, Assinaboins, Gros-Ventres, Mandans, and Arickeras, parties of the second part: on the seventeenth day of September A.D. one thousand eight hundred and fifty one.

Article 1st. The aforesaid nations - parties to this Treaty having assembled for the purpose of establishing and confirming peaceful relations amongst themselves, do hereby covenant and agree to abstain in future from all hostilities whatever against each other - to maintain good faith and friendship in all their mutual intercourse, and to make an effective and lasting

Article 2^d. The aforesaid nations do hereby recognize the right of the United States Government to establish roads, Military, and other Posts within their respective Territories.

Article 3^d. In consideration of the rights and privileges acknowledged in the preceding article, the United States

bind themselves to protect the aforesaid Indian Nations against the commission of all depredations by the people of the said United States after the ratification of this Treaty.

Article 4th. The aforesaid Indian Nations do hereby agree and bind themselves to make restitution or satisfaction for any wrongs committed after the ratification of this Treaty by any band or individual of their people, on the people of the United States, whilst lawfully residing on, or passing through their respective Territories.

Article 5th. The aforesaid Indian Nations do hereby recognize and acknowledge the following tracts of Country, included within the limits and boundaries herein-after designated as their respective Territories viz:—

The territory of the Sioux or Da-co-tah Nation—Commencing at the mouth of White Earth River on the Missourⁱ river, thence in a South-Westerly direction to the forks of the Platte river, thence up the north fork of the Platte River to a point known as the Red Butte, or where the road leaves the river, thence along the range of Mountains known as the Black Hills, to the head waters of Heart River:—thence down Heart river to its mouth:—and thence down ^{the} Missourⁱ to the place of beginning.

The territory of the Gros Ventre, Thondan, and Arickara Nations. Commencing at

the mouth of Heart River - thence up the
 Tripouri River to the mouth of the
 Yellow Stone river - thence up the
 Yellow Stone river to the mouth of Pow-
 der River - thence from the mouth of
 Powder River in a South-easterly direction
 to the head waters of the Little Missouri
 river, thence along the Black Hills to the
 head of Heart River - and thence down
 Heart River to the place of beginning.

The Territory of the Arinaboins Nation. -
 Commencing at the mouth of Yellow Stone
 river - thence up the Tripouri river to the
 mouth of the Musch-shell river - thence
 from the mouth of the Musch-shell river
 in a South-easterly direction until it
 strikes the head waters of Big Dry Creek -
 thence down that creek to where it empties
 into the Yellow Stone river nearly opposite
 the mouth of Powder River - and thence
 down the Yellow Stone ^{river} to the place of
 beginning.

The Territory of the Black Foot Nation.
 Commencing at the mouth of the Musch-
 shell river - thence up the Tripouri river
 to its source - thence along the main
 range of the Rocky Mountains, in a southerly
 direction to the head waters of the northern
 source of the Yellow Stone river - thence
 down the Yellow Stone river to the
 mouth of Twenty five Good Creek -
 thence across to the head waters of the Musch-
 shell river - ^{and} thence down the Musch-shell
 river to the place of beginning.

The territory of the Crow Nation. Commencing at the mouth of Powder River on the Yellow Stone, - thence up Powder River to its source, - thence along the main range of the Black Hills and Wind River Mountains to the head waters of the Yellowstone River. Thence down the Yellow Stone River to the mouth of Twenty Five (Cold Creek), - thence to the head waters of the Mussel-shell River, - thence down the Mussel-shell River to its mouth, - thence to the head waters of Big Dry Creek, and thence to its mouth.

The territory of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes. Commencing at the Red Butte, or the place where the road crosses the north fork of the Platte River. - thence up the north fork of the Platte River to its source, - thence along the main range of the Rocky Mountains to the head waters of the Arkansas River, - thence down the Arkansas River to the crossing of the Santa Fe road, - thence in a North Westwardly direction to the forks of the Platte River, - and thence up the Platte River to the place of beginning.

It is however understood, that in making this recognition and acknowledgements the aforesaid Indian Nations do not thereby abandon or prepay any rights or claims they may have to other lands: and further, that they do not surrender the privilege of hunting, fishing or passing over any of the lands of country herein before described.

Article 6th. The parties of the second part to this treaty, having selected principal or Head Chiefs for their respective nations, through whom all national business will hereafter be conducted, do hereby bind themselves to sustain said Chiefs and their successors during good behavior.

Article 7th. In consideration of these treaty stipulations and for the damage which have, or may occur by reason thereof, to the Indian Nations - parties hereto, and for their maintenance, and the improvement of their moral and social condition, the United States bind themselves to deliver to the said Indian Nations the sum of fifty thousand dollars per annum for fifty years in provision, merchandise, domestic animals and agricultural implements, in such proportions as may be deemed best adapted to their condition by the President of the United States - to be distributed in proportion to the population of the aforesaid Indian Nations.

Article 8th. It is understood and agreed that should any of the Indian Nations, parties to this treaty, violate any of the provisions thereof, the United States may withdraw the whole, or a portion of the annuities mentioned in the preceding article from the nation so offending, until in the opinion of the President of the United States proper satisfaction shall have been made.

In testimony whereof, the said D. D. Mitchell and Thomas Fitzpatrick Commissioners as aforesaid, and the Chiefs, Head men and Breres-parties hereto, here set their hands and affixed their marks, on the day and at the place first above written.

In presence of
A. B. Chambers, Secretary.

J. Cooper, Col. 1st Army
R. W. Chilton, Capt. 1st Drago
Thomas Duncan, Capt. 1st Riflemen
Chas. B. Smith, Bvt. Capt. R. M. R.
W. A. Elliott, 1st Lt. R. M. R.
O. Campbell, Anticipating
John D. Smith " Chayennes
Robert McAdams " Crow
A. Culbertson " Apinabois
Francis S. Catlin " Arickarnee
John Pigeon " Arapaho
B. W. Brown
Robert Campbell
Edmond F. Choubeaux

D. D. Mitchell
Thomas Fitzpatrick
Commissioners

Witness

Mah-ta-wah^{his} you why

Mah-kah-ta^{his} fel-gah

Bel-o-ta^{his} kah-ta^{his} long

Mah-nu-jah^{his} gi-ga

Mah-ta-wah^{his} kah-ta^{his} bi-chi

Mah-what^{his} bet^{his} how like

Chayennes

Mah-ha^{his} me^{his} letta

Voist^{his} to^{his} wit

Kah-k. Ka^{his} me-ien

Kah-kah-y^{his} wh^{his} cum at

Arapaho

Peah^{his} to a^{his} lah

Kah-ni^{his} bah^{his} sek it

Peh-kah^{his} ay^{his} bet^{his} sek c

Crows

Ar-a^{his} hi^{his} ri^{his} Dakh

Dahshe^{his} pit^{his} sek^{his} chi c

Arenai^{his} boinnes

ish^{his} to^{his} wit^{his} 120

Shu^{his} lak^{his} ki^{his} nan

PLATE V
Westbound Wagon Train



PLATE VI
Sioux Burial Trees



051140

PLATE VII

Painting of Fort Laramie

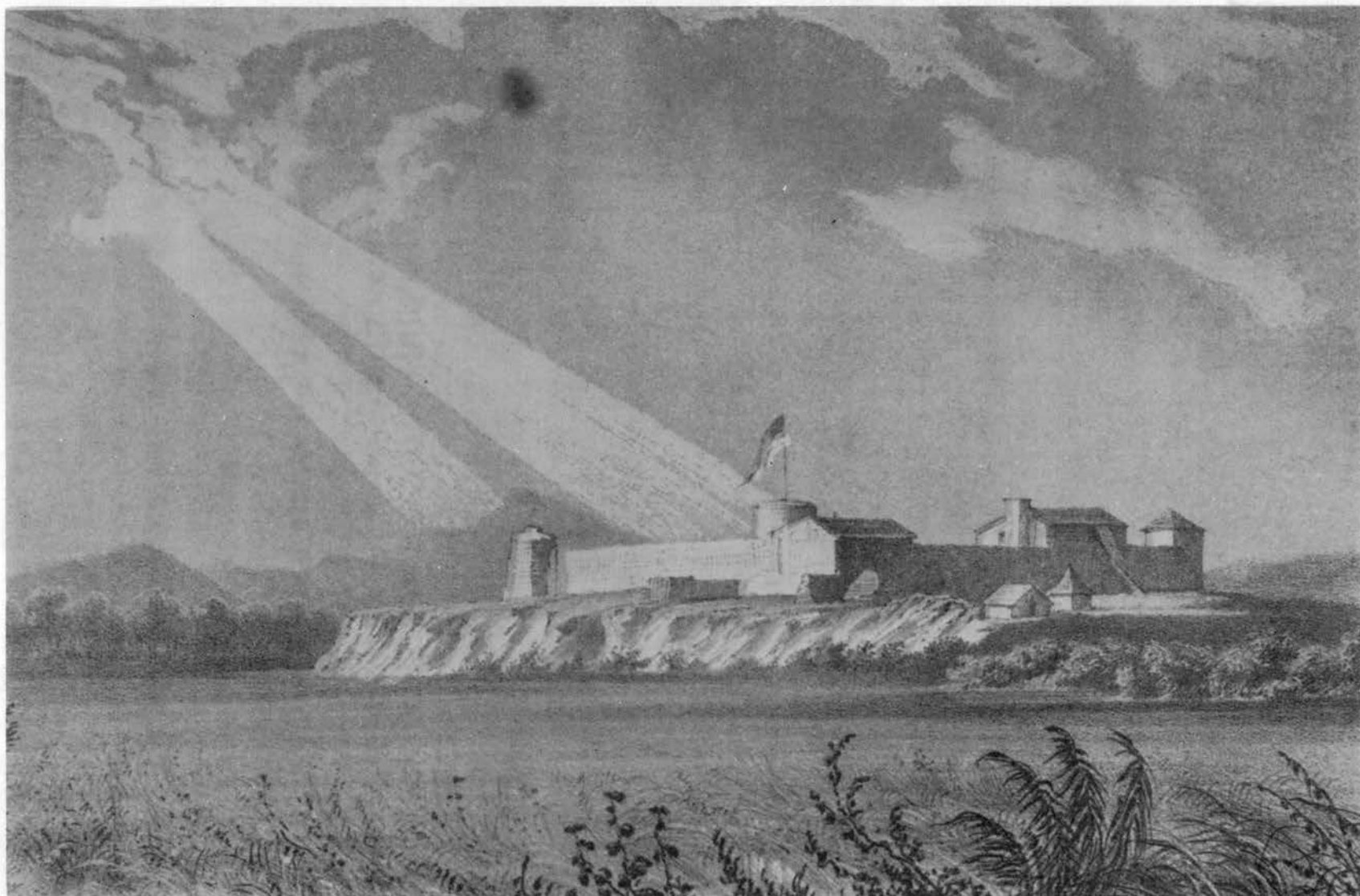


PLATE VIII
|
Independence Rock

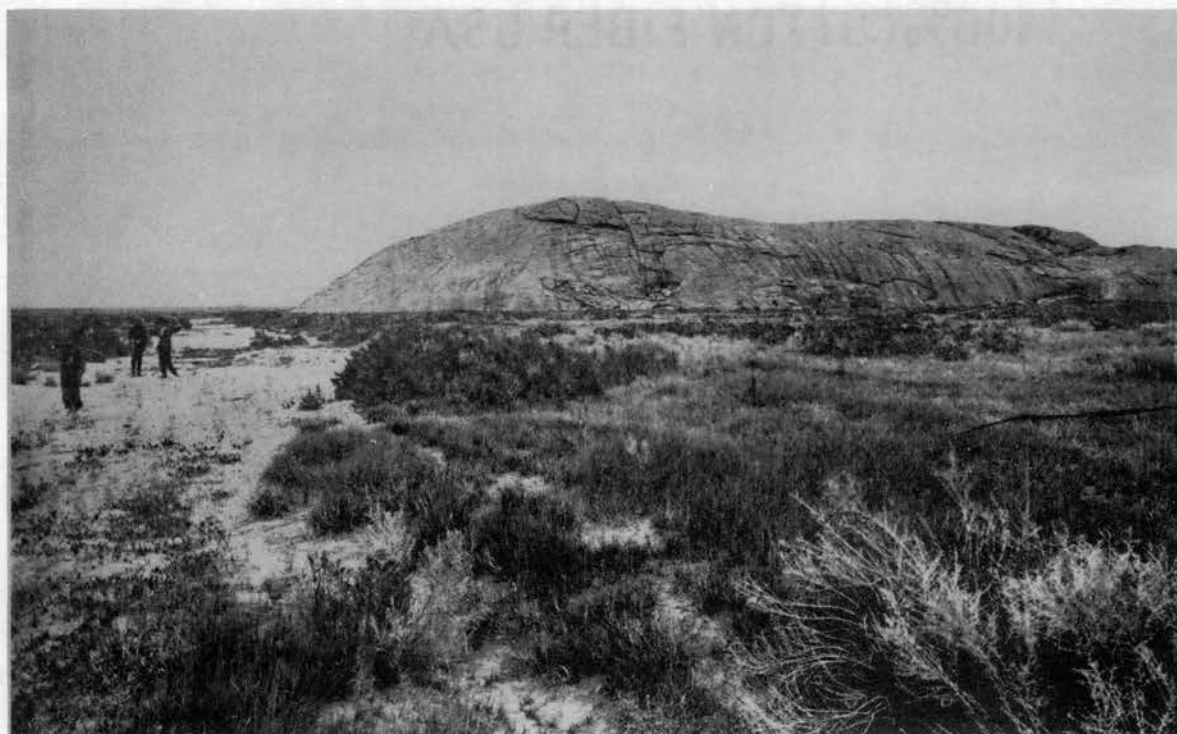


PLATE IX

Devils Gate on the Sweetwater River

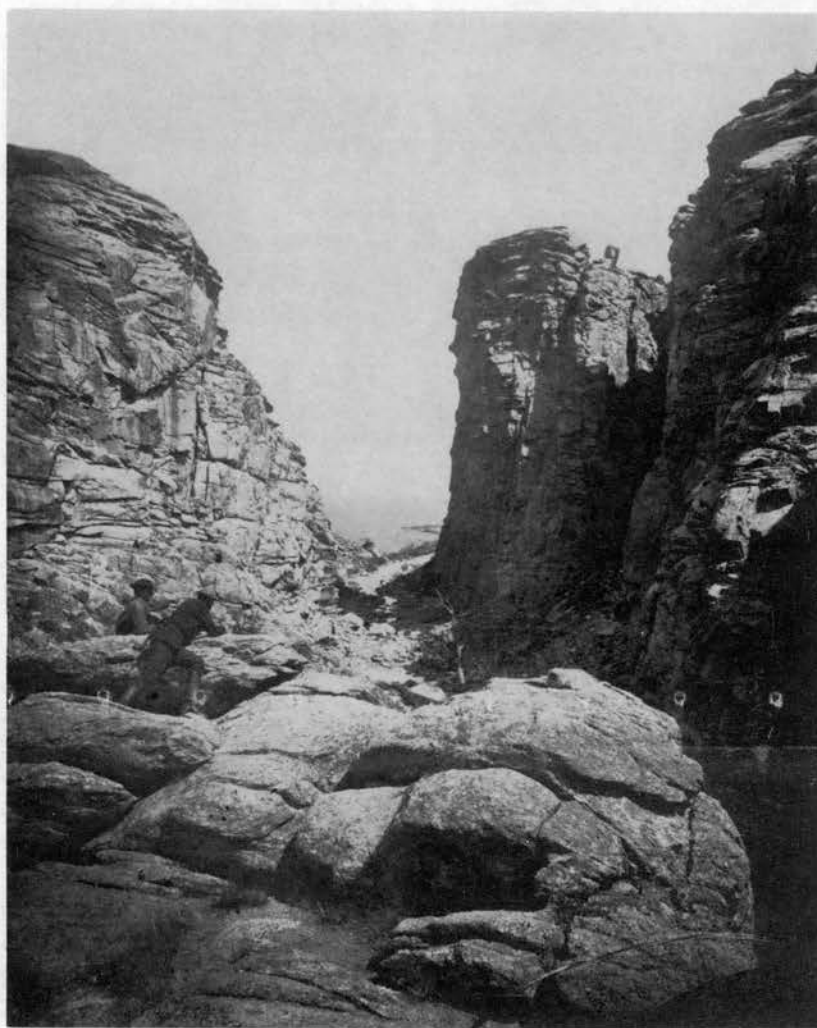


PLATE X

Group Camped Near Devils Gate

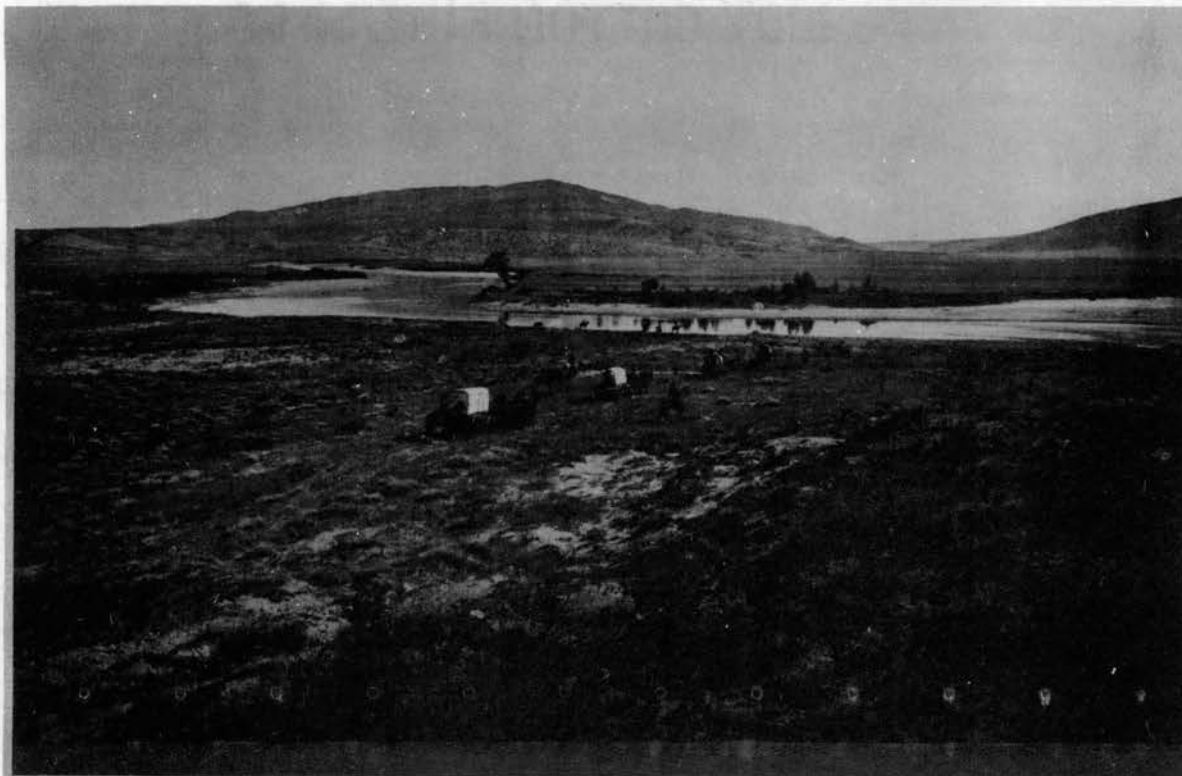


PLATE XI

Mummy Rock on the Sweetwater River

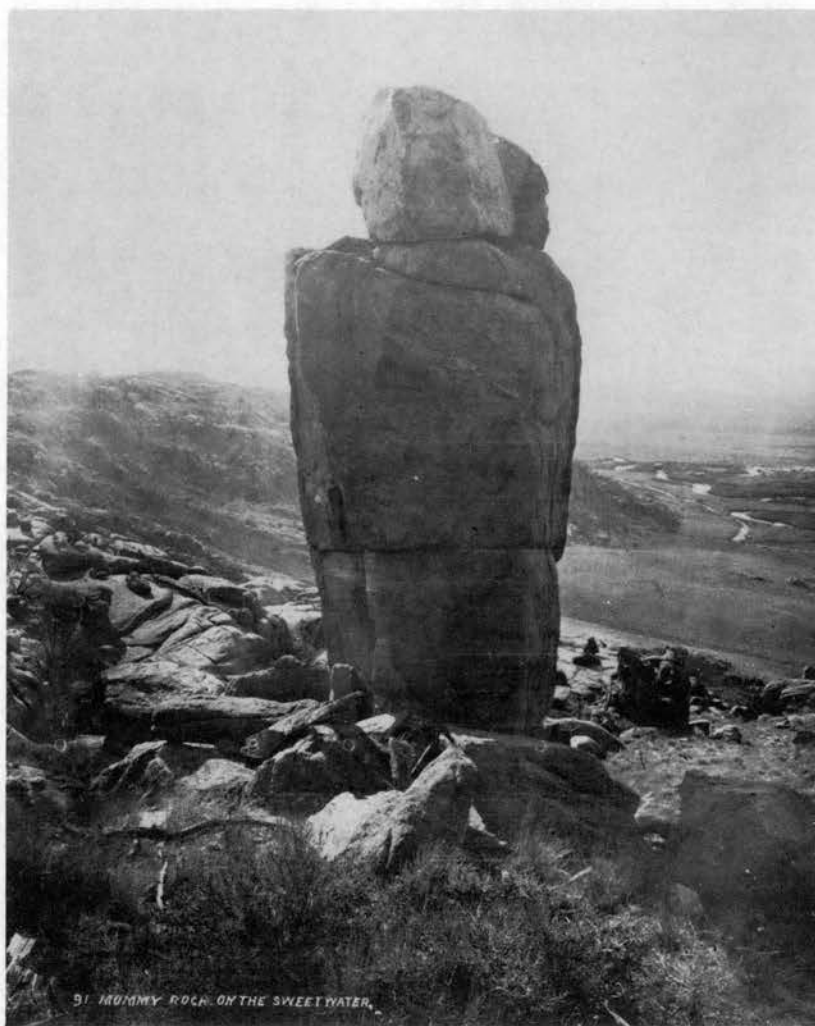
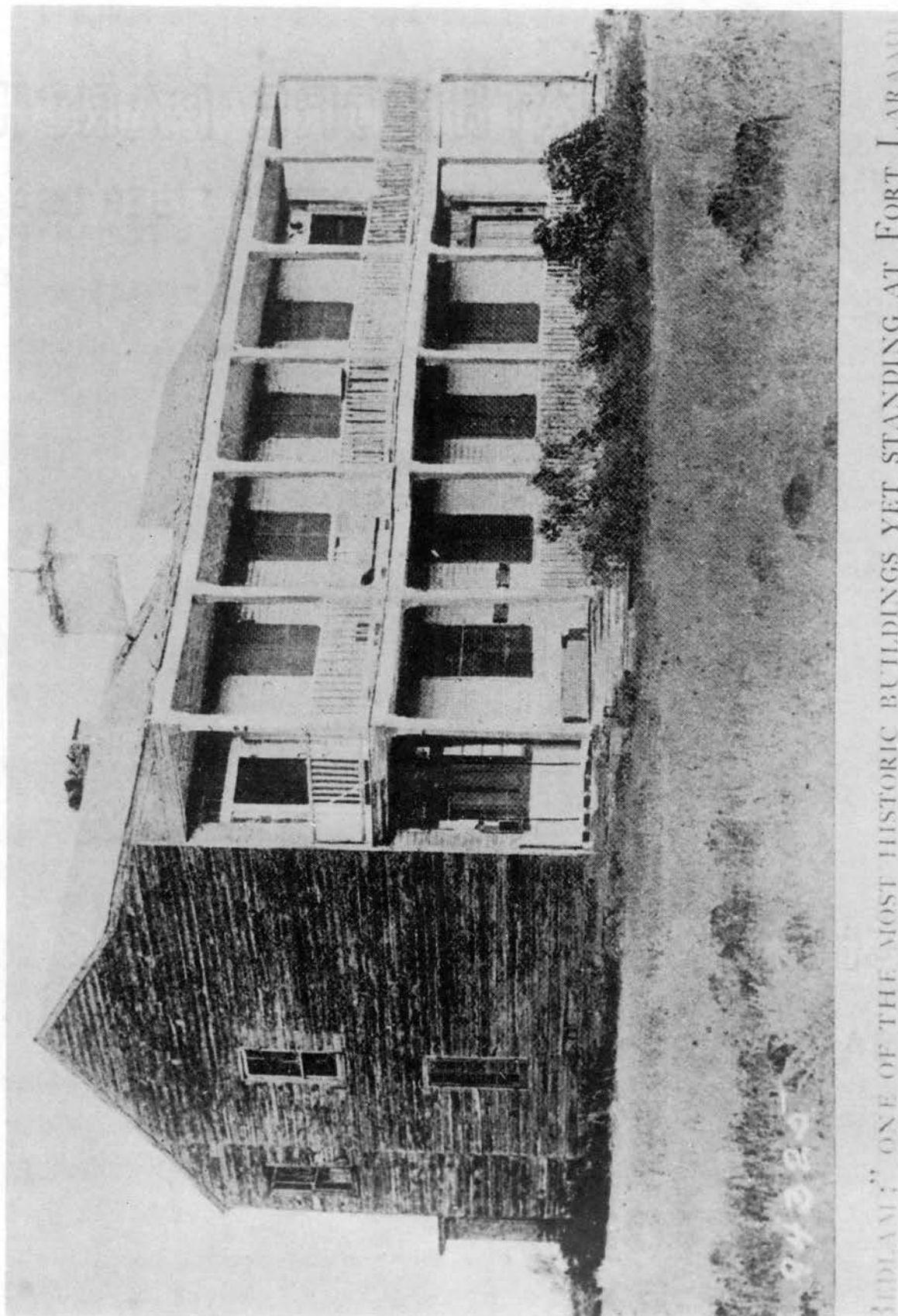


PLATE XII

"Old Bedlam" First officer's quarters built at Fort Laramie, 1849



"BEDLAM" ONE OF THE MOST HISTORIC BUILDINGS YET STANDING AT FORT LARAMIE

VITA

GORDON ROSS CARLSON

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Thesis: FORT LARAMIE, THE EMIGRANT'S HOPE ON THE OREGON TRAIL

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, October 23, 1927, the son of Charles Gordon and Gladys Ross Carlson.

Education: Attended grade school in Tulsa, Oklahoma; graduated from Tulsa Central High School, in 1946; attended the University of Colorado, in 1947; received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Oklahoma State University, with a major in History, May, 1952; completed the requirements for the Master of Arts degree, Oklahoma State University, in May, 1963.

Professional experience: Served in the United States Air Force, 1950-1954; taught school at Tulsa Central High, 1955-1956; served as graduate assistant in the Department of History, Oklahoma State University, September, 1957, through January, 1958, and September, 1958, through January, 1959; taught school at Las Cruces, New Mexico, September, 1959, through June, 1960.

Professional and honorary organizations: Mississippi Valley Historical Association; Southern Historical Association; United States Naval Institute; American Neptune, Phi Alpha Theta.