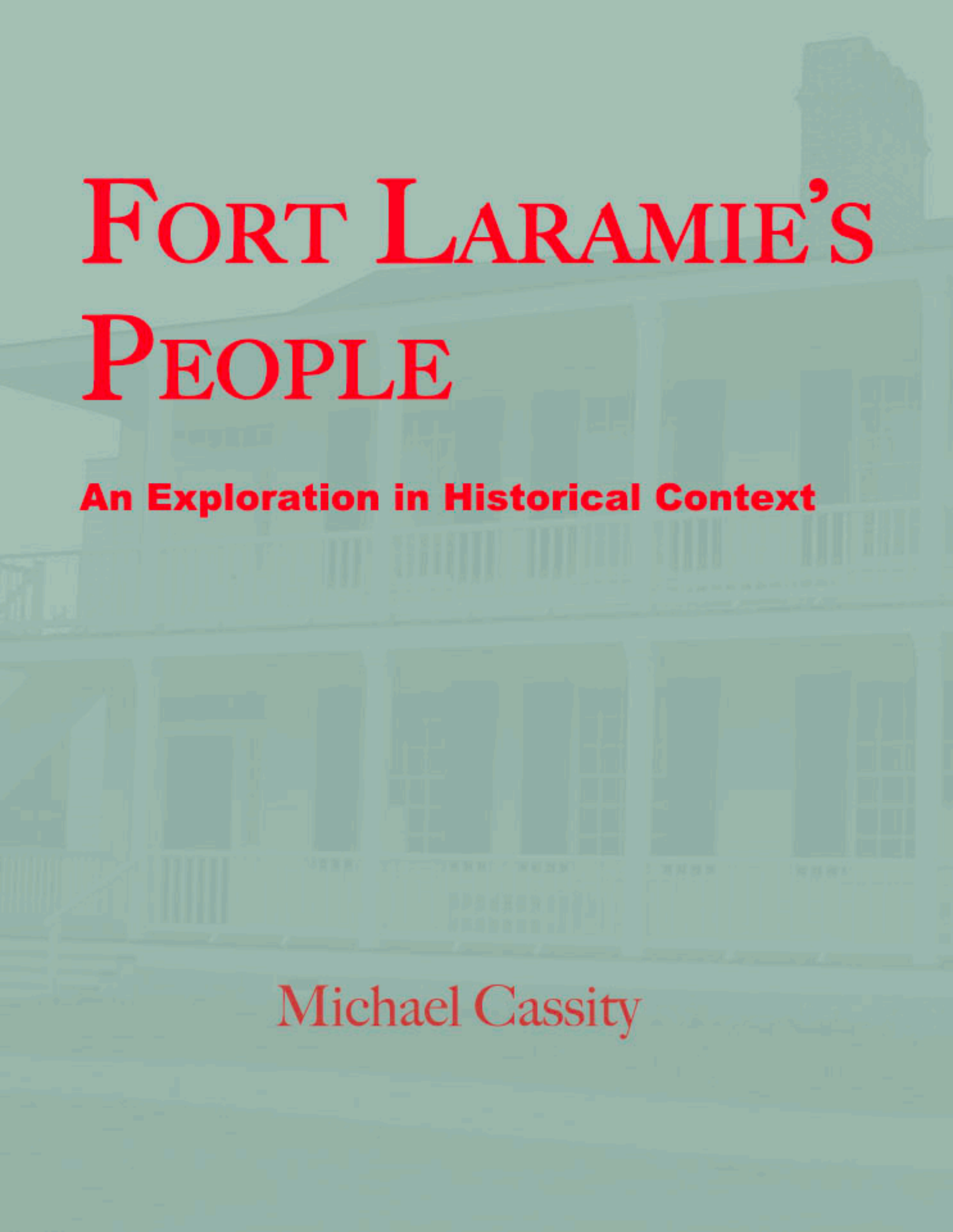

# Fort Laramie's People

## An Exploration in Historical Context

Michael Cassity

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On the cover: In the background is Old Bedlam, the oldest building in the state of Wyoming and a recognizable icon of Fort Laramie. The colors are those of Wyoming sagebrush and also the Indian Paintbrush.
Cover photograph: Old Bedlam, Fort Laramie National Historic Site
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# Preface

This book represents one step on a journey in which there have been many steps. It began decades ago when I was examining social change in a community in western Missouri, which is to suggest that the origins of this study had more to do with a set of historical questions, issues, and concepts than it did with a specific geographic location. That is because the problems I examined at the time were not just related to the people I studied in Missouri; they had to do with the transformation of American society in the nineteenth century. Since then, I have pursued those questions at a number of places on the map and at various points in time, with the conceptualization of the process of social change evolving in my own mind so that the developments at one place informed the patterns I examined in other places. That is one origin of this study, for this book is properly understood less as a chronicle of events in a particular place than as an exploration of larger questions that have some degree of relevance to broader American history.

The second origin, however, has to do with the specific community of Fort Laramie. Even in the 1970s when I was engaged in research in Missouri, Fort Laramie lodged itself in my mind and continued to attract my attention anytime I could shift my focus westward. In reading archived documents left by one Missouri family, I happened onto a letter written from the vicinity of Fort Laramie in 1851 during a traveler's journey west along the Oregon – California Trail. I no longer recall the particulars of the letter but I was intrigued by the fact that this person was actually able to mail a letter from some kind of an outpost in an area that I assumed was beyond the pale of organized society. I wondered: What was this place called Fort Laramie? And, given my curiosity about the relationship between communities and the evolving social structure elsewhere in the nation, I wondered about the process of social change there, about historical patterns in places like Fort Laramie. Would they be different? Since I had observed community transformation from some kind of a "frontier" settlement in western Missouri, I doubted that the history in Wyoming would be completely foreign to what I found in Missouri. The questions lingered, causing me to probe more and more, and the questions grew and actively became part of my own research agenda.

A decade later I found myself living in Wyoming and again Fort Laramie beckoned to me, and now it pulled at me with greater force because I could now walk the terrain and explore the written history of the fort and try to put the two together. The pivotal experience for me came when I taught a series of courses for the University of Wyoming that took students along the Oregon – California Trail in the state and those courses included spending more time with Fort Laramie history, both at the site and in the historical records. Too often, however, the historical accounts of the fort fell into one or more unsatisfying categories: military conquest, triumph of westward expansion, romance, and nostalgia. The written accounts, and much of the interpretation provided at the Fort Laramie National Historic Site as well, seemed to be far removed from the questions about social change I was trying to answer. So my "expeditions" with students, friends, colleagues, and others to Fort Laramie gave me an increasingly serious and sustained opportunity to start putting together my own understanding of the

history of the place and, for that matter, of the larger area that would become the state of Wyoming.

In 2000 – 2001 the journey reached an important point when I had an opportunity to prepare a study for the National Park Service examining the social history of Fort Laramie during the years of its military occupation. That project enabled me to spend more time working in and on the historic site and drawing upon the resources available in their library and archive. I was also fortunate in that the superintendent of Fort Laramie at the time, Jim Mack, sought a general social history of the military post, a history broader than what had been customary, and which was sometimes even resisted, there and at other military sites in the National Park Service. While his perspective did not exactly converge with my own inquiry, there was obvious overlap and I was able to prepare a report that met the needs of the NPS and that also enabled me to further my own research. That report, a copy of which is in the files at Fort Laramie National Historic Site, was an important step in the evolution of this book.

The decade and a half since I prepared that study has allowed me to push forward with my inquiry into Fort Laramie and into Wyoming history and to move my research and thinking beyond the limits of the report I prepared for the NPS in a number of ways. First, the concepts I have used have become more focused and my understanding of the context in which Fort Laramie operated has become, I think, more nuanced and complex; I have attempted to make explicit this conceptual framework at a number of points. In addition, my subsequent examination of homesteading and settlement—and the social processes associated with them—in Wyoming in the nineteenth century especially helped me revise and refine my understanding of broader forces at work, and my continued research on the Oregon – California Trail—and also the emigrant, commercial, military, and contours of that road—has often enabled me to sharply revise some of my earlier formulations. Since every study is defined ultimately by the questions it asks, these shifts in perspective and conceptualization have shaped the current work in critical ways. In fact, where my own previous work for the National Park Service was essentially a social history of Fort Laramie, guided by a set of concepts, the current study is an inquiry into those concepts and questions, using Fort Laramie as the focus. The difference may be subtle but it is important both in the expectations of the study and in the uses to which it is put.

One of the elements in the present exploration that marks it as different from my own previous work, and from that of some others, has been greater attention to Native American experiences at, and related to, Fort Laramie. It may seem odd, but a number of accounts, perhaps even most accounts, have endeavored to understand Fort Laramie in history with Native Americans somehow only in the shadowy background, as a force to be acted upon and not included as participants in the narrative; the consequence of that absence has been sometimes a one dimensional picture of the fort, or, to change metaphors, has been like hearing only one side of a complicated and difficult telephone call. With that limitation we do not hear what the other unseen and unheard people are saying and thinking, so we do not understand their role, nor without that context do we really understand the role of those to whom we are ostensibly paying attention. The absence of Native Americans has at times even given those remaining in the picture, in this case the military, a sense of inevitability and self-evident justification for any and all actions. In any case, the result has too often been a skewed view of history at Fort

Laramie. While I recognize that much more needs to be done in probing the history of Native Americans at and around Fort Laramie, I hope that I have been able to at least move beyond a one-dimensional perspective and also beyond the equally simplistic notion that all Native American people shared exactly the same culture, values, and aspirations. For that matter, I have tried also to move beyond the equally problematic assumption that all Euro-American people were monolithic in their needs, expectations, and attitudes. One of the important conclusions I think anyone must reach who approaches the past at Fort Laramie honestly and thoughtfully is that history there was complex, it was often subtle, and there was nothing inevitable about the lives lived there, about the courses taken, about the decisions made. The tensions between different alternatives, perspectives, and objectives abounded at Fort Laramie. The path has not been straight or easy for anyone and should not be taken as a given. It risks great peril to take for granted the path others have trod to the point where we are today. To explore that path respectfully and with a goal of greater understanding, however, is a task filled with great promise and potential.

Thus I reach the current point in the development of this study. This is not to suggest that the intellectual journey is complete, for the inquiry continues. There remain more steps on this journey, perhaps a great many more steps, and I hope that others will continue on the journey. This is an exploration and hopefully it helps us down a path of understanding, but it is not the final word. The journey goes on.

I will not speak for others, but I do know that the work of a researcher and writer is often a lonely task. But when a book is finally written you realize that you were never really alone. Along the path in the creation of this book, there have been a number of people who have provided me important assistance and advice, and even sometimes much needed solace and encouragement, and I wish to acknowledge the assistance and contributions of those people with gratitude. Since this study builds, in part, on my previous work for the National Park Service, I especially want to express appreciation to Jim Mack, the Superintendent of Fort Laramie National Historic Site at the time, who conceived and pressed for a study of social history at the fort instead of yet one more chronicle of the fort's military activities. In addition, Art Gómez, who was then History Program Manager of the National Park Service Intermountain Support Office in Santa Fe, proved invaluable in a range of matters administrative as well as historical; after that project was completed Art encouraged me to find a broader audience for my research on Fort Laramie and worked with me in that direction. Sandra Lowry on many occasions showed her command of the vast materials in the library at Fort Laramie National Historic Site and offered valuable suggestions of sources to examine. In fact, I had the warm cooperation of many people at Fort Laramie in my research and writing. Of course, I am grateful for this help and opportunity, but neither the National Park Service nor the professionals in its ranks bear any responsibility for the interpretation, and any weaknesses in it, that I have presented in these pages. That is mine alone. I also want to express appreciation to the professionals and staffs at the American Heritage Center, the Wyoming State Archives, the Newberry Library, and the other archival institutions where I have spent time exploring various treasures of source materials, often with one source leading to yet another in an ongoing adventure.

In addition, in the journey of the creation of this inquiry, I have many times felt the

presence intellectually and personally of a number of other people who have made the trip more productive and more pleasant. Both before and after the NPS project, I have had the good fortune of drawing upon the counsel of others in large matters of social history, in strictly Wyoming concerns, and in life itself. While they have provided different perspectives on the issues I have explored in these pages, and while they would often dissent from the analysis I have put forth, they generally are of a mind not to take history as a given, with the task of the historian reduced to filling in gaps in the existing framework of our knowledge; for that matter, they generally also are not inclined to take the circumstances of life in the present as a given either, not prone to regard either the past or present as something exempt from questions ultimately about the relationship of individuals in a democracy to the organization of their society. They are alive to the opportunities and meanings of human life and relationships.

I have never been very good at putting people into categories or pigeonholes based on their place or role in the economy or society and that also goes for the people around me. The students, teachers, administrators, friends, colleagues, and more who have been important to me do not constitute separate realms, and some people clearly fit into several of those labels, and I have been able to learn from them all. I am grateful for their contributions to the present study. I am even more grateful to them for the opportunity to confront issues together, for the opportunity to look each other in the eye and have an honest, heartfelt discussion, and for the opportunity to exchange insights, experiences, and perspectives. So I wish to thank these people for their contributions, their perspectives, their clarity, their questions, their support, their disagreement, their patience, and more: Joe Cassity, Mary Hopkins, David Kathka, Ann Noble, Anita Puig de Vall, Robert Righter, Sherry Smith, Alice Stanton, Lee Ann Swanekamp, David Thelen, Judy Wolf, and Robert Young. I will, however, separate out my immediate family for special mention since they have offered the same support and encouragement as others, but they have also found me, and my work, less easy to dodge than some others may have. Thank you, Rebecca, Russ, Jessica, and Connie. Thank you deeply and dearly. Again, I am pleased to share any credit with others for the work here, but I will claim for myself sole responsibility for any weaknesses and limitations.

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# Fort Laramie's People

# Introduction:

# Fort Laramie, Social Change, and History

The way we live our days is the way we live our lives. And, over the years, the way we live our lives with others is the way we make our history. Accordingly, history needs to address how people live their lives and how their experiences, their hopes and values, their habits of work and play, and their expectations of themselves and others change—or resist change—over time. For as the circumstances of people's lives transform, so too do the pressures also increase for change in the structure and habits of forging a living, making a home, and interacting with others. If we are to understand historical processes, which is to say, if we are to understand history at all, it is essential that we come to grips with the ways in which people in their daily lives have experienced, endured, struggled with, participated in, and contributed to the processes that have created the world we live in today.

During the nineteenth century the social fabric of the United States underwent a vast transformation and probably no region, no community, and no person escaped the impact of that transformation. One purpose of the present work is to inquire into the contours of that transformation, contours that were at once social, economic, political (in its broadest sense of the exercise of authority), organizational, and cultural. Another purpose is to understand more closely how this social transformation operated in real life, what it meant for people, and at least something of how they responded to the changes they experienced.

One way to explore the processes at work in this reshaping of American society in the nineteenth century is by examining those forces in the microcosm of a single community. This does not mean simply chronicling events at a single, isolated point for its own sake; it means, rather, focusing the historian's lens on national issues but doing so in a particular community. There are significant advantages to this approach. It is at the local level that the connections and tensions uniting and separating people can be discerned in matters of everyday life. At the local level we can see how people, real people, engage the issues of social change and life—not as abstractions or as exemplars of reductive "themes," but as meaningful participants in history. In the nation we can talk about economic and politically prominent individuals and about the hierarchy of powerful institutions and organizations that have acquired legitimacy within the dominant social structure, but not the people themselves; at the local level we can often see the dynamics and contours of life more directly, even in the lives of those who somehow live outside the prevailing, established framework of society. While the sources available at the national level may sometimes be abundant and accessible, that does not mean they are necessarily more informative than sources at the local level; all sources have built-in biases and strengths and need to be evaluated carefully. The

limitations of local history sources are familiar, but their potential is too often neglected; at the local level a sensitivity to the specifics and contexts of local situations can allow even the most conventional sources to reveal substantially more than, or other than, what their creators intended. Putting the specifics and the context together means that at the local level the whole can be more than the sum of its parts. While it is true that at the local level we can explore mainly local lives and institutions and events, we can also still ask large, very large, questions. This brief exploration hopes to ask some large questions of a small place.

*i. A Place on the Map and a Place in History*

The community I have chosen as a focus for this exploration is one that emerged near where the Laramie River joined the North Platte River in what would eventually become Wyoming. Fort Laramie was the earliest enduring community that formed a part of the ascendant society in the area, a social order that took the place of the native cultures that had hunted and dwelled in the area. The community life that took shape at Fort Laramie before it became an army post was hardly ideal. The people at the fort in the years of the fur trade knew hardship and privation, lived outside the channels of commerce and technology emerging in the Northeast, and occupied a place where the institutions of economy were undeveloped and unpromising in comparison with the more settled areas of the nation. Early Fort Laramie, by whatever name it was known, was also, however, a community where different cultures mingled with and accepted each other; a community where bonds were personal and where conflict was mitigated by individual relationships and ties of kinship; a community where power and authority were local in structure and exercise, broadly dispersed in the population and decentralized in daily practice; a community where some semblance of equality obtained; and a community where the process and product of cooperation counted for more than the strife of competition.

Over the next four decades this structure of life would erode and transform into one more recognizable as a modern American community, a society in which relationships became increasingly impersonal and more oriented to commerce and production, in which standards of behavior and discipline bore the marks of organized industrial society, in which the activities at this location were regulated more by a centralized and national hierarchical framework than by local needs and aspirations, and in which the peoples who lived at the fort became increasingly separated from each other by virtue of their skin color and language, by their economic position and social rank, by their genders, and by their cultures. By the end of the period under discussion not only were firm lines drawn between ranks and cultures but there was also an increasingly clear line between what was acceptable and what was not, what was supportive of the new order and what was subversive of it. By the end of the 1880s, the foundations of modern American society were apparent at Fort Laramie. A transformation had taken place but not without struggle and it never did reach a conclusive end. Put in these terms, what was at issue in that transformation was not only the changing contours of life at this particular point, although there was that for sure, but

the evolving structure of American society. This involved a struggle not just for power and control, but a struggle between alternate visions of American society.

Given this conceptual focus, it may seem odd to select a military post as a focus for the inquiry. While the choice of Fort Laramie is partly to demonstrate that social forces operate everywhere, even in places where there seems to be little latitude for behavior, expression, and objective beyond that which comes down from established institutional authority and higher command, it is also hoped that this will help encourage some branches of the study of military history to pursue a broader track than they have often followed, especially in the nineteenth-century American West. Conventionally, the historical accounts of army posts in the West, including those administered by the National Park Service (NPS), have followed a predictable path, detailing campaigns and battles, arguing the merits of particular commanders and soldiers, doing so generally within a narrowly defined framework of discipline, tactics, and battlefield success. Sometimes these studies offer valuable findings and sometimes they amount to little more than telling war stories, refighting old battles, and seeking heroes. A 2011 study prepared by a team of historians from the Organization of American Historians for the National Park Service, building on similar efforts in the 1990s, endeavored to help the NPS align itself more closely with professional historical practice and focus and especially pointed the NPS in the direction of greater inclusiveness of different parts of society in historical interpretations at sites, embracing alternative interpretations and understandings of the past, addressing conflict and controversy both in and about the past, and shifting from a focus on content knowledge to the skills of historical thinking.[1] As for academic historians, in 1998, historian Sherry Smith made a case, a very good case, for Western historians to pursue issues beyond the narrow confines associated with much of military history. In addition, and importantly, she also took to task those historians associated with what is sometimes called "the new western history" for neglecting the military in their history of the West.[2] It is difficult to argue with her analysis, and those who prefer narrower paths appear generally to have sidestepped her critique instead of addressing directly the issues she raised. To be clear: My own starting point is neither the "new western history" or the "old-fashioned" military history. Rather, I simply use concepts and questions appropriate in exploring social history in the nation

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[1] OAH History in the NPS Study Team: Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Chair; Marla R. Miller, Gary B. Nash, and David Thelen, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington, Indiana: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 27-28; a list of twelve basic approaches to historical research and interpretation can be found on pages 27-29, but the entire study makes for rewarding reading by those in and out of the NPS. In addition, one should consult the account by retired NPS historian Richard Sellars on the struggle to incorporate a broader historical perspective into the interpretation at Fort Laramie National Historic Site: Sellars, "War And Consequences: The American Indian Movement Vs. The National Park Service At Fort Laramie," *National Parks Traveler*, April 25, 2011 and April 26, 2011. These articles are available on the World Wide Web at http://www.nationalparkstraveler.com/2011/04/war-and-consequences-american-indian-movement-vs-national-park-service-fort-laramie8003 and http://nationalparkstraveler.com/2011/04/war-and-consequences-american-indian-movement-vs-national-park-service-fort-laramie-part-ii7992.

[2] Sherry L. Smith, "Lost Soldiers: Re-searching the Army in the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly*, XXIX (Summer 1998), 149-163.

and its communities. These concepts and questions are not limited to any region.[3]

With this focus and with these questions to explore, the subject of this study is not just the soldiers and officers who carried arms in the fulfillment of their military mission. It is the broader community of peoples at Fort Laramie. There were, after all, people at Fort Laramie other than those in uniform, people whose lives were equally shaped by, and who also helped shape, social change on the banks of the Laramie River. There were the Native Americans who lived there, who visited there, who traded there, who worked there, and who were in one way or another constantly in either the foreground or the shadow of what happened at Fort Laramie. There were also the trappers, the emigrants, the teamsters, the servants, the traders, the laundresses, the cowboys and herders, and countless others who regarded Fort Laramie as their home or workplace or both. And then there were the women, men, and children in the families of the officers and soldiers and in the families of the civilians and others at the fort. There were, finally, even the people who were in some sense or another outside the framework of accepted society, people outside the very notion of legitimate members of organized society, people regarded with contempt or derision by authorities, people sometimes considered to be fugitives (and even enemies), people labeled outcasts or worse. It is important to consider all these peoples, as best we can, to understand the community at Fort Laramie. This is partly a matter of including those who did not thoroughly share in the benefits of the new social order in addition to those who did. This is partly a matter of giving appropriate attention or credit or respect to people, cultures, and behaviors beyond the roles and expectations actively pressed onto them. But this is primarily a matter of attempting to understand the whole community, for understanding the relationship between those in power and those out of power ultimately illuminates both populations better.

*ii. Conceptual Considerations*

To comprehend events, however private or public, as something more than discrete and even isolated happenings of importance to a particular individual or small group of people, and to understand them as part of a larger history of society requires using precise tools and drawing upon conceptual frameworks that can illuminate otherwise obscure events and patterns. In the process it is also possible, however, for methodological jargon to get in the way of historical narrative and for the account to become more about terminology and historians than about history. In the following pages I generally avoid cluttering the narrative with constant references to these concepts. They are there nonetheless. Moreover, I should add, concepts are always there, even in the pages of those who are not aware they are using them, even in the

[3] See, for example, my own inquiries: "Modernization and Social Crisis: The Knights of Labor and a Midwest Community, 1885-1886," *Journal of American History*, 66 (June 1979), 41-61; and *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). In addition, my essay, "History and the Public Purpose," *Journal of American History*, 81 (December 1994), 969-976, is also pertinent here.

narratives of those who simply seek to record history "as it really was." Sometimes historians use larger conceptual frameworks both in their selection of facts to record and in the organization of their narratives without being aware of the models or theories guiding their choices. When they do so, they are essentially captive of others' ideas. When this happens the results can be unfortunate, reflecting not just the absence of critical thinking but mocking the value of history itself. The point is not that everyone needs to accept the specific concepts used in this inquiry; there are, of course, other concepts that are also illuminating and that may prove more valuable. While one would hope that the questions raised with these ideas will be examined by others in Fort Laramie and in other places, the larger point is to urge historians to use explicit concepts more and to use them deliberately and mindfully. If these particular concepts ultimately prove insufficient, hopefully other researchers will find alternative conceptual frameworks to help us understand the issues at hand wherever they may be explored.

It is useful at this point to identify a few of the more important concepts that underlie some of the formulations in the following pages, though often without even being mentioned. A number of ideas will be contemplated, sometimes just in the asking of questions of the evidence, but four large concepts in particular deserve note:

- Historical Context
- Modernization
- Hegemony
- Agency

Without pretending to offer a complete or definitive discussion of these complex ideas, I can give a general idea as to their meaning and importance here.[4]

*Historical Context*. By historical context I simply mean placing specific events and developments into a pattern, or even into a larger framework of historical patterns, so that their significance can be better understood. This involves understanding what came before and what came after a particular historical moment, development, or event and also understanding what was happening elsewhere under similar circumstances, either at the same time or at a comparable point in social history. By seeking out historical context, even apparently minor events and developments in history can take on larger meaning.[5] At a minimum, for historical context to have value, the idea must be something more precise and more thoughtful than vague notions of "progress" or

[4] To identify a small handful of concepts as especially important runs several risks, including separating some out for attention while not including others with a possible implication that those not included are not worth exploring. That is not the intention at all. A brief discussion like this is not intended to be exhaustive, but merely an introduction to those not familiar with specific concepts and, for those familiar with them, a guide to the way that they are used in this study. Finally, each of these concepts is a difficult idea often with a complex history and historians of the U.S. West (and beyond) are well advised to explore the literature of their European colleagues in particular to find closely considered and alternative models of analysis. For an excellent introduction to a vocabulary of historical thinking, see especially Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, revised 1983).

[5] I have discussed the problem of historical context more fully elsewhere. See Michael Cassity, "The Problem of Historical Context," at http://www.michaelcassity.com/the-problem-of-historical-context.html.

"western expansion" or other terms (like Manifest Destiny, to take a common example) that implicitly identify the emerging social system as providential, inevitable, or otherwise ordained. And historical context is more than a set of categories or a list of themes with which actual history can be vaguely associated, and it is much more than a historiographical game. Fundamentally, historical context is the way historians discern meaning in the past.

As we seek to understand and learn from the past, it is not the isolated facts themselves that represent the ultimate goal of our research, for in and of themselves the individual facts are devoid of meaning. Instead, we must seek out the patterns that the multitude of facts together comprise. Those patterns may be complex, they may be subtle, and they may also be subject to debate, but identifying the patterns is a fundamental responsibility that requires ongoing critical thinking, examination, and re-examination to assure that the context is both accurate and meaningful. At a minimum, the idea of historical context helps us make sense of the sometimes scattered and fragmentary evidence revealing human lives and human behaviors in a process of social change.

*Modernization*. Modernization is much more than simply becoming "modern" in any kind of technological or utilitarian sense—as with modern plumbing and faster communication and more sophisticated medicine. It is a concept that, in the hands of social scientists and some historians, describes the broad pattern of structural change in economy, government, and society to include such aspects as the:

- Impersonalization of social and economic relationships
- Erosion of traditional or parochial loyalties and identities
- Rise of more cosmopolitan identities
- Specialization and synchronization of economic activities
- Growth of a national social structure that embodies a transfer of social, political, and economic authority from local to central levels which can coordinate massive activities in a presumably rational manner.

A few historians—a *very* few—use this concept carefully, thoughtfully, and approvingly as an organizing principle for economic and social development, especially in regards to industrialization and popular responses to the changes industrial market society brought to bear in the creation of the modern American political, social, and economic structure. Often, and indeed in its genesis as a framework to be applied to other parts of the world as a model for economic development, it was even called Westernization, an application that revealed some of its interior cultural and economic biases. A great many more historians rely on the modernization framework in a less conscious and overt way, assuming that its components amount to self-evident and inexorable "progress" or a natural course of institutional development and expansion. Modernization is thus used sometimes deliberately and carefully and at other times unknowingly and uncritically as an organizing framework for understanding American history. Whether employed reflexively as an article of faith or in the most skilful and sensitive treatments, however, there are problems, serious problems, with this idea.

That this pattern of modernization has taken place in American society is undeniable. How much modernization reflected popular needs and responses, however,

is a different matter. Substantial evidence suggests that widespread resistance to the forces of modernization accompanied it, and, in fact, much of the current tension and discontent in our society may be traced to the pressures associated with modernization and its narrowing of life to its economic dimension, its transfer of authority, both public and private, to centralized institutions, and its fragmentation of society into separate components where people become connected more to people across the state, nation, and globe according to their shared economic roles than to their neighbors with whom they previously shared cultures, institutions, and intimate relationships. And when historians view modernization as an automatic, technically "rational," and inevitable response to social change (as some indeed do), they effectively narrow the range of choices available to us today and obscure traditions and values to which citizens can appeal as they confront fundamental issues in their lives concerning the organization and purpose of the society in which they live.

*Hegemony*. Setting aside strict, arcane theoretical considerations, the idea of hegemony can provide a way to explore the control that one social group has over another (as in, for example, master – slave relationships, class relations, gender roles, and more) and also the limits of that control. For one group to dominate another generally requires more than raw power; it requires, in some measure, the acceptance of the terms of domination by the oppressed. The other side of this is that hegemony is seldom complete; there may be physical, political, or economic domination, but there will still be a space where there is competition for loyalty and values, and that space may be an ongoing, daily, cultural battleground. Thus it is important always to identify the cultural limits of hegemony as well as the reach of it and this involves examining the attitudes and behaviors of the peoples in the subordinate position, and the examination of what once was called "the inarticulate" (those who were presumed to be silent because they did not leave the letters, diaries, and record books found in the archives) requires sensitivity to their values, institutions, disciplines, assumptions, and priorities as manifest in subtle forms of expression.[6] On one level the analysis of hegemony helps us avoid turning history into a stark contest of black and white issues and a set of rigid categorical definitions of role in society; on another level it helps us understand in a more nuanced way the process of domination and the resistance to that domination. The subtle dynamics of hegemony also remind us of the dangers of assuming, and not seeking limits to, a broad popular consensus on fundamentals of policies and priorities

*Agency*. Agency in history is an idea that, like so many other useful concepts, has immense value, provides important insight, and separates much good history from much mediocre history, but since it has been applied casually to everything and anything, it sometimes winds up meaningless. Historian Sherry Smith referred to this, perhaps correctly and in acknowledgment of the term's ultimate devaluation as a

[6] One of the more nuanced historical examinations using the notion of hegemony is that of a few decades ago concerning American slavery, especially in the works of Herbert Gutman and Eugene Genovese. See also my article on the use of hegemony in master slave relations and the ability of an oppressed group to carve out a "living space" of its own, free of the restrictions of cultural hegemony: "Slaves, Families, and 'Living Space': A Note on Evidence and Historical Context," *Southern Studies*, XVII (Summer 1978), 409-415. Also, see T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review*, 90 (June 1985), 567-593.

heuristic device, as "trendy."[7] But agency need not be discarded, for it still holds promise. What makes the difference in whether the concept of agency is useful or not is the context within which agency appears. With that in mind, we can return agency to its rich potential.

The English historian E. P. Thompson suggested ways in which agency can be helpful in the analysis of the past. In his own work Thompson often confronted understandings of the past shaped by historians using social science concepts like capitalism, class, and ideology as static and categorical entities, and not as historical processes involving relationships and identities as they evolved over time. Those studies, and the models they employed, reduced human beings to nameless, faceless, and mindless creatures within specific or general intellectual formulations; people, no matter how messy their own lives, had to fit into neat and tidy and arbitrary categories formulated by social scientists (or even by the census bureau); the categories did not emerge from real life experiences. The problem was that people, viewed through that lens, were not making history, but were captives of it. Thus Thompson and other European historians sought to look at peoples over time, to listen to them, and to let them define and shape, through their behaviors in context, historical patterns of identity. What Thompson wanted to understand was people and their relationship with the world around them, people "who act, experience, think, and act again."[8] There is nothing inevitable about history. People make choices and act on those choices, and often the choices they make do not conform to the standards of the dominant social structure—consciously.

This is not to say that the people who resisted or rebelled against the dominant pattern were always able to mobilize an articulate, organized, and effective movement. Sometimes they did. The Native Americans who sought to hold onto traditional patterns of economy and culture and to territory promised them protested, resisted, and went to war and defeated the United States Army on the battlefield. Even they, however, were outflanked by legal, cultural, and economic maneuvers that left them, in one way or another, subjugated politically if not culturally. Others were not as effective in their resistance as the Indians, but they also declined to yield in the essentials of life. In moments of quiet despair or public protest, at times of private rebellion or overt social disturbance, people expressed their displeasure with the prevailing social arrangements and the course of social change. It is appropriate that we recognize their actions and accord them the significance they deserve, for their actions and thoughts were not only personal; they were also political—in the broad sense of the distribution and exercise of power and authority. These people were active participants in the making of their own lives, and they actively attempted to make their history. Agency can take a multitude of forms; it depends on context to give those actions meaning.[9] Because Fort Laramie's

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[7] Smith, "Lost Soldiers: Re-searching the Army in the American West," 155.

[8] See especially, E. P. Thompson, "Agency and Choice," *The New Reasoner*, No. 5 (1958), 89-106; interview with E. P. Thompson in Henry Abelove, Betsy Blackmar, Peter Dimock, and Jonathan Schneer [MARHO: The Radical Historians Organization], eds., *Visions of History* (New York, 1983), 21; Thompson, "Socialist Humanism," *The New Reasoner*, No. 1 (1957), 113; David Montgomery, "History as Human Agency," *Monthly Review*, 33 (October 1981), 42-48.

[9] The eminent psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson noted the full range of human activity in which identity and resistance can be expressed: "You can actively flee, then, and you can

people sometimes made compromises, because they were sometimes ambivalent, and because they sometimes believed promises made them and acted accordingly does not mean that they thereby passively or enthusiastically accepted the course of social change thrust upon them.

Other concepts could be added to this list. *Alienation* is one, especially if taken not in a narrow, economic, industrial application, and more as a metaphor of the separation of people from their institutions and leaders. *Class* is another, and certainly it appears at a number of points in this discussion, but I think those usages are sufficiently clear to render elaboration here unnecessary. It is tempting to launch a discourse on the *Gemeinschaft / Gesellschaft* dichotomy, and that would be appropriate given the transformation at the heart of this exploration, but the theoretical underpinnings of that discussion could easily eclipse all else in these pages. I will simply encourage those unfamiliar with these ideas, or with their application to social change in the American West, to embark upon what will surely be a fascinating journey in the literature of sociology, cultural anthropology, and comparative social history.

And there are obvious and familiar concepts that have not been included here. Absent from this list is the notion of "frontier." It is missing not because it is not worthy but because it has been trivialized, misused, and reduced and made sometimes worse than useless—downright subversive of serious inquiry. Even so, I use the word on occasion in these pages, hopefully in each instance with care and precision as to its meaning and its limits in that usage. Likewise the term "civilization" is intended to be used here in ways that shed light on both the issues at hand and the concept itself. Some of the speakers quoted in these pages refer to "civilization" as if it were a self-evident, objectively verifiable social construct when what they have in mind is celebrating and proselytizing their own particular concept of social order. Their standard of judgment from that perspective is clear and their use of the term usually tells us more about them than it does about the superiority or validity of their social preferences. Less frequently, "civilization" may be used in a broad, almost anthropological sense, as in a lost or remote civilization, or a social order that is different but that is also valid and legitimate, and, at any rate, as one of a variety of legitimate patterns of living. In addition, it is prudent to remember that, in attaching the name "civilization" to the specific set of relationships evident in the rising industrial market society of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the term can carry subtler meanings not altogether complimentary of that social order. Critics ranging from Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* to Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* have, with differing valuations and interpretations, pointed to the tension inherent between the individual and society, and especially between the individual and modern production-oriented "civilization." The physical, political, philosophical, and emotional costs of that tension for the individual can be enormous. Again, used carefully and with appropriate consideration to the conflicting (and conflicted) implications of the concept, "civilization" retains value but figures here more as a subject of exploration than as a tool of analysis.

This conceptual approach, which seeks to understand the larger contours of the

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actively stay put; you even can (as Louise Pinsky said about some youths in the European underground) 'actively hide.'" Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight* (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1964), 86.

transformation in the way people lived at Fort Laramie, leads not so much to a collection of multiple biographies or histories of individual lives and families; rather it generates a broad outline of the patterns of life as those patterns changed over time. As we continue to learn more about the individuals who lived at the fort, and about those whose lives intersected in some other way with the community at Fort Laramie, be they military or civilian, rich or poor, male or female, white or non-white, and as we inquire of their own individual stories, their experiences, hopes, satisfactions, and frustrations and the circumstances under which they lived and died, labored and loved, fought and negotiated, we will hopefully both refine our understanding of life at the fort and hone the concepts we draw upon to deepen that understanding.

In this way, this study is partly about Fort Laramie but it is also about life in Wyoming, and even life in America, in the nineteenth century and how that life changed over a period of just slightly more than fifty years. It is also about the meaning of those changes both for the people whose lives were touched by Fort Laramie and for our own lives too, for we have inherited a past that was at least in part shaped by forces evident at Fort Laramie. Ultimately, when we explore the historical context of social change at this point on the map, even from the perspective of the twenty-first century, and when we ponder the direction of social change, we are all Fort Laramie's people.

# PART ONE

# A Community Apart from Civilization

In the early nineteenth century, on the banks of the Laramie River, near where that river emptied into the North Platte, a community emerged that some people elsewhere characterized as marked by wilderness, as "uncivilized," a life that was, in one way or another, beyond the pale of eastern, organized, civilized, society. Importantly, it was a community beyond "civilization" in two ways. There was, first, the physical distance of this community from "the states," a substantial distance whether measured in miles or days and weeks, and secondly, the social and cultural distance from "civilization" the life on the banks of the North Platte represented—a distance that was just as substantial. Moreover, the pejorative of "uncivilized" revealed as much about the observers as it did about the observed. Of course, this was not in fact a wilderness. There were people enough in the area already and they had their own histories, cultures, values, economies, and social arrangements, even if they varied dramatically from the formulations of the expanding nation that increasingly collided with them. Those people in and around Fort Laramie lived a life marked by a sense of community and also an acceptance of differences, and they came there from the established states of the nation often forsaking the trappings of "civilization" in favor of a freer life on the plains. Fort Laramie as a fur trading post was anything but the vanguard of the advancing "civilization" of the East. If anything, just as it was both physically and culturally beyond the restraints of "civilized" society, it also pointed up the limitations of that expanding civilization. One of those limits was the tendency to summary dismissal of alternate social institutions and practices.

Even as this community flourished, however, it also began to change. After a decade and a half of service and life as a fur trading post, and part of that time as a replenishing site for emigrants on the road west, Fort Laramie in 1849 became an official military installation and embarked on a new mission with a new population, a new regimen, and a new meaning for all those who came into contact with it. The transfer of property to the United States government represented a change in ownership and a change in function, but there was more. While this change also signaled the gradual emergence of a different culture and social order, the deeper changes were anything but automatic and would take years—decades—to become complete—that is, if anything in history is ever really complete or finished.

The contours, and the meanings, of this change are clear. After becoming a military post, Fort Laramie would undergo a physical transformation as new buildings replaced old, but more fundamentally the way of life of the fur trade and its practices, values, and routines began to give way to new priorities, values, and institutions. As the relationships at the fort became increasingly structured, as those relationships adhered more and more to the rules and restraints of the established order far away, and as this outpost sought to transform the peoples of the mountains and plains to fit the model of

society elsewhere, the changes held powerful implications for the local population. Where the fort had previously been characterized by its conformity to the Indian and fur trade life that it served, which is to say to life beyond and outside the parameters of organized society in the East, it was increasingly recognized as an outpost of a different social order.

At this particular place near the junction of the Laramie and North Platte Rivers, one step at a time, the priorities of the new order challenged the previous system at every point so that, by the end of the Civil War, life at Fort Laramie, at least in its established, dominant forms, had moved a world away from what it had once been. Where once Fort Laramie had been an institution reflecting local needs, values, and priorities, it was becoming more and more an outpost of a remote social order with ever greater designs of transforming this area. But the forces resisting that transformation would not be so easily silenced. Sometimes the conflict between the two orders even erupted into war.

# Chapter 1

# A Legacy of Community

Before Fort Laramie became a military post owned and operated by the United States government, it already had a life that began in 1834 as a private fur trading post. Known as Fort William and then Fort John, and casually as Fort Laramie, prior to its takeover by the United States Army, the post held far more in common with the undisciplined life of the natives and mountaineers who frequented it than with the society of the East. Visitors to the outpost in the 1830s and 1840s repeatedly registered their perception of a local society that differed dramatically from that which they left behind. In these accounts, the hallmarks of the society at the fort were its remoteness, its polyglot composition, and its lack of what many called "civilization." Indeed, these qualities reinforced each other. Countless travelers noted the multi-cultural society that existed at Fort Laramie on a basis of general equality and mutual tolerance.

The original fort had been constructed in 1834 specifically for the fur trade by the trapper / trader William Sublette, business partner with Robert Campbell. Envisioned as a commercial venture, this trading post was supposed to offset other trading companies and capture the fur trade of the North Platte River. While Sublette and Campbell certainly possessed an entrepreneurial spirit, and while they may have fit William Goetzmann's stereotypical "expectant capitalist" model to a T, and while these two, like other famous mountainmen / businessmen Goetzmann portrayed, may have regarded "the wilderness as simply a stage in the civilizing process—a place to be settled and developed in the future," the operation on the banks of the Laramie River showed little inclination for settlement, development, or for the other qualities of the advance guard of civilization that the fur trade and mountain men were supposed to represent.[1] Just as there was a disconnect between the values and priorities of the leaders of the enterprise and those employed and served by it, there was also a disconnect between the vision those leaders beheld and the reality that obtained on the ground. This was the way it was in the years of the fur trade and this was the way it would be in the future too.

Initially serving as a post on the road following the Platte by which traders carried their goods to the fur trade rendezvous, and then carried their furs back to St. Louis, the post became also, in the words of the early (1938) history of the fort by LeRoy Hafen and Francis Marion Young, "a gathering place" for trappers.[2] It also became a gathering place for Native Americans. And, from all appearances, the gatherings proved mutually satisfactory and even convivial. Alfred Jacob Miller, the artist who traveled in a party with English adventurer Sir William Drummond Stewart, visited the fort in 1837 and

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[1] William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York, 1966), 107-08.

[2] LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; originally published, Glendale, California, A. H. Clark, 1938), 51.

reported the scene there, noting the congregation of Indians and traders that filled the wooden fort's interior:

> They gather here from all quarters; from the Gila at the south, the Red river at the north, and the Columbia river west, each has its quota and representatives, Sioux, Bannocks, Crows, Snakes, Pend-Oreilles, Nez Perces, Cheyennes and Delawares, all except the Black Feet who are "bêtes noirs" and considered "de trop." As a contrast there are Canadian trappers, free and otherwise, half-breeds, Kentuckians, Missourians and Down-Easters. A saturnalia is held the first day and some excesses committed. But after this trading goes briskly forward.[3]

Of course, this particular gathering was uncommon with its attraction of such far-flung peoples as well as its celebratory atmosphere. Everyday would not be a saturnalia at Fort William, or, as it started to become known by virtue of its location, Fort Laramie. For that matter, William Sublette, after whom the fort was named, and Robert Campbell had sold their fort to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick & Company in 1835, beginning a series of convoluted transactions and transfers and owner name changes that has boggled the efforts of most modern observers to trace.[4] Those transfers also may have demonstrated that deeds and contracts governing ownership in far away places did not necessarily translate to changes in practices, in habits, and in culture at this point on the map.

Exceptional the 1837 gathering and its "excesses" may have been, but the fundamentals remained a constant. This post was populated by a diverse range of peoples, and that diversity placed the "expectant capitalists" in the slim minority. And the Anglos in the group seemed to adapt themselves to the ways of their neighbors instead of the other way around. Even the most traditional accounts of the early years of the fort notice this. Hafen and Young quote another European visitor to the post, the German physician F. A. Wislizenus in 1839, "on a tour of recreation and adventure to the mountains," who described the first white people his party encountered near the fort: "They were French Canadians . . . clad half Indian fashion in leather, and scurrying along on their ponies, bedight with bells and gay ribbons, as if intent to storm some battery."[5] This was a new world for the German, one that he did not quite expect.

That was 1839. The next year marked a turning point in the organized fur trade as the last rendezvous was conducted. While this change obviously signaled that the fur trade itself was in decline, at least so far as organized beaver trapping was concerned, it probably also meant that more trade would take place at the post instead of at the

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[3] Miller is quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West*, 46, 49.

[4] The outstanding exception, and the account to which others are referred who seek to follow the ownership of Fort Laramie in the fur trade years, is Barton Barbour, "Special History Study: The Fur Trade at Fort Laramie National Historic Site" (Santa Fe, New Mexico: National Park Service, 2000), 26-47. A copy of this unpublished report is available in the files of Fort Laramie National Historic Site. In addition, Barbour's study presents a number of strengths and his discussion of the trade in alcohol at the fort, and beyond, in the fur trade years before it became a military post is particularly important.

[5] Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West*, 59.

rendezvous. And certainly Fort Laramie continued to do business of all kinds, and the Indians who came to the fort would trade their buffalo robes. But its polyglot culture remained, and perhaps it broadened. In 1841 the wooden stockade fort from the original construction was replaced with a new building, this one named Fort John, although Fort Laramie was the name that would stick. What was distinctive about the new fort was less its name than its appearance and materials. The new fort was made of adobe bricks. John C. Frémont in 1842 visited the fort on his exploration of the route along the Platte River, and described it as "a quadrangular structure, built of clay, after the fashion of the Mexicans, who are generally employed in building them."[6] For that matter, the adobe Fort John, or Fort Laramie, was neighbored about a mile away by another adobe establishment, Fort Platte. Given the construction and the language and the ethnicities present, the early fort known as Fort Laramie resembled not only other adobe structures to the south but even carried something of the aura of Santa Fe.

Visitor after visitor to the early fort remarked on the diversity of the population at Fort Laramie. Francis Parkman, one of the most famous and careful observers, although always filtering his perceptions through the tinted lenses of his Boston Brahmin background, encountered the peoples of Fort Laramie even before he reached the fort itself in 1846. These people included "swarthy, ignoble Mexicans," the mountaineers themselves, whom he termed "a mongrel race" (which he qualified to suggest in whom "yet the French blood seemed to predominate"), Indian "half-breeds," and perhaps others. "One and all," Parkman recorded, "they seemed to aim at assimilating themselves to their savage associates."[7] When he arrived at the fort, he found more of the same variety of people and remarked that the view was "less like a reality than like some fanciful picture of the olden time . . . so different was the scene from any which this tamer side of the world can present." Inside the fort the relationships were, fittingly, undisciplined and ethnically mixed:

> Tall Indians, enveloped in their white buffalo robes, were striding across the area or reclining at full length on the low roofs of the buildings which inclosed it. Numerous squaws, gayly bedizened, sat grouped in front of the apartments they occupied; their mongrel off-spring, restless and vociferous, rambled in every direction through the fort; and the trappers, traders, and *engagés* of the establishment were busy at their labor or their amusements.[8]

He described the rooms of the adobe post which "served chiefly for the accommodation of the men employed at the fort, or of the equally numerous squaws whom they were allowed to maintain in it."[9]

Parkman, of course, was not alone in his observation. The year before, 1845, Captain Philip St. George Cooke visited Fort Laramie and reported on the cultural and

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[6] John C. Frémont, *A Report on the Exploration of the Country Lying Between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains, on the Line of the Kansas and Great Platte Rivers* (Washington, By Order of U.S. Senate, 1843), 36.
[7] Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: Books, Inc., n.d.), 58.
[8] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 79-80.
[9] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 81.

ethnic mix of peoples: “The fort swarmed with women and children, whose language—like their complexions—is varied and mixed,—Indian, French, English, and Spanish; they live nearly exclusively on dried buffalo meat, for which the hunters go at least fifty miles; but they have domestic cattle.”[10] J. Quinn Thornton extended this general view about the same time that Parkman visited the fort when he delivered two bundles of religious tracts to the residents and then described the group gathered there: “Most of the white men about the place had taken Indian wives, and there were many little half-breeds about the doors. A worth less white woman, who had been in one of the forward companies, had stopped at this place.”[11] It was unclear whether the white woman was “worthless” because she remained at such a depraved place, and was thereby guilty by association, or if she actively contributed her own qualities to the cultural mix of the fort.

Ethnically and culturally mixed, the peoples at the fort seemed to some observers to lack not only discipline but also any reverence, any spirituality, at least in forms recognizable to their conventional sensibilities. How much good the tracts that Quinn Thornton left there may have done is subject to speculation if not outright doubt. If they were well used, they were more productive than the efforts of Joseph Williams a few years earlier: “I tried to preach twice to these people, but with little effect. Some of them said they had not heard preaching for twelve years.”[12]

This free, untrammeled spirit thrived in its isolation. As of yet, the numbers of emigrants remained small. By 1846, the year that Parkman visited, the total emigration to California and Oregon since 1841 was just over eight thousand, a number which meant very small numbers annually; by the time the military took over the fort in 1849, the cumulative pre-gold rush total of emigrants still was under nineteen thousand to the West Coast and Utah, and the maximum number in any one year was around 6,650 in 1847.[13]

The residents more or less permanently installed at the fort appeared quite content with their lot, not thinking of returning to the states. In 1846 Edwin Bryant noted that James Bordeaux, who managed the trading post at Fort Laramie at the time, left the settlements of the States fifteen years earlier and had never returned. “Most of the others with whom I dined,” Bryant continued, “had been absent from their homes and civilization several years.”[14] With permanent, long-term residence, with minimal contact from the forces that were at work in the construction of the burgeoning society in the East, without a rotation in and out of the local settlement, the community in and around Fort Laramie developed its own characteristics, its own nature, and that was a nature that visitors identified, from their own privileged positions, as uncivilized.

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[10] P. St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army: or Romance of Military Life* (Philadelphia, Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857), 335.

[11] J. Quinn Thornton, *Oregon and California in 1848* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1849), volume I, page 115. This volume is located in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

[12] Joseph Williams, *To the Rockies and Oregon*, journal quoted at length in typescript, “Visitor Views of Fort Laramie,” Fort Laramie Vertical File, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

[13] John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 119.

[14] Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1858) 112. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

Of the Native American population in the area, the information is imprecise but nonetheless clear. Most accounts agree that a population of Sioux moved to the vicinity of Fort Laramie to trade at the post in the years of the fur trade, and, in fact, that they were actively and purposely drawn to that place by the traders.[15] The trade itself was more than a simple economic exchange; it had definite social elements to it and the social may even have been the more important ingredient. The trade in buffalo robes—as processed by Native Americans, and especially by the wives of hunters—had replaced the beaver trade and the buffalo robe trade continued its apparently robust transactions even as the beaver trade shriveled. And that trade depended on maintaining, at a minimum, friendly relations and often even more, developing personal and kinship relationships with each other, and all that those relationships implied—acceptance, help, protection, and more. It was this blurring of the lines between ethnicities, cultures, and other distinctions important 800 miles to the east that made this all the more remarkable to those who came into contact with it from outside. For that matter, even gender distinctions in the local population, while obviously weighted to the advantage of males, may have been somewhat blurred. One should note the incident at old Fort John described by Parkman in which James Bordeaux's Indian wife seemed to be less than submissive in a disagreement: "Bordeaux's own squaw, equally incensed, screamed to her lord and master that he was a dog and an old woman."[16]

The thin stream of emigrants traveling the Platte River Road to the west encountered those native populations and the early contact seemed mutually beneficial, at least to some degree, and at least while the numbers of emigrants remained small. In 1845 Joel Palmer recorded his emigrant party's contact with Indians at the fort, providing an account conspicuous for the amicable relations between the emigrants and the native population and also for its notable documentation of the reciprocal exchange taking place. Palmer's account, however, also hints at the larger changes at work, changes

[15] See the letter to Congress and Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 16, 1867, signed by the families of Richard, Bissonette, Beauvais, Cuny, and others, in which they state "that they are residents of Dakota Territory in the vicinity of Fort Laramie and are each and all heads or members of Indian families, that they have resided in said Country many years, and came to it originally under the auspices of the old Northwestern Fur Company and for many years depended solely upon said Company for support . . . ." In addition, see George Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 45, quoting Lucien Fontenelle's statement that Campbell "has now men running after these Indians to bring them to the River Platte. Buffalo is in abundance on that river during all seasons of the years and the situation may turn out to be an advantageous one for the trade." This evidence conforms to the pattern suggested recently by Kingsley M. Bray, "The Oglala Lakota and the Establishment of Fort Laramie," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, 36 (Winter 2000-2001), 3-17, that "Sublette's establishment of Fort Laramie encouraged a winter presence along the North Platte, ensuring that Oglalas and their guests could be found in the region year round." This is not entirely incompatible, as the author suggests, with Richard White's interpretation that such a movement was part of a larger migration process already underway: "Their push beyond the Black Hills was merely another phase in the long Sioux advance from the edge of the Great Plains." White, "The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of American History*, 65 (September 1978), 334.

[16] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 103.

that eroded the material basis of the Indians' economy with the loss of game upon which they were dependent. Palmer writes:

> In the afternoon we gave the Indians a feast, and held a long talk with them. Each family, as they could best spare it, contributed a portion of bread, meat, coffee or sugar, which being cooked, a table was set by spreading buffalo skins upon the ground, and arranging the provisions upon them. Around this attractive board, the Indian chiefs and their principal men seated themselves, occupying one fourth of the circle; the remainder of the male Indians made out the semi-circle; the rest of the circle was completed by the whites. The squaws and younger Indians formed an outer semi-circular row immediately behind their dusky lords and fathers. Two stout young warriors were now designated as waiters, and all the preparations being completed, the Indian chiefs and principal men shook hands, and at a signal the white chief performed the same ceremony, commencing with the principal chief, and saluting him and those of his followers who composed the first division of the circle; the others being considered inferiors, were not thus noticed.
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> The talk preceded the dinner. A trader acted as interpreter. The chief informed us, that "a long while ago some white chiefs passed up the Missouri, through his country, saying they were the red man's friends, and that as the red man found them, so would he find all the other pale faces. This country belongs to the red man, but his white brethren travels through, shooting the game and scaring it away. Thus the Indian loses all that he depends upon to support his wives and children. The children of the red man cry for food, but there is no food. But on the other hand, the Indian profits by the trade with the white man. It was the custom when the pale faces passed through his country, to make presents to the Indians of powder, lead, &c. His tribe was very numerous, but most of the people had gone to the mountains to hunt. Before the white man came, the game was tame, and easily caught, with the bow and arrow. Now the white man has frightened it, and the red man must go to the mountains. The red man needed long guns." This, with much more of the like, made up the talk of the chief, when a reply from our side was expected.

For his part, Palmer acknowledged that his party was "compelled to pass through the red man's country, but we traveled as friends, and not as enemies." And, he said, as friends they feasted the Indians, shook hands with them, and smoked the peace pipe with them. He also told them that his group was not traders and they did not have other goods to give them since they had just the supplies that they needed for themselves at the end of their journey. "We told them," he said, "to eat what was before them, and be satisfied; and that we had nothing more to say."[17] What is also noteworthy in this exchange—an exchange of food for the right to travel through and also an exchange of positions and perspectives on the frictions that emigration kindled—is that the principals sat down and talked forthrightly and cordially, dealing with the issues at hand. Perhaps

[17] Joel Palmer, *Journal of Travels over the Rocky Mountains, to the Mouth of the Columbia River; Made During the Years 1845 and 1846* (Cincinnati: J.A. & U.P. James, 1847), 57-60.

the one element that Palmer did not address, or even hint at, involved the role of white women in this parlay. The "squaws and younger Indians" sat directly behind the men of the tribe. What about the white women? Were they in attendance?

The emigrants continued on after stopping at the fort for some resupply and other transactions, but their mark was being felt in subtle ways, as the chief explained to Palmer's party. The Indians themselves were making an equally large mark, especially on the whites at the fort. With close and constant contact between whites and Indians, and after a generation of social intercourse, it appeared to observers that Indian cultures had rubbed off onto the whites more than European cultures had changed the natives. Francis Parkman, again, provides a clue to the cultural distance separating him from them: "These men were thorough savages. Neither their manners nor their ideas were in the slightest degree modified by contact with civilization."[18] Historian Barton Barbour sums up the process underway in the fur trade era at the fort: "Here was a form of assimilation that inverted the one ordinarily prescribed by white Americans with regard to Indians: instead of attempting to transform Indians into white farmers, these white men chose to live much like the Indians."[19] Barbour quotes the journal of the Forty-Niner gold seeker William Kelly as he observed social relations at the fort; Kelly believed that "most men" when encountering Indian life "contact a singular liking for their habits of life." He said that well-to-do men "have forsaken the conventionalities of polished society for the simple, unsophisticated association of those children of nature, demonstrating the inherent tendency of man to the natural in preference to the artificial, wherever free will is left a loose rein."[20] It even appears that the appeal of "the natural" and the life of the Indian tugged somewhat at Kelly himself as he passed by Fort Laramie.

This assimilation of whites to Indian cultures was almost universally noticed by visitors to the fort. As to the native cultures themselves, some participants observed in retrospect their tenacity in the face of cultural pressures. Seth Ward, in future years a trader at Fort Laramie, and who spent the 1840s and 1850s on the plains, later recalled of those decades, "The Indians had not contracted the vices of civilization, and were a different race of people from what they are to-day."[21] In 1846, a few years before the transfer of the fort to military hands, Francis Parkman expressed apprehensions about the future of the Indians: "the Indians will soon be corrupted by the example of the whites, abased by whisky, and overawed by military posts; so that within a few years the traveler may pass in tolerable security through their country. Its danger and its charm will have disappeared together."[22] "Great changes are at hand in that region," Parkman said.

Indeed they were.

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[18] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 151.
[19] Barton Barbour, "Special History Study: The Fur Trade at Fort Laramie National Historic Site," 119.
[20] Barbour, "Special History Study: The Fur Trade at Fort Laramie National Historic Site", 120.
[21] Seth Ward, "A Trapper's Tale" in Seth Ward file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.
[22] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 151.

Parkman himself helped bring about those changes. He suggested that a military fort was necessary in this area, partially for the reasons he hinted at in the above passage, to overawe the Indians by the military force of the United States. At the same time, it is important to note that there was minimal threat from the Indians. Parkman blithely commented, "Though men are frequently killed in its neighborhood, no apprehensions are now entertained of any general designs of hostility from the Indians."[23]

By the time the U.S. government purchased and took over Fort Laramie in 1849, the settlement at this place on the banks of the Laramie River, near where that river emptied into the North Platte, had a life of its own. It had its own society, its own culture, its own sense of community, and its own legacy for the future. That legacy was one of mutual and reciprocal acceptance and attachment, relations with bonds more than with divisions, respectful discussion of issues, and inclusion more than exclusion. It was a legacy of community. The question for the future would be whether those relationships would endure the changes signaled by the change in ownership, population, and mission at the fort—whether the civilization the peoples of Fort Laramie had forsaken or resisted would overtake them.

[23] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 88.

# Chapter 2

# Seeds of Social Change, 1849-1851

When Major Winslow Sanderson and his troops occupied and took possession of the fur trade post and fired the cannons that heralded the beginning of the new military installation, the blast echoed through the surrounding hills, but the action also reverberated through the social and cultural dynamics of the area. Fort Laramie would be a military outpost, but it would also constitute a significant cultural and social force as an agent of change. Sometimes that change was evident on the post and sometimes in the people with which the military came into contact. But the change was also resisted and slowed in its impact by the strength and vitality of the existing cultural forms and structures.

The forces of change were vast and powerful. Two forces in particular were evident in 1849 as the fort changed hands. One force had to do with the military occupation itself. Instead of the undisciplined, free-living, multi-cultural society that had given the Fort Laramie community much of its identity during the fur trade years, the military would, at least ultimately, bring new habits and structures and priorities to life on the banks of the Laramie River. Discipline, uniformity, synchronization, rank and file, drill and more drill, and tight organization and structure would be the presumptive watchwords of the new military order at Fort Laramie. This, however, could be easily overstated, more evident in theory than reality, and slower to emerge than the issuing of an order might suggest.

Likewise the second agent of change at Fort Laramie: the emigration that passed by the post each summer. Although the emigration on what was called the Oregon Trail in the 1840s had been reasonably steady, it had also been small. But the numbers jumped in 1849, a reflection of the discovery of gold in California as well as increased traffic generally. John D. Unruh, the most careful historian of the Oregon – California Trail, estimated a total emigration to the West Coast in 1849 of 25,450. This one-year's volume was greater than all the previous years together since 1840. And then, in the following years, it increased with 50,000 in 1850, 60,000 in 1852 (the peak years of the gold rush), and with a total cumulative emigration between 1840 and 1860 of 296,259—of which all but 18,847 took place after Fort Laramie became a military installation.[1] Merrill Mattes estimates that the number after 1849 was even higher, placing 65,000 to 75,000 emigrants in 1850 and a total of 500,000 to 525,000 by 1866.[2] Whatever the precise number, the immense wave of this migration passing by Fort Laramie in the

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[1] John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860*, 119, 120, 122.

[2] Merrill J. Mattes, "Potholes in the Great Platte River Road: Misconceptions in Need of Repair," *Annals of Wyoming*, 65 (Summer / Fall, 1993), 10-11.

years after 1849 surely challenged the traditional community that had prevailed at the fort before then.

As to how, exactly, it challenged that community, historian Barton Barbour places responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the emigrants: "Racial intolerance and bigotry were among the ideological baggage that the emigrants' wagon trains carried westward, and the fur traders' social system quickly eroded and then vanished under the new pressures." In fact, Barbour writes, "Fort Laramie's social system collapsed in about 1850," even earlier than the fur trade society at Fort Union. What is important about that "collapse" is that, as Barbour writes, "Before the collapse . . . Fort Laramie, like other nearby posts, sheltered a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society . . . ."[3] These are all astute and important observations, although the rapid demise of the traditional community seems to be overstated.

The multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society that had emerged in the fur trade years did not suddenly vanish at Fort Laramie. The fur trade may have collapsed, but the social institutions and cultures it spawned and nourished lingered for years at Fort Laramie. It would take more than the signing of a deed and the arrival of troops to erase the community values and relationships that existed at the fort. For that matter, it would take more than the arrival of a surge of emigrants through the area to alter social relations on the North Platte. There is, after all, little that is automatic in history when it comes to the change of cultures and social relations. As historian E. P. Thompson famously observed in another context, ". . . There is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of a culture; and the growth of social consciousness, like the growth of a poet's mind, can never, in the last analysis, be planned."[4] The agents of change were subtle and they included the gradual cultivation of the institutions and values and priorities of another society and the active effort to impose that system locally. It would, in other words, require a struggle for the new system to take root, and even more for it to dominate. That struggle would be long, but the process began in 1849.

Fort Laramie as a military post did not have an auspicious beginning. When emigrant Annie Ruff reached the new fort in July 1849, less than a month after its commissioning, she could not contain her disappointment. "The fort itself is the gloomiest most desolate looking place I ever saw. It looks exactly like a Penitentiary except there are *no* windows on the *outside*," she wrote her mother.[5] She was not alone in that view, and others who also saw the area at the junction of the Platte and Laramie Rivers as benighted planned to do something about it.

There was no less than a missionary impulse taking shape at Fort Laramie. Lieutenant John Gunnison, an officer in the Stansbury expedition that stopped at the fort on its way west in July, wrote, "This morning 'two' were gathered together to worship and

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[3] Barton Barbour, "Special History Study: The Fur Trade at Fort Laramie National Historic Site" (Santa Fe, New Mexico: National Park Service, 2000), 121.

[4] E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, No. 38 (1967), 97.

[5] Letter from "A." to Mary Dougherty ("My Dearest Mother"), June 24, 1849, located in Mary Dougherty file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

we had the greater part of the morning service read in W[d] room -- Even this was most charming & appeared quite Church like . . . ."[6] Gunnison also reported that two women, wives of soldiers at the fort, lived there and that one of them delivered a baby the day his group arrived and the other was expecting soon. He also noted that yet another woman worked at the fort preparing meals, but provided no additional information about her or any others who might have resided there.[7] Likewise, when a group of Mormon missionaries traveling east in 1849 stopped at the fort and admired the changes, they recorded, "There is an air of quietness and contentment of neatness and taste, which in connection with the kind of reception given by the polite and gentlemanly commander, Major Sanderson, made us feel as if we had found an oasis in the desert."[8] Similarly optimistic, though in a more secular vein, Alonzo Delano expressed thoughtful relief at the fort: "Its neat, white washed walls presented a welcome sight to us, after being so long from anything like a civilized building, and the motly crowed of emigrants, with their array of wagons, cattle, horses, and mules, gave a pleasant appearance of life and animation."[9] An important element of this observation was the characteristic noted by increasing numbers of passers-by—that the fort represented a level of civilization that contrasted with their own rough appearance. In the several years after it became a military post, Fort Laramie provided an element of what emigrants casually referred to as "civilization" in the wilderness, or an oasis in a desert. The cultivation of the wilderness had begun.

A significant aspect of Fort Laramie when it began its military career was that it was not a fortress, not a stronghold, and not a bastion of defense against invading enemies. Indeed, the old fur trade post with its high adobe walls, secure doors, and block houses at corners proved to be more of a fortress than the military installation ever developed. It became instead more of a village in appearance. As historian Alison K. Hoagland observes, installations like Fort Laramie "represented model settlements, not necessarily by inviting literal imitation but by promoting through example civilized society" even in their fundamental arrangement of buildings.[10] When emigrants visited the post they found there the institutions and organization of life associated with the civilian communities that they left behind. Indeed, exactly how "military," how disciplined, a unit this outpost was in its initial phase was not at all obvious. John Unruh writes that in 1850 the emigrants were concerned with "the alleged absence of industry and probity on the part of Uncle Sam's profit-oriented officers" who owned the ferry services over the two nearby rivers, and, even at that, the emigrants complained that "the soldiers demonstrated insufficient zeal" in replacing ferry boats that were out of service. Not only

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[6] Brigham D. Madsen, ed., *Exploring the Great Salt Lake: The Stansbury Expedition of 1849-50* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), 97.

[7] Gunnison, in Madsen, ed., *Exploring the Great Salt Lake*, 98, refers "to the cook matron (of the 'Mess') . . . . She seemed well pleased at the attention paid her. She takes great pains to get milk for me, borrowing when her cows don't come up– this noon all her milk had soured."

[8] This quotation is from the Latter-day Saints, journal history, quoted in LeRoy R Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; originally published, Glendale, California, A. H. Clark, 1938), 155.

[9] Alonzo Delano, *Across the Plains and Among the Diggings* (Buffalo: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1854), 76. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

[10] Alison K. Hoagland, "Village Constructions: U.S. Army Forts on the Plains, 1848-1890," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 34 (Winter 1999), 216.

were they not attending to military needs, but they were operating a business, and not operating the business efficiently either.[11]

Some soldiers, instead of drilling, were at work building the new post, with carpenters framing in the officers' quarters that would become known as Bedlam in the future, with masons working on the stone foundations, with still others repairing the old adobe fort, and with yet more infantrymen and others detailed to labor in construction of a bakery and various temporary structures.[12] Moreover, as a military organization, at least one fellow officer remarked upon the lack of discipline prevailing at the new fort. Lieutenant John Gunnison wrote caustically, "It is a Rifle company here & pretty green on military etiquette, at which Capt. S. has taken offence & won't come to the Fort, -- the commander not having been once to his camp."[13] Discipline, in others words, was poor enough that Captain Stansbury would not grace the post with his presence. That would change though, and by 1850, Leander Loomis, of the Birmingham Emigrating Company remarked "…it happened that the day we passed they were Drilling the soldiers, we saw them all dressed in uniform, and martched on the parade ground and drilled for some time, they looked splended. I tell you, neat as new pins."[14] A mixed picture began to fill out.

The greatest indicator of discipline (or lack thereof) may have been the simple continuing challenge of persuading or compelling soldiers to remain in the ranks and not to bolt and flee the post. Emigrant and military diaries and journals commonly refer to suspected deserters, to encounters with detachments sent to find and bring back deserters, and tell stories about those who found the escape from the military worse than remaining in its clutches (as in the case of a deserter who was discovered by a group of Crow Indians who then stole his rifle, horse, clothes, and all other possessions; he soon turned himself in at the fort.[15]). Perhaps the most exceptional incident, and the most revealing too, came in 1850 when either sixteen or eighteen soldiers armed themselves and took horses and fled to California. Henry John Coke explained just how pervasive the impulse to take flight was: "A party left today to retake them, but the odds are greatly in favor of the deserters, especially if the capturing party take it into their heads to shoot their officer, and join the fugitives in the attempt to make their fortunes in California."[16] The soldiers' commanding officer, Captain Stewart Van Vliet, proved almost as pessimistic in his report to his superiors in Omaha. Van Vliet predicted that the twenty-

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[11] Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860*, 272.

[12] Letter from Lt. D. P. Woodbury to Gen. Joseph Totten, September 7, 1849; typescript copy located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file TJE-1.

[13] Lt. John Gunnison, wrote this in a letter to his wife, July 13, 1849; the letter is in Madsen, ed., *Exploring the Great Salt Lake*, 98.

[14] Leander V. Loomis, diary entry, June 8, 1850, in Edgar M. Ledyard, ed*., A Journal of the Birmingham Emigrating Company, The Record of a Trip from Birmingham, Iowa, to Sacramento, California, in 1850* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1928), 39. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

[15] William McCarty to John Dougherty, 1850, Dougherty file in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

[16] Henry John Coke, *A Ride over the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California* (London: Richard Bentley, 1852), 156. This volume is located in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

five man detachment pursuing the fugitives would catch up with them, and he predicted success, though he quickly qualified it: they would "bring them back, unless they too, decide upon visiting California."[17] If there was any doubt about the need for discipline in the ranks, that doubt evaporated in September when Captain Ketchum desperately issued an order calling upon officers and soldiers who knew of the intent of others to desert to report that intention immediately.[18]

Both the military discipline and the village appearance of Fort Laramie matured in the next several years, each quality complementing the other. By 1852, Silas Miller, an emigrant, wrote home about the settlement that was the fort, about its welcome appearance, and about the discipline of the soldiers there:

> When we came in sight of the fort it looked like a settlement of houses. Every one was straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of white settlements. The day we passed, Laramie was a very fine lively looking place. Though it was Monday we all stopped and went over to see. Our feelings were something like the sailor when [he] gets in port after a long voyage. There was a store, a grocery, several dwellings, and the fort and soldiers' quarters, which was a long shed or stable appearing building, and the magazine house . . . . There was about 60 soldiers stationed here when we passed. The whole squad of buildings seemed under guard when we were there. I presume this was done more for form than necessity. The soldiers are under absolute control by their officers. They are mostly boys and foreigners.[19]

Miller's letter shows that one aspect of the composition of the denizens of Fort Laramie had not changed, at least by this early date; it had something of a polyglot character among its soldiers, although very little is known of the precise origins of the soldiers. As for the officers, the fort's military leadership was more uniform: they were New England Yankees about whom some of the Midwestern emigrants harbored barely concealed suspicion. Englishman Henry John Coke recorded after his visit to the fort that "the conversation ran upon general topics, and we were struck with the intelligence and information of the officers. In other respects, small blame to them, they were entirely Yankee – perhaps, a little more gentlemanlike and more hospitable than the generality of their countrymen."[20]

There was more to the fort than the military and the seeds of change began to take root there too. The forces of commerce thrived at Fort Laramie, even more than in the usual village. It was a way-station, a place where emigrants could trade tired stock

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[17] Letter from Captain Stewart Van Vliet to Major General T. S. Jesup, July 23, 1850, typescript copy located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library, Quartermaster General Correspondence.

[18] General Order No. 119, September 4, 1850, General Orders File, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[19] Letter from Silas V. Miller (?), to Bertha Atkinson, exact date not indicated, typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-61.

[20] Henry John Coke, *A Ride over the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California* (London, 1852), 149. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

for fresh, could replenish exhausted provisions, could mail letters home, could sell to others wagons and supplies that they regarded as surplus, could hire repairs on their wagons, could cross the North Platte on a ferry and the Laramie River on a ferry or toll bridge, and could even recruit help on their journey. The trading post at the fort, operated by the sutler under regulations imposed by military authorities, attracted considerable commerce. So intense was this exchange in the years of the California gold rush that the traders sometimes exhausted their supplies. At the moment at which the fort shifted to public ownership, the private trader wrote his own superiors that it was a pity he had not more provisions to sell to the emigrants, given the rate of traffic by the post. The next year, 1850, Lucena Pfuffer Parsons complained that "this morning went to the Fort to get some blacksmithing done but could not they have so much work of their own."[21] One consequence of the great demand and limited supply was an escalation in prices paid by emigrants, sometimes considered even extortionate. Emigrant Parsons lamented that "They hold goods high & work is also high"—a judgment affirmed by others.

In contrast to the unleashed acquisitiveness of those who sought to capitalize on the dependent market of emigrants, the army at Fort Laramie sought to temper both the market and the military discipline with compassion, assistance, and neighborliness. The army in these early years served much more as a force for rescue and salvation than as a fighting force. Beyond providing road-weary travelers a hiatus from the daily concerns of travel and an opportunity to retreat into a familiar discourse reminiscent of the society of their hometowns, the military officially and formally provided assistance to those who most needed it. In this way the mission of the fort included an explicit humanitarian component that shaped contact with civilians in the area and that would both hearken back to the pre-military days of the fort and also provide a contrast with future postures. On June 4, 1849, before Major Sanderson arrived at the junction of the Laramie and North Platte, a shipment of provisions was sent to him:

> the object of which . . . [is] the alleviation of such suffering, from want or sickness, as may present itself among emigrants on their way to or from California or Oregon, this season. Besides the application, if necessary, of the additional means sent you for this purposes, it is the order of the Secretary of War, through the general commanding the department, that you render every assistance in your power, consistent with the proper care of your command, to persons who may seem to you to stand in need of succour; though at the same time, it is expected that any appropriation of supplies &c., to this object will be made with due judgment and discrimination, for the relief of the suffering.[22]

A variety of documents demonstrate both the great need of emigrants and the responsiveness of the military to those needs. Emigrant George Gibbs in 1849 recorded in his diary at Fort Laramie that, of his fellow emigrants, "a great proportion indeed are

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[21] Lucena Pfuffer Parsons, Trail Journal published in Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails 1850*, vol. 2 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 255, diary entry for August 2, 1850.

[22] D. C. Buell (?), 6th Military Department Head Quarters, St. Louis, to Sanderson, June 4, 1849, photocopy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-39.

persons of high character and ample means, but even these frequently suffer from the loss or giving out of their animals and are forced to abandon a part of their wagons. . . . The road is lined with broken wagons and abandoned provisions, and as destitution increases, so will robberies."[23] The next spring, even before the huge exodus to the gold fields of 1850 got well underway, Captain Van Vliet wrote that nearly a thousand emigrants had come through by the middle of May and many of them needed supplies and other help. The situation was simple, according to Van Vliet: "they require considerable assistance in the way of repairs, which I render, as far as it is in my power so to do. 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."[24] The invisible hand of the market, in this way, was tempered by the helping hand of the government.

Not all who received that help were grateful, as fellow travelers were quick to point out. In 1849 while the post was in its first phase of construction, Ann Ruff wrote her mother about such an instance:

> A day or two afterwards we overtook a widow with 4 children. She had lost her husband & 2 children from cholera & all the rest were ill with it but one. Her party had deserted her. The colonel and quarter master rendered her every assistance, sent medical aid and men to get her cattle together & she proved her gratitude by bribing two teamsters to desert the command & join her and share her property with her. She has 40 head of cattle.[25]

Others were more appreciative and less disruptive of the fort community. When Fleming Hearn, on his way west in 1850, was stricken with an unspecified ailment, which may have been cholera, he received assistance from the post surgeon, and suspected

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[23] Diary of George Gibbs, 1849, typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CDIA-24.

[24] Letter from Captain Stewart Van Vliet to Major General T. S. Jesup, May 14, 1850, typescript copy of letter in Quartermaster General Correspondence, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. The "coal" that Van Vliet mentioned was most likely charcoal since he said he had burned it during the winter. As a term, "coal" often referred to charcoal, or, as it was sometimes also known, "coalwood." Carl P. Russell's discussion of the technology of the blacksmith's world in his *Firearms, Traps & Tools of the Mountain Men* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1967; reprint by University of New Mexico Press), 59, 79-80, describes both the technique of burning wood to make charcoal and also the pervasiveness of the fuel: "Blacksmiths in city shops and on the frontier, as well, generally adhered to charcoal for fuel." He also notes (p. 380, n9) the existence of an 1841 ordnance manual on the making of charcoal by the army. At the same time, it should be noted that emigrants were also remarking on the existence of deposits of coal along the North Platte in the vicinities of modern Casper and Glenrock, and within a decade entrepreneurs like John Richard were using the coal in their own operations. Historian Bill Bryans notes that near Deer Creek (Glenrock), coal was located as early as 1845, and was actively mined and used by 1847. Bill Bryans, *Deer Creek: Frontiers Crossroad in Pre-Territorial Wyoming* (n.p.: Glenrock Historical Commission, 1990), 23.

[25] Ann Ruff letter to Mary Dougherty ("My Dearest Mother"), from "A," June 24, 1849, located in Mary Dougherty file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site files.

that his fate would have been fearfully worse, "had it not been for the promptness of Dr. Moore Surgeon of this post in administering medicines that have relieved me of the cramps." The physician visited him at his camp and removed him to the post hospital: "They placed me in this room where I have had every attention that could be expected in this isolated region." This was in striking contrast to his abandonment by the party with which he traveled; anticipating his impending death, that party continued on for California with his provisions.[26]

Fleming Hearn was not alone in his need and in his rescue. Post Surgeon Moore recorded in his quarterly report during 1850 words that suggest full duty just in treating emigrants: "I presume I saw and prescribed for every sick emigrant passing the fort, and many were necessarily left under my charge."[27] L. D. Custer cogently described the broader pattern of assistance into which medical assistance fit when writing home in 1850; he wrote that "Sick Emmigrants are taken into the Hospital & carred for untill they are well & able to go ahead or dead and burried, (free of charge) they register all the names of emigrants the number of Horses Oxen &c there has passed this place …. The government takes our letters to the States free of charge, I found Pauls name here he passed through here on the last day of May and is 25 days ahead."[28] Medical assistance, postal service, a register of emigrant traffic, and additional help proved to be an important component of life at Fort Laramie and contributed to the definition of contact between the military and civilian populations in that vicinity. It should be no surprise that the "Buck Eye Company No. 1 of California Emigrants" in May 1850, "passed very complimentary resolutions about Major Sanderson, commandant at the fort, for the gentlemanly and kindly manner of treatment 'so rarely received at posts of the regular Army.'"[29] James M. Livingston, an attorney, noted in particular the "prompt and general assistance" of Major Sanderson and Captain Van Vliet to the emigrants, and whose assistance relieved the wants of the travelers so far as within their power "and even at some sacrifice to themselves."[30]

In addition to the material support the young post offered to all in need, it also attempted to provide for the intellectual and spiritual wants of the neighborhood. While many emigrants noted that they paid a toll to cross the North Platte by a ferry maintained by the soldiers, only one comment has been located that suggests how that money was intended to be used, or at least where people were led to believe it would go. Emigrant

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[26] Fleming G. Hearn, "A Journal for 1850," typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, civilian diaries, p28, entries for June 16, 17, 18. Hearn also noted from his hospital bed, "There are five emigrants in this room with me."

[27] Surgeon S. P. Moore quoted in Marie H. Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," *Annals of Wyoming*, 15 (October 1943), 319-20.

[28] Letter from L. D. Custer (?) to "Dear Cate" from "Fort Larrimie," June 26, 1850, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-6.

[29] This is from an anonymous correspondent, writing to the *Missouri Republican*, May 20, 1850, and quoted in "Notes of the Early History of the Nebraska Country," *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, XX (1922), 223.

[30] *Missouri Republican*, May 20, 1850, quoted in "Notes of the Early History of the Nebraska Country," 223.

E. S. Ingalls recorded in his diary that the ferry earned considerable money, "which I understand goes into a fund to buy a library for the garrison."[31]

Then there was the matter of religion. In 1849, William Vaux was appointed chaplain for the post, and, according to nineteenth-century historian G. C. Coutant, Vaux took his position in 1850, and in addition to his spiritual work "did a great deal of work among the sick, and aided the emigrants." Vaux, inheritor of a missionary tradition that included others like Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, who was still his contemporary, differed from others in that he had a government appointment to a particular post and his ministering went less to the Native Americans than it did to the soldiers and other whites. Where missionaries like Father De Smet, Marcus Whitman, Samuel Parker, and others sought to convert large numbers of Indians, Vaux's mission was more focused on providing a spiritual element to the fort—much like a minister in a New England or Midwestern village. It also seems that, at least in its early years, the observance of religion on the post was attended with a distinctly casual approach. In 1850 Henry John Coke stopped at Fort Laramie, and then, as he described in his diary, he

> Went up to the Fort with the intention of going to church, but called on the Quartermaster and found the majority of the congregation collected there smoking and drinking champagne. We joined the party, and accepted their invitation to dinner. Colonel Somner, Major Thompson, captains Eyer, Van Vleet, a Mr. Stillett, and our three selves filled the little mess-room. We had a capital feed off a saddle of young elk and green peas….[32]

What Fort Laramie represented to the civilian emigrants who passed through, and to much of the military as well, was an effort to transplant into an area they regarded as wilderness, an outpost that contained and nurtured central elements of the civilization that sponsored it. The post's formative years especially served as both an example and a force of transformation for the group of people to whom the government felt a special mission: the Native American population. And indeed local Indians were more than a little wary of the change from a fur trade post to a military installation to begin with. Colonel Aeneas MacKay, in August 1849, reported, "the Indians . . . were in a state of great excitement." Their concerns were based on their fear that the fur traders were selling to the government the lands upon which they lived, lands "which they consider their special inheritance," and that moreover, "they had witnessed with amazement the columns of troops and the crowds of emigrants which had been pressing towards the West during the whole season; and with equal terror the frightful disease which they had

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[31] Eleazar Stillman Ingalls, *Journal of a Trip to California by the Overland Route across the Plains in 1850-51*, (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, n.d.), entries for June 7, 1850. Although the tolls reported paid by emigrants vary, they usually are placed at a dollar or two per wagon. One emigrant, perhaps unbelievably, reported that "They kept a ferry, and charged us twenty-five dollars to take a wagon across." See G. W. Thissell, "Crossing the Plains," typed diary excerpt for June 20, 1850, in Fort Laramie Journals, Volume 3, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[32] See the anonymous article quoting Coutant, which in turns quotes Vaux's daughter Laramie Vaux, in the *Wyoming Churchman*, with no citation on the copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CREL-2, and also Henry J. Coke, *A Ride over the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California,* entry for July 21, 1850, p. 151.

bore with them and had already communicated to their people who were rapidly dying in many places of cholera, which they were told the whites had brought with them as a means of exterminating the whole Indian Race."[33]

Colonel MacKay's account can doubtless be trusted in this instance, presenting if anything an understated perspective of Native American fears. After the enormous emigrations of 1849 and 1850, Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick observed, "The immense emigration traveling through that country for the past two years has desolated and impoverished it to an enormous extent."[34] As for additional documentation of how Indians viewed this enormous wave of people surging through their country, one news account described a painting on a buffalo robe by an Indian named Suingkiss near Fort Laramie. The robe had on it a painting of "a mass of men, women, children, horses, oxen and wagons all running as for a wager."[35] Father De Smet described a conversation with Indians in the area who "fancied that all had gone over that road, and that an immense void must exist in the land of the rising sun," i.e., that the entire American population had emptied out of the East and gone to the West.[36] In a season that counted more than 50,000 emigrants and gold seekers, possibly as many as 70,000 or even more, and multiples of that number of livestock, Suingkiss may himself have understated not only the number of people but also the single-mindedness with which they moved through his home. New forces, at any rate, were abroad in the land along the Platte, forces that threatened major changes, even devastation, for those who already lived there, and the emergence of a militarized Fort Laramie that both served and encouraged more emigrants and more change was one of those forces.

What is especially notable in the early years of the military fort is the cooperation and lack of acrimony offered by the Indians, despite their apprehensions. Well before 1849, as William G. Johnston observed in his journal on the way west, the Indians had established a routine of visiting Fort Laramie: "many Indian tribes assemble here at certain seasons of the years to exchange Buffalo robes and buckskins for tobacco, whiskey, powder and lead, blankets, beads and notions."[37] The traffic attracted more and more of the regional population to its campgrounds and passages. Two years later, C. A. Brandt wrote his brother from Fort Laramie that "we saw plenty [of Indians] yesterday they begged for something to eat they had mocisons to sell they were very well made I got a pair as me feet were very sore they a great relief the only english they

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[33] Report of Colonel MacKay, August 14, 1849, quoted in Merrill J. Mattes, *Fort Laramie and the Forty-Niners* (Estes Park: Rocky Mountain Nature Association, 1949), 31.

[34] Thomas Fitzpatrick, Annual Report, September 24, 1850, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1850*, 55. This volume, identified only in its interior as House Document No. 1, is located in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

[35] Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890*, 165. Hafen and Young attribute the story to the Liberty, Missouri, *Weekly Tribune*, February 10, 1851.

[36] P. J. De Smet, *Western Missions and Missionaries: A Series of Letters* (New York: T. W. Strong, 1859), 108. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

[37] William G. Johnston, Experiences of a Forty-Niner, typed excerpt from published journal in William Johnston file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-89. Johnston also noted that "on account of the antipathy of Indians to appearances of civilization, neither grain nor vegetables are raised by the occupants of the fort."

could say was howdodoo and shake hands."[38] Likewise, P. V. Crawford wrote, ". . . At the end of 14 miles of tolerable hilly road, we encamped on the banks of the Laramie River. Here we found a large number of Sioux Indians that were very friendly but were great beggars."[39] While occasionally, out of fear of smallpox or cholera, the local Native American population would flee the path of the emigrant traffic, the bulk of the time the population remained substantial and the opportunities for friction grew with the increasing numbers of emigrants and others pouring into their land. Despite the opportunity for misunderstanding, for bad faith treatment, and for individual tempers to flare, the journals, diaries, and letters of emigrants and soldiers reveal a pattern of positive interaction between whites and Indians at the fort. One anonymous soldier wrote in 1849, after the emigration had passed, that "These Platte Sioux, by the way, are the best Indians on the prairies. Look at their conduct during the past summer. Of the vast emigration, which rolled through their country this year, not a person was molested, not an article stolen. Such good conduct deserves reward."[40]

The positive contact, moreover, was not just the restraint from harming white people or stealing their property; it included more direct forms of assistance. In the first winter of the new post, the soldiers were unprepared for the toll that an inadequate diet would take on them. As a result of an epidemic of scurvy, according to the medical history of the post, "about one-fifth of all the men were on crutches." The solution was to employ Indians to gather watercress and wild onions.[41] Where "civilization" had made serious inroads into the "wilderness" it became necessary to learn from and draw upon the skills of the natives who were being civilized, indeed to draw upon the wilderness itself. Or, consider the situation in which emigrant Carlisle Abbott found himself in 1850. Abbott forded the Platte only to have his horse swept away in the current. He grasped a willow branch and clung to it, remaining there until help arrived. Aid came in the kind of circumstance that suggests a perhaps unanticipated cooperation: "The soldiers beat their way through the brush, and as they were unable to reach me directly, they quickly cut off the limb to which I was clinging and drew me to the bank. I was, of course, as stiff as a poker, and was altogether unable to stand; but they carried me to an Indian tepee nearby, and the squaw spread a buffalo robe by the fire, while the soldiers rubbed me until I was able to walk."[42] The dynamics that permitted this cooperative impulse to blossom, however, belonged more to the past than to the future.

Change was in the air. One of the most revealing documents hinting at the contours of the new order is an annual report submitted by Indian Agent Thomas

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[38] Letter from C. A. Brandt at Fort Laramie to O. P. Brandt, June 18, 1851, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-8.

[39] P. V. Crawford, "Journal of a Trip Across the Plains, 1851" *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 25 (1924), 144.

[40] Letter dated September 18, 1849 in undated *Missouri Republican*, quoted in "Notes of the Early History of the Nebraska Country," *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, XX (1922), 214.

[41] H. S. Schell, "Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory," in *A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army*, War Department, Surgeon-General's Office, Circular No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), 350.

[42] Carlisle S. Abbott, *Recollections of a California Pioneer* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1917), 37. This volume is located in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

Fitzpatrick in 1851. While at Fort Mann, previously and subsequently known as Fort Atkinson, Fitzpatrick watched the interaction of the various tribes (in this case, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Comanche) with the encampment under the charge of Colonel E. V. Sumner. Fitzpatrick's biographer claims that in that camp "the Indians were permitted free intercourse in and about the camp," and Fitzpatrick took the bold step of arguing against such casual relationships.

> Such free and unrestrained intercourse, carried on between officers, privates, squaws and Indians, not braves nor chiefs, but as the Indians themselves would term them, 'dogs,' was certainly a new thing to me, and what I have rarely seen allowed even by the traders . . . . I have frequently witnessed a want of self-respect exhibited by men in high positions on such occasions, thereby inviting the disrespectful and rude treatment of the untutored Indian; and I regret that the idea prevails, to a more or less extent, among many persons, that, to receive the respect and attention of Indians, one must cast off all the restraint of civilized society, and assume conduct and manners entirely the reverse; such, however, is a great error, and I do, without hesitation, assert, that there is no course more proper for a white man to pursue among Indians than an upright, virtuous, and moral one, both in conversation and conduct; and, moreover, that the very rules of decorum which govern a gentlemen [*sic*] in civilized society, are both suitable and applicable in his intercourse with the Indian race.[43]

What is especially noticeable here is Fitzpatrick's formulation of the notion of self-respect and the restraint of civilized society as the standard by which he judged behavior. Fitzpatrick was not surprised that the Indians lacked proper restraint and adherence to the "rules of decorum which govern" people in "civilized society," but he was deeply concerned that the whites themselves did not abide by those rules in this instance. It may be possible to infer from his comment that this pattern of free and casual interaction at Fort Mann "was certainly a new thing to me," that at Fort Laramie the proper rules of decorum were in the ascendancy. At Fort Laramie, the rules of civilization, rules that separated and stratified people by rank and gender and class would soon be expected in all relationships, and perhaps especially those with the Native American residents. Or at least Fitzpatrick and others in some authority believed that those were the rules that should prevail. Social relationships were changing, albeit gradually, and the fort was pointing the way in those changes.

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[43] LeRoy R. Hafen, *Broken Hand: The Life of Thomas Fitzpatrick: Mountain Man, Guide and Indian Agent* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973; originally published 1931 by the Old West Publishing Company), 281. Thomas Fitzpatrick, Annual Report, November 24, 1851, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1851*, 336. This volume, identified only in its interior as House Document No. 1, is located in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

# Chapter 3

# A New Map of Social Relationships, 1851

The Fort Laramie treaty council of September 1851 is significant for many things, including a formalized agreement between the tribes gathered which produced a map that would remain a reference point in all future considerations of Native American rights and territories in the area. Beneath that familiar outcome, however, the council also set forth an agenda for social change that would shape the future in and around Fort Laramie—and for a broad area beyond. That agenda focused on the priorities and expectations of a new order coming to the high plains and the social relationships that would prevail in the future. The outlines of "civilization" were being drawn with the clarity of the map that was sketched and that new order focused on the replacement of the life of the hunt with a life of dependency and with the fragmentation of peoples among and within tribes, the development of hierarchical relationships, and the competition between groups for rewards. Moreover, the treaty conference provided an opportunity for the government representatives to make significant progress, not only in showing the path to this particular vision of the future and hinting at the changes to come, but actually in moving the tribes along that path.

First, it needs to be noted that not everybody saw, or agreed upon, the necessity for such a treaty council. Corporal Percival Lowe, present at the conference and assigned to assist Jim Bridger, who accompanied the Shoshone group at the gathering, recorded a purpose other than preservation of the peace that was served by the peace conference. He said the Indians were happy with things the way they were. Of the Shoshone, he said, "All they wanted was to be left alone, but would endeavor to care for themselves; they had never injured the white people and had no desire to do so." And, of the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, he said they

> did not want peace with other tribes. Why should they? Their pastures were well stocked with game, the supply of buffalo was unlimited, the way they hunted inexhaustible. They were rich in everything that people of nomadic habits needed, and as to peace, why what would life to be to them without war? Nature supplied all their needs. They did not hunt for the sake of wantonly destroying the lives of animals as did the white man, and how could they amuse themselves? Of what use to live?[1]

[1] Percival G. Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) and Other Adventures on the Great Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 71, 63. One should immediately note the possibility of even a romantic view of the human inhabitants of the plains on the part of Lowe and others. The evidence is far from conclusive as to the precise contours of the ecological relationship of the Plains Indians in this area, what impact they had on the landscape, and how much that impact was mitigated by low population numbers. See especially in this regard, Shepherd Krech, III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Elliott West, The *Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, & The Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998); and most particularly Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison

In contrast, he continued, "But the Indian Department had become a great branch of the political machine, large amounts of money were appropriated, growing larger annually, and it must be spent. There were many beneficiaries interested—manufacturers of Indian goods, merchants, freighters, officials and hangers-on in large numbers." The government wanted a treaty council and a treaty council was held.

The immediately noticeable aspect of the council was the sheer diversity of tribal and linguistic groups represented. Never before on the Great Plains had there been such a congregation of tribes. Somewhere between eight and twelve thousand Indians gathered at Fort Laramie (and then moved east to the banks of Horse Creek), including large portions of Cheyennes, Arapaho, Lakota, Eastern Shoshone, Crows, Assiniboines, Gros Ventres, and Arikaras, along with their herds of horses and numerous dogs, establishing camps and setting up housekeeping for several weeks—longer in the case of the early arrivals. Not only was this the largest and most diverse gathering of native peoples on the Great Plains, but it was also probably the single largest gathering of people of any background in a wide area, with the exception of the flowing stream of emigrants crossing the plains, for another quarter century or more.

A good number had never been to this area before and had previously had only remote dealings with some of the other cultures. More to the point, it is useful to remember the admonition of George Grinnell that "To the plains Indians of early days the terms 'stranger' and 'enemy' were almost synonymous."[2] These people were not just strangers but often enemies to each other. So it is noteworthy that, while not exactly ecumenical, this gathering did generate significant cultural interaction. In this way, the Indians saw firsthand the customs and practices of other tribal groups. In fact, the Indians themselves turned the gathering into an opportunity for cultural interaction of the first order. Consider the assessment and the details offered by B. Gratz Brown in his dispatches to *The Missouri Republican* as he witnessed the proceedings: "it is not probable that an opportunity will again be presented of seeing so many tribes assembled together displaying all the peculiarities, features, dress, equipments and horses. The manner of painting themselves and horses, and every thing else, exhibiting their wild notions of elegance and propriety."[3] They appeared, Brown reported, "not armed or painted for war, but decked out in all their best regalia, pomp, paint and display for peace."[4] They also visited each other, friends, relatives, strangers, and enemies. On a Sunday when the treaty council did not meet, Brown reported that the Indians devoted the afternoon "to visits of portions of one nation to another, and to feasts and dances."[5]

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Diplomacy Redux," in Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

[2] George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955; a reprint of the 1915 Charles Scribner's Sons original), 97.

[3] B. Gratz Brown, letter dated October 24, 1851 in "The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 According to Letters from the Editor [B. Gratz Brown]" in *The Missouri Republican*, August 8, 1851 to November 30, 1851. This document was transcribed from microfilm in the Missouri Historical Society by Lois E. Woodard and David L. Hieb, September 1956. Transcription is located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, ITRE-9. This collection of Brown's reports will be referenced as B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters.

[4] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 24, 1851.

[5] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 24, 1851.

While many of these were visits of curiosity and cultural pride, sometimes they became much more focused and they even engaged in some healing of wounds and building of bridges between cultures. Shoshone and Cheyenne remained apprehensive about each other, but even in that case, the performance of a scalp dance or feast by the Cheyennes to return to the Shoshones (sometimes there referred to as Snake Indians) the scalps of two of their own killed by Cheyenne warriors on their way to the conference was perhaps unprecedented.[6] This interaction was not on the official agenda, but the visits and exchanges symbolized an apparent unity of the group and there was much talk of brotherhood and peace. In the eyes of Father P. J. De Smet, "They seemed all to form but a single nation."[7]

The irony is that such unity was only on the surface, and probably then only in the eyes of the whites, and in fact collapsed at every turn. Apprehensions remained, and tensions occasionally rose to the surface. The reality was not unity but fragmentation both among and within the tribes. B. Gratz Brown described the tribes as they gathered, and even before they moved to Horse Creek, noting, "There are several of them, that are by no means friendly, and each one distrusts the other. Each one suspects the other of desiring peace merely to gain an advantage—to lull his antagonist into security—then take him off his guard and steal his horses and kill his people."[8] Brown did not mention whether the Indians harbored the same suspicion toward the United States government. In a subtle and deft stoke, however, the government focus on drawing lines between the tribal lands encouraged not tribal unity but tribal competition which encouraged Indians to see other Indians, not the United States, as the threat to their cultures, livelihoods, and lands.

First of all, the very proposal to divide lands was not just a matter of formalizing what already existed. It was a new system, one that met with opposition. Exactly what all was said against that division and subdivision is not known. At least one person, Black Hawk, an Oglala from the area around Fort Laramie spoke against it: "Father, if there is anything I do know, it is this country, for I was raised in it, with the interpreters and traders. You have split the country, and I don't like it. What we live upon, we hunt for, and we hunt from the Platte to the Arkansas, and from here up to the Red Bute and the Sweet Water. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes agree to live together and be one people; that is very well, but they want to hunt on this side of the river."[9] Even Black Hawk, however, had been drawn into the framework presented, and while he started out opposed to "splitting the country," he ended up protesting where the split would take place.

The tensions emerged not just in the conference when discussing such delicate matters as the fine line separating one tribe's hunting ground from that of another, a matter on which consensus seemed elusive if not impossible, but along even more revealing fault lines. Whether calculated to produce divisions within the tribes or not, the

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[6] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 29, 1851.
[7] P. J. De Smet, *Western Missions and Missionaries: A Series of Letters* (New York: T. W. Strong, 1859), 108. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.
[8] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, September 1, 1851.
[9] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, September 13, 1851.

government proposals certainly generated them. For example, among the Lakota, the most heavily represented nation there, and a people who had a resident contingent at Fort Laramie itself, the government's terms caused some rancor. Again, B. Gratz Brown describes the situation among the Sioux: "They have advanced many objections to the stipulations of the treaty; but they are so split up into small bands, and the bands residing on the Platte are so much more numerously represented than those on the Missouri, that there is a great deal of jealousy and opposition from this quarter."[10] And, just as powerful was another division that appeared and that would surface continuously in years to come—a division between young and old in a tribe. As the Shoshone proceeded toward the main staging area, Brown saw their adversaries, Sioux and Cheyenne, immediately ahead. So did the Shoshone: "During all the march the Indian shout and whoop was ringing over the plain, and the old men kept up a constant harangue to the young men, to behave themselves and make friends with the cheyennes, to give them presents and treat them as brethren."[11] Some degree of the ideal of peace and brotherhood, sometimes qualified, may even have been universal at the council, but the framework in which it was pursued was not likely to produce a permanent reconciliation. The enduring result would more likely be jealousy, competition, and factionalism.

In its effort to compensate for the factionalism, or just the lack of unity, within the tribes, the government's approach generated another issue—leadership. If boundary lines were negotiable, some government demands were not, and the question of leadership was one. Brown wrote down Commissioner David Mitchell's statement to the Indians:

> Your nations are divided up into bands or small tribes, and many of these small bands are as hostile to other bands of their own people as they are to other nations. Your Great Father will not recognize any such divisions. The bands of the several nations or tribes must make peace with each other and form one nation. Your Great Father will only treat with the whole nation or tribe when united, not with any band however large or powerful. For this purpose I desire that each nation shall select one suitable man to be "chief of the whole nation," who shall be recognized as the head of the nation or tribe, and through whom your Great Father will transact all Government business . . . .[12]

Since the Sioux could not agree on a single chief (or even that there should be a single chief) Colonel Mitchell chose one that they would vote for or against—Conquering Bear. Each band would vote by handing him a designated stick or withholding it. And so the leadership of the Lakotas was determined. This is significant social history not just because white authorities named the chief and then allowed the bands to ratify that selection, but because of the unprecedented authority that any chief, no matter who, would be expected to wield. It was just five years earlier that Francis Parkman visited the lodge of Old Smoke, a reputed leader and chief among the Sioux in the area of Fort Laramie. That lodge, he reported, "was by no means better than the others; indeed, it

[10] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 1, 1851.
[11] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, September 26, 1851.
[12] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 24, 1851.

was rather shabby; for in this democratic community, the chief never assumes superior state."[13] In 1851, Parkman's "never" expired and a federalist formula took the place of the decentralized structure. The leader was not only given new authority to speak for the nation, but would also be held accountable for the actions of the multitudes. Quite aside from the fact that the system itself was imposed from the outside by the whites, a major internal social shift had taken place.[14] If this was expected to generate unity, and it was, any unity it achieved reflected as much on the white institutional concept of republican, representative government that it imposed as it did on Indian concepts of democracy that were suppressed.

There were other signs of change among the Indians at the conference. Leadership aside, generation gaps aside, and factionalism aside, another powerful undercurrent was transforming the cultural landscape of the Native Americans around Fort Laramie. A double-edged change undermined the traditional culture of the Plains Indians. The emigration and the infusion of whites into the area generally took a serious toll on the bison population as the herds moved farther away from the road, well to the north and south. The treaty council itself furthered that erosion of tribal cultural and economic association with the buffalo. The treaty conference came at precisely the time of the Indians' fall buffalo hunt, so that in 1851 there would be no such hunt and the winter would be correspondingly lean. While the distribution of goods at the conference would allay some of the material hardship generated by missing the hunt, this benefit came at a cultural cost. Plus, the future distributions would also come in late summer and early fall, again, a competition to the hunt—an easy, tempting competition too.[15] That was one side of the change.

The other side was that as an alternative to the buffalo, some of the Indians were already becoming dependent upon working for emigrants and traders and selling goods to the white traffic. Thus an established culture and economy that valued and promoted

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[13] Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: Books, Inc., n.d.), 89.

[14] See also the conclusion reached by George Hyde in 1937. After relating the confusing changes in leadership of the Oglalas between 1849 and 1854, he states that "the oldest Oglalas now living have no knowledge of these events, but they do insist very earnestly that the whites have never understood their system of tribal government, or the rank and duties of the chiefs and other leaders; they assert that they never had a head-chief until after 1850, when the whites persuaded them to choose a chief with whom the government might deal as the head of the tribe." Then, Hyde, not known for casually accepting the validity of his Indian sources, says bluntly, "This seems to be true." Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 67. In addition, see Catherine Price, "Lakotas and Euroamericans: Contrasted Concepts of 'Chieftainship' and Decision-Making Authority," *Ethnohistory*, 41 (Summer 1994), 447-463.

[15] See, in addition, the anticipation of a future decline in the buffalo and the acceptance of that change in economy in Colonel Mitchell's comment to the gathered Indian leaders: "The ears of your Great Father are always open to the complaints of his Red Children. He has heard and is aware that your buffalo and game are driven off, and your grass and timber consumed by the opening of roads and the passing of emigrants through your countries. For these losses he desires to compensate you. He does not desire that his White Children shall drive off the Buffalo and destroy your hunting-grounds, without making you just restitution." With this proposal of a fair exchange, distributing goods to replace that part of their culture, the values and assumptions of the new order were neatly formulated. B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 24, 1851.

independence was in demise; on the other hand, a system that generated dependence and that undermined traditional culture grew every year. B. Gratz Brown articulated some of this change succinctly:

> The time was, not many years since, when all these Indians lived on the buffalo and game of the plains, and desired nothing more; but the ingress of the emigrants, and the introduction of the manners and customs, possibly I might say, the vices and dissipation of so-called civilized life, have changed their appetites and desires in many particulars. Coffee, sugar and some few things of this kind, are now more sought for and desired than almost any thing else.[16]

One could take that a step further and note that the "Coffee, sugar and some few things of this kind" happened also to be commodities that generated an additional dependence. And then one could add alcohol, and "the vices and dissipations" become palpable.

Brown was more than a casual observer on this point. Elsewhere in his reports he contrasted the Indians of the high plains with those in eastern Kansas near Missouri: "It is an undoubted fact that the bearing, character, manners, courage, habits and nearly all leading characteristics of the Indians of the plains and mountains, strongly contrast with that of the more easterly Indians—say from the Pawnees to our State line. The former are proud, manly and high toned sons of the wilds—the latter are dirty, beggerly and cowardly compared with the former. The latter have had more to do with the whites, have learnt many of their vices and few of their virtues. What contamination may do with the former remains to be seen."[17] Even if one qualifies the "beggerly" trait by noting that what some saw as begging was simply the act of assessing a toll for crossing their land in the same way that the soldiers at the ferry assessed a toll for crossing the river on their ferry, the difference in the patterns of life were huge. What Brown missed was that it was not just the vices and dissipations of civilizations that generated this decline. Instead it was the core features of that civilization—markets, hierarchies, specialized economic activities, sedentary occupations—that were now being expected. The Indians were leading a proud, free-ranging life (although one that was also severe and often filled with hardship, and a life that certainly knew its own inequities) in pursuit of the buffalo, or bison, and they were entering a downward spiral in the name of civilization. The treaty council and its agreements and its procedures and assumptions would shepherd them down that spiral.

There was one final indication of the changes underway that became explicit at the treaty council, this one an issue that surged ahead and that would not have been articulated a generation or two earlier. There were growing numbers of *Métis*, people in this area who were identified, often derisively, as "half-breeds," although the term lacked precision. While it most literally referred to the progeny of the union of a white man and an Indian woman (with few recorded instances of the opposite), it also referred to the next generation of offspring and perhaps beyond that too. As the lands and hunting grounds were being divided and apportioned out to various tribes at the treaty council, the question emerged as to the future prospects of these people of mixed ancestry. That

[16] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 5, 1851.
[17] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, October 24, 1851.

the question even arose, though, indicated how much "civilization" was moving west and engulfing the area served by Fort Laramie. Such marriages and their "half-breed" children had represented a common element of the fur trade days of a few years earlier.[18] Now, though, B. Gratz Brown noted that partners of a marriage between an Indian and a white "are, in many respects, estranged from civilized society. The white man who has taken a squaw for a wife, however honestly and virtuously they may have lived, (and in this many of them will compare advantageously with some who claim to be civilized) is, with his wife, for ever debarred admission into society."[19] In other words, the casual manner in which white traders and Indian women lived in the adobe fort prior to the military take-over was being shunned, not because of anything to do with the virtue of the relationship itself, but because of the race or ethnicity of the partners. The fort in the new order represented civilized society and the mixed marriages represented a relationship increasingly outside its pale.

In a new legal environment in which land was being divvied up and set aside for one group and then another, the proposal the traders and interpreters and others presented to the conference, in behalf of their mixed heritage children, conformed to the new pattern and suggested that land be set aside for them also. The government commissioners then passed the issue on to the tribes to see if they would yield their lands for the cause. Approached in this way, the answer was a foregone conclusion. Brown reported that "The proposition to make provision for the Half Breed children, was well received by all the Indians, but the difficulty was to fix a location of the Half Breed tract."[20] Agreement in principle was easy; the problem was to select the specific location on the map where it would be realized. And the place identified in the proposal was located in Cheyenne and Arapaho land at the base of the mountains, prime agricultural country evidently, an area that Brown called "an oasis in a vast waste," and those two tribes, like the others, having already witnessed the carving up of lands to an area smaller than they felt appropriate, declined to yield further. There the issue languished and faded from formal discussion. But it also signaled an issue that would not go away, an issue whose force increased each year: What future awaited the partners in mixed marriages? What future awaited their children? And, to turn it around: What additional challenges would come in the name of civilization?

When the treaty council closed and the tribes departed and the officers made their reports, from the perspective of the Indians who had gathered and conferred it was not clear what precisely had been accomplished. Many were disappointed and distrustful, understandably, of the results of the treaty itself. Some, like the Platte River bands of Lakota, felt especially slighted in the treaty stipulations. Perhaps, as has been

[18] Michael Lansing has argued that not only were such unions common, but in them, at least insofar as they were associated with the fur trade, the women, with their ability to bridge different cultures, managed to become important agents of change. None of the instances he examines bears directly on Fort Laramie and vicinity. Lansing, "Plains Indian Women and Interracial Marriage in the Upper Missouri Trade, 1804-1868," *Western Historical Quarterly*, XXXI (Winter 2000), 413-433.

[19] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, September 20, 1851.

[20] B. Gratz Brown, 1851 Treaty Letters, September 20, 1851.

speculated, everybody left with misgivings about the future.[21] Two outcomes were now clear, though. One result was a map that drew lines separating people and hunting grounds in ways they had never been separated before. The other result was a map of social relationships that charted issues of authority, of livelihood, of land ownership, and of propriety. A map had been drawn that separated white from Indian (and separated their mixed children as yet a third group), that separated tribe from tribe (whether friend or foe), that separated leader from follower, "wild" from "civilized," and finally that separated past from future. That map replicating relationships from a different world far away was being imposed on the land and people of this area.

[21] LeRoy R Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; originally published, Glendale, California, A. H. Clark, 1938), 190.

# Chapter 4

# The Drawing of Lines, 1851-1861

The decade between the Treaty of Fort Laramie and the outbreak of the Civil War witnessed a general transformation of the post in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways. During the 1850s the fort grew substantially in military strength but activities of all kinds increased as well, and with them came other equally profound changes in the contours and quality of life at the fort. Some people would have referred to this evolution as one of increasing civilization. With its ethnocentric value judgments that term leaves much to be desired. Even so, its components are clear from a century and a half later. During this ten-year period, life at Fort Laramie became increasingly ranked, fragmented, and regulated, established authority became more entrenched and hierarchical, and acceptable behavior became more sharply defined. Increasingly, this pattern of change made Fort Laramie, step-by-step, bit-by-bit, resemble the society of the East and differentiated it from the world of humanity beyond its reach, a world often termed *a* or *the* "frontier," but, in any event, a world that had once defined this fort and continued to surround it.

For several years after the Fort Laramie Treaty, the fort retained some of the loose relationships that had characterized life in the area and the changes to the more structured life of established society, when they came, were gradual. Initially it was just a matter of appearance. Lodisa Frizzell's comment that Fort Laramie represented "a rose in the wilderness" was perhaps accurate, for Fort Laramie did represent an anomaly in this vast land that knew sparse permanent concentrations of population.[1] But that comment, like others, initially focused on the physical appearance rather than the organization of society. Buildings that reminded emigrants of their homes ("the first buildings since we left the Missouri River") in and of themselves did not translate into social hierarchy or draw lines separating people from each other. Nor did the brass band at the fort that evoked to Sam S. Gilbreath "the prettiest music I ever heard in my life on or off the plains"[2] necessarily mean that the roots of civilization permeated the social structure of this settlement.

Less noticeable but much more powerful were the more fundamental changes at Fort Laramie. Life on the post increasingly operated within a world of rules and regulations and unspoken expectations of behavior. Some of this was simply in the nature of military regimentation. Lieutenant Richard Garnett, a West Point graduate, issued a series of sweeping orders in 1852 to improve the discipline, the appearance,

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[1] Lodisa Frizzell, *Across the Plains to California in 1852* (New York: New York Public Library, 1915), ed. by Victor Palstits, 23. "This is quite a place, several fine buildings, nestled here among the hills it looks like a rose in the wilderness." This volume is located in the Special Collections, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

[2] Sam S. Gilbreath to Mrs. Mary Beavers, June 11, 1852, photocopy and typescript of letter in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-28.

and the orderliness of the military installation including restricting the movement of soldiers to an area within a mile of the post, preventing the uncontrolled grazing of the "beasts of burden" owned by soldiers, prohibiting gambling on post, and other such measures. He also tried to clean up the post by ordering "the guard will be held responsible that all rubbish, slops, etc calculated to create a nuisance arising from the company quarters & guard house police shall be thrown into the river, and that men shall not be permitted to make an improper use of the grounds in the vicinity of the guardhouse or company quarters."[3] But the impulse toward order and tighter organization was also evident in the private sector at the fort. Robert Campbell, the very man who constructed the original Fort William, Fort Laramie's direct ancestor, and who now held the contract as sutler at Fort Laramie, although operating it at a distance through his local agents, attempted in 1851, with mixed success, to get his books put in order at the sutler's store.[4] His lament on the disorderly nature of the accounts was the familiar grumble of modern businesspeople seeking better organization, management, and record-keeping and frustrated with employees who operate on a more casual and less accountable standard. Fort Laramie may have looked like a village, but it was going to be a clean and orderly village befitting an outpost of civilization.

On the other hand, there remained whole areas in which behavior more characteristic of the past seemed to persist, if not always prevail. The way that business was conducted and recorded, as Campbell discovered, constituted one of those aspects. Another area was that of the relationship of whites to Indians. Despite the message communicated by the peace commissioners as they endeavored to coax the Native Americans at the peace conference down the road of "civilization," relationships with the Indians remained informal, casual, and even personal until 1854, and sometimes beyond. This could be seen in the frequent encounters of whites along the trail in the area. Some, of course, would resent the "begging" of the Indians. Others understood more clearly the transaction that was taking place. Hanna Cornaby, a part of the 1853 Mormon emigration, described the relationship thus:

> . . . we often met with Sioux Indians, who were quite friendly, and on one occasion, we camped near one of their villages, where we held a big pow-wow, smoked the pipe of peace, and paid them a tribute of sugar and flour for the privilege of traveling through their domain. We also purchased from them buffalo robes and dried meat. Reaching Fort Laramie, we made a short halt when many Indians visited our camp; the squaws being particularly anxious to exchange their commodities for groceries, &c. I remember one squaw in particular, who took quite an

[3] General Order No. 14, by Lieutenant Richard Garnett, July 24, 1852; General Order No. 8, also issued by Garnett, May 30, 1853, in General Orders files, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

[4] Robert Campbell to John Dougherty, September 5, 1851, Dougherty file in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files: "Today I hope to get some information and some insight into our business—tho books have been so badly kept that it is impossible to form any opinion of the business from them and I truly wish that he had some capable man with Tutt who would neither drink nor gamble and who could keep books correctly so as to understand how our business stands."

> interest in our dear little daughter; measured her foot, and next day returned with a very tastily embroidered pair of moccasins which she placed upon her feet, refusing to take anything in payment.[5]

The military, too, managed a relatively personal, non-abrasive relationship with the local Native American population. The chaplain at the post, William Vaux, conspicuously made no effort to convert and "civilize" the Indians he came into contact with, a striking departure from the zeal encouraged by officials in the Indian Affairs agency. His daughter recalled later that "Conditions were such that my father did nothing to convert the Indians, though he had many friends among them. He was called 'The Medicine Man,' and they made many requests of him for intercessions for rain and fair weather."[6] If Chaplain Vaux showed a tendency to live and let live, to refrain from active proselytizing, and even to respond favorably to their requests for spiritual "intercessions," Lieutenant Garnett, for his part, in fact, went further.

Lieutenant Richard Garnett went to Fort Laramie in 1852, leaving behind his wife and children in Virginia, a practice much more common in the earlier years than later. The documentation of his life on the post is largely limited to his official records and duties, but his private life may reveal important contours of social relationships on the post. Multiple versions of that personal legend exist, and the story has been put to several uses despite the lack of clear record. This much is certain: Lieutenant Garnett developed a relationship with an Oglala woman named Looking Woman, and she became either his wife or mistress, Garnett's existing marriage to a woman in Virginia notwithstanding. One account relates: "Lieut. Garnett married the beautiful maiden and proudly took her to his quarters."[7] The union produced a child who became future scout and interpreter Billy Garnett. What this shows is not necessarily rampant interracial cohabitation, but instead the absence of a strict line separating whites from Indians, and certainly a degree of acceptance of interracial relationships that would not be permissible a decade and a half later. At the same time, it may also show a double standard that has to do with gender but also has to do with social geography. When Garnett returned to the East, however open and accepted his relationship with Billy Garnett's mother may have been at Fort Laramie, he left her and their soon-to-be-born son in the West.

The other indication of a flexible interaction between whites and Indians at the fort in the years immediately following the 1851 treaty emerges actually in instances of

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[5] Hanna Cornaby, *Autobiography and Poems* (Salt Lake City: J. C. Graham & Co., 1881), 35. This volume is located in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.

[6] Vaux's daughter is quoted in an article in the *Wyoming Churchman*, with no citation on the copy found in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CREL-2.

[7] Eddie Herman, "Couple Credited with Heroism Lie Buried in Unmarked Graves," *Rapid City Journal*, November 26, 1950. A copy of this article is contained in the William Garnett file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files. Herman also says, "On April 25, 1855, the lieutenant's pretty wife gave birth to a fine baby boy. His father named him 'William' and proudly carried him to the Indian camp, much to the amusement of the old warriors. It was said that Lieut. Garnett was happy with his Indian wife and baby." This is the only account that contains this information, which is dubious, since other documents indicate that Garnett left Fort Laramie before his son was born. See also Emily Levine's information in Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun and Josephine Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes: A Lakota Woman Tells her People's History*, ed. Emily Levine (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 147.

conflict. Given the combination of massive numbers of whites traveling through Indian lands, wreaking significant damage on the Indians' habitat and economy, and the number of Indians gathering at the post and along the trail especially to await the distribution of annuities, misunderstandings, tensions, and individual frictions were likely to happen, treaty provisions or not. But two such incidents are especially notable for what they reveal about the larger context of Indian-white relations at the time, and what is especially notable is how people responded to such conflicts. They had not yet been locked into postures of group enmity and warfare.

In 1853, an incident which is still unclear provoked passions and generated death when soldiers killed three, four, or five Sioux; reportedly the troops were in pursuit of an individual who had fired upon a soldier during a dispute over the use of the ferry.[8] This happened in a large village near the fort and calls for reprisals began to circulate among the Indians. When Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick arrived, the Indians "stoutly insisted upon the immediate removal of the post from amongst them, saying that, when first placed there they were told it was for their protection, but now the soldiers of the Great Father are the first to make the ground bloody."[9] Fitzpatrick sat down with the Indians at council and called upon Lieutenant Garnett to visit the group and explain his version of what happened. After he did so, according to Fitzpatrick, "the slight interruption of friendly feeling gradually gave way, and I had the satisfaction of witnessing a much more amicable spirit manifested before my departure than at my arrival." Indeed, the Indians gathered and Fitzpatrick said they even accepted the amendments to the treaty of 1851 that had been made by Congress, reducing the annuities and the length of time for which they would be paid (an assent that would be disputed by others).[10] In any case, this

[8] See the accounts in George Belshaw, *Journey from Indiana to Oregon: Journal of George Belshaw*, typescript of journal in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CDIA-70, p. 9; *Diary of J. J. Conner*, typescript of diary in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-202, p. 18; George Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk: A History of the Brulé Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 56; George Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 70-71; LeRoy R. Hafen, *Broken Hand: The Life of Thomas Fitzpatrick: Mountain Man, Guide and Indian Agent* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973; originally published 1931 by the Old West Publishing Company), 314-315.

[9] Thomas Fitzpatrick, Annual Report, November 19, 1853, in *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, November 26, 1853, 366. This volume is located in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

[10] Fitzpatrick, Annual Report, November 19, 1853, 366. The 1851 treaty, which had promised the Sioux $50,000 per year for fifty years, was subsequently modified by the Senate to a time of ten years. Charles Kappler's collection of treaties notes, "This treaty as signed was ratified by the Senate with an amendment changing the annuity in Article 7 from fifty to ten years, subject to acceptance by the tribes. Assent of all tribes except the Crows was procured (see Upper Platte C., 570, 1853, Indian Office) and in subsequent agreements this treaty has been recognized as in force." Charles J. Kappler, ed. and comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II, Treaties* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1904), 594, 776. The subsequent acceptance of this modification by the tribes, however, is not universally recognized. While Indian Agent Thomas Fitzpatrick maintained that in 1853 the Sioux accepted the modifications, others disagreed. In fact, see the report of the 1868 peace commission on exactly this point: ". . . But it is equally true that in lieu of this privilege the United States was to pay them $50,000 per annum for 50 years. The Senate reduced the term to 10 years, and the Indians never having ratified the amendment, they have some right to claim, when the annuities are stopped at the end of 15 years a release from their obligations in this behalf." *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the*

demonstrates that, regardless of the origin of this incident, regardless of how inappropriate the military response may have been, and regardless of the pressures generating tension, in 1853 the relationship between the Indians and the army was such that personal discussion could prevent even serious issues involving the loss of life from escalating to general armed conflict.

Likewise another event in the summer of 1853 demonstrated flexibility, this time between Native Americans and emigrants. Garret Mountjoy and his family were in camp while heading west on the trail near Fort Laramie. An acquaintance of Mountjoy related, "the Indians are very plenty along here and they are all friendly." When one of those Indians walked into the family's camp and asked for something to eat, he was carrying a firearm which Mountjoy borrowed momentarily to look at. This seems to have been a friendly enough encounter. Unfortunately, when Mountjoy handed the weapon back to the Indian man, and then turned around, the gun accidentally discharged, immediately killing the white man. The Indian, the acquaintance wrote, then asked for Mountjoy's brother to put him to death, evidently as a matter of justice, "but they did not kill him." Instead of mobilizing, or even seeking retribution, the tragedy was accepted as "one very great accident."[11] These two events, one involving soldiers and Indians, the other involving emigrants and Indians, and both involving a loss of life, demonstrate a lenience and tolerance, a recognition that misunderstandings happen, and that when they happen war is not a necessary result. That would change the following year in what became known as the "Grattan massacre," although that label carries misleading implications.

To a hammer, the saying goes, the whole world looks like a nail. Or, to put it differently, the solution to a problem can look different from how it otherwise might, depending on the tools at your disposal. Such as when you are holding a gun in your hand. Or when you have a cannon. Or two cannons. Or two cannons and twenty-nine or thirty soldiers in your command. From this perspective, the Grattan incident can be summarized as a military commander, Lieutenant John L. Grattan, using very poor judgment—identifying the issue before him as one that could be resolved with the firepower at hand—leading to catastrophic results. And that is true, but the results of this action were not limited to the soldiers in Grattan's command nor were they limited to this field near the North Platte River about ten miles downstream from Fort Laramie. The consequences were much larger, and were profoundly historical, in that they helped shape relationships for years and decades to come.

In August 1854 a Mormon emigrant train had a lame ox fall behind or wander off as the party traveled the road west. A Miniconjou Sioux named High Forehead killed the ox and the emigrant reported the loss—theft—to the military at Fort Laramie. The commanding officer at the fort, Lieutenant Hugh B. Fleming, two years out of West Point and twenty-eight years old, summoned Conquering Bear, the Brulé chief with whom the Miniconjous were staying, and demanded that Conquering Bear turn High Forehead over to the military where he would be punished. Conquering Bear refused (High Forehead was not in his band) and offered restitution for the cow instead. Fleming, however,

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*Year 1868* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868). This report can also be found in a Furman University transcription at: http://facweb.furman.edu/~benson/docs/peace.htm.

[11] Wallis Goslin to Sarah Goslin and children, June 17, 1853, typescript of letter in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-42.

insisted on surrender of the culprit and the next morning dispatched Lieutenant Grattan, eager to demonstrate the force of the U.S. Army, to bring in High Forehead. Grattan's force took with them a mountain howitzer and a field gun and they marched into the encampments of the Sioux who were gathering near the fort to receive the annual allotment of goods promised them by the 1851 treaty. There were thus probably 1,200 warriors in those encampments. This was not a prudent move, the two big guns notwithstanding.

At the encampment where High Forehead was located, Conquering Bear told Grattan that the man would not surrender to the army; he also warned Grattan that he was following a dangerous course. Grattan ordered one cannon fired, and then the other, but they were aimed too high and while Conquering Bear was mortally wounded, they did little more damage; moreover, this left the cannons unable to fire again immediately. Historian Stephen Ambrose summarized what followed: "The Brulés poured out of their lodges; the Oglalas rode down on the Grattan party from the bluffs."[12] Within ten or fifteen minutes it was all over and Grattan and his entire party were dead. And within that short time the direction of history had shifted in several respects. An extraordinary, perhaps unprecedented, loss of life had taken place near the fort, where previously the goal, probably on both sides, had been to avoid such bloodshed. Also, the army had gone on the offensive and had lost. The Indians had fought back and won. So the army escalated the conflict, sending General W. S. Harney and 600 soldiers out the following season to punish the Sioux in their own territory. A turning point had been reached: peaceful, though not frictionless, relations had obtained previously; afterward the road led more and more to armed conflict.

The lenience, latitude, understanding, and tolerance that had once prevailed faded more and more at Fort Laramie. Moreover, pressure on the Indians to change and to conform to the military authority increased. Specifically, the pressures of "civilization" ratcheted up a few notches in the wake of the Grattan fight in 1854 in two ways. First, the Grattan fight signaled an intensification of social conflict. With new power, lines were being drawn, literally and figuratively, increasingly and inexorably, between whites and

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[12] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 64. The literature on this battle is extensive and well known. For a blow-by-blow chronology of the incident (and of other strictly military activity at the fort), see Douglas C. McChristian, *Fort Laramie: Military Bastion of the High Plains* (Norman, Oklahoma: The Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), but for an effort to understand the significance of the incident, Ambrose, though obviously dated in analysis, is more probing and thoughtful, contemplating Indian perspectives on the event including the possible presence of young Crazy Horse. On the last point, see also the old, and not always reliable, Mari Sandoz biography: *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas: A Biography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942), 28-31. Sandoz writes of Crazy Horse, called Curly at the time: "As the young Curly looked down upon this enemy of his people, his Indian blood rose like a war drum in his ears, swelling hot. For a moment it seemed he must kill, kill whites, many of them to make his heart good after what this man and the soldier chief had done in the Brule camp today." Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 29. That passage demonstrates some of the strengths—passion, empathy, cultural understanding, and even a sense of historical context—at the same time that it shows some weaknesses—recreating, or even fictionalizing, internal thoughts and reactions as if they were, or could be, documented. It is not universally agreed that Crazy Horse was present at this battle.

non-whites, especially Native Americans. And within the Native American population a line was drawn separating different factions of Indians. A state of war existed between the Indians and the soldiers, trade was prohibited with the Indians, and the traders were ordered into the fort, and, in fact, it took a special effort of the command to try to persuade everyone, whites and Indians alike, that General Harney's object in his 1855 punitive mission was *not* to kill all the Indians he could find.[13] Another line was unmistakable; it was the river itself. Indian Agent Thomas Twiss arrived at Fort Laramie shortly after the Grattan fight and his first action was to separate nearby Indians into two groups: "I declared the North Platte the boundary between the hostile and friendly Sioux,"[14] he reported, and he instructed the "friendly" Indians to come to Fort Laramie, south of the North Platte. Those who remained north of the river, as George Hyde summarized the Sioux understanding of Twiss's order, "would be dealt with by the troops. The men who had led in the Grattan killing and in the raids along the Platte road were known, and they were not to come in with the friendly camps. They were murderers and would be treated as such."[15] The North Platte River was literally, as Hyde explained, a "dead line."

After the establishment of this delineation, bands of Sioux began their movement away from the North Platte, a corridor dominated by whites, moving both to the north and the south. According to George Hyde, those who were left near Fort Laramie "were the ones who had become so entangled with the whites that they could not leave them." They came from different bands and formed a distinct group identified, according to Hyde, by their "more independent tribesmen, [as] Waglukhe, followers or loafers," since they made their living from the whites more than they did from hunting.[16]

There was also another aspect, for life at Fort Laramie became different for the whites there as well. Part of the change came simply with the increase in troop strength as Fort Laramie moved from a one-company outpost to a fort with four companies. While the military expedition under General Harney's command the following year attracted attention, the more subtle aspect of reinforcement with more troops, more units, and an augmented officer corps meant a significant change in the contours of life

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[13] William Chandless, *A Visit to Salt Lake; Being a Journey across the Plains and a Residence in the Mormon Settlements at Utah* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1857). This volume is located in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library. " . . . On the door of the store was posted a notice of pains and penalties to whoever should presume to trade with any of the Sioux nation, then at war with the United States; also another notice that some persons had, for evil purposes, spread among peaceful Indians a false and wicked rumour that General Harney meant to kill every Indian he could catch, whether Sioux or not, and that such persons and all others were forbidden to publish this rumour under pain, etc." This effort was not helped by local interpretations of Harney's success at Ash Hollow. Thomas P. McCann wrote his brother from Fort Laramie in November 1855, "You have heard of Harney's Indian fight and I know as much about it as I can tell you except some here call it a great victory and some a cold blooded massacre." McCann to Brother, November 25, 1855, typescript of letter located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-56.

[14] Twiss to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Manypenny, quoted in Alban W. Hoopes, "Thomas Twiss Indian Agent on the Upper Platte, 1855-1861," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XX (December 1933), 356.

[15] Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 69-70.

[16] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 86.

at the fort. A fair representation of the limited social interaction of Fort Laramie at the time of the Grattan battle can be easily discerned from the annual report submitted to his church offices by Rev. William Vaux for the period ending October 1854: "The fort, during this period, has been garrisoned but by one company of infantry; and, none of the officers having families, there has been little society, either for church or social privileges and enjoyment."[17] In July 1854, the post had three officers, and was commanded by a second lieutenant. By November, following the Grattan fight, seven officers served at Fort Laramie and the commanding officer was a major / brevet lieutenant colonel. In terms of leadership, military and social, Fort Laramie had undergone a revolution in a very short period of time. The Fort Laramie troop strength and officer corps would never revert to the pre-Grattan levels; by the winter of 1857-1858, the Fort Laramie command averaged 325 officers and men.[18] Society was becoming more structured at Fort Laramie and lines were being drawn between the whites who lived at the post just as a matter of military regimentation. Put another way, no longer would relationships be as casual, personal, and informal as they had been.

One way to describe Fort Laramie in the half decade before the Civil War was that it was becoming an increasingly complex society. In that sense the fort was coming to resemble more and more the social order of the future and less and less the social order of the past. But there is more to it than just complexity. It was a particular kind of social order, one with rigid stratification and privileges, one with burdens and opportunities apportioned according to position in social hierarchy. The point is that this ranking was not simply a function of military duty, but extended to all aspects of life at Fort Laramie.

Consider just the elementary circumstance of pay. Not only was the pay of the officers significantly greater than the pay of the enlisted men, but the officers faced different circumstances, especially obligations for personal and service-related expenses that did not fall to those in the enlisted ranks. There was also the byzantine system of paying members of the army that caused time lapses between paydays that were not only irregular but also incredibly long. This was not just a matter of pay being a few days late. In 1855, Colonel William Hoffman complained to headquarters about the duress that his command had to suffer because pay was overdue by six and eight months.[19]

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[17] Rev. William Vaux, chaplain, report to church from Fort Laramie, October 1, 1854, printed in *The Spirit of Missions; edited for the Board of Missions of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, vol. XX (New York: Dana and Company, 1855), 40-41.

[18] This number was provided in a medical report cited by Surgeon R. C. Wood in published correspondence with the Fort Laramie assistant surgeon as reproduced in Marie H. Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," *Annals of Wyoming*, 15 (October 1943), 331. The report was originally printed in U.S. Cong., Documents, 36th Congress, 1st session, Senate Executive Documents, No. 52, pp. 45-47 [Serial 1035].

[19] Letter from Major William Hoffman to Major O. F. Winship, September 7, 1855, typescript copy in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. The situation was summarized cogently in an 1857 letter: "A consequence of this system is to encourage men to desert for if a willingness to commit such an act is ever felt, it is sure to be put in practice when the Soldier finds himself with, for him, a large sum of money in his pocket …." Letter from Hoffman to Major Geo. Deas, typescript of letter, March 4, 1857, in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

The situation did not improve in the next several years either. Hoffman described the inequity of this arrangement: "To avoid the inconvenience of being without money, officers have been obliged to sell their pay accounts to the Sutler, and others but soldiers have no such resource, and whatever their wants may be they have no alternative but to await the arrival of a paymaster. At times to relieve their most pressing wants, the Sutler has, in charity felt obliged to give them a small credit at his own risk."[20] Senior officers managed well. Junior officers, it is important to note, were, as Hoffman explained, "obliged to sell their pay accounts," a circumstance indicating less than a sumptuous lifestyle. In fact, it conjures images of sharecropping or the crop-lien system in its fundamental relationship, with the debtor never able to catch up on payments. Moreover, the junior officers, with the lowest pay of the officer corps, still had the same financial obligations of food and uniform and entertaining as their senior brethren, and were thereby caught in a double bind of strained income and unavoidable expenses. And behind the junior officers were the others. Perhaps some in uniform at Fort Laramie—possibly the commanding officer, if of senior rank—continued life as normal but the bulk of the others suffered in frustration while waiting for the paymaster to visit at some unknown date, either because they had to do without or because they had already borrowed on the next payday's credit to cover their considerable expenses.

The hardship worked on the soldiers was palpable in other ways as well. The soldier who had a wife and family was not able to count on his rations to support all who depended upon him. While the number of soldiers with families in the early years appears small, it grew as the troop strength enlarged. The documents of enlisted men—the journals and letters they penned—are considerably fewer than those of their officers (which are themselves scarce enough), so it is difficult to assess the burdens they experienced. There are a few such records, however. As early as 1853, Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder protested the high price he was compelled to pay for goods from the post sutler. Noting that he had a family to support, and that his pay was insufficient to meet the needs of his family, Schnyder asked to be permitted to purchase goods at actual cost plus transportation, rather than at the inflated price at which goods were offered for sale by the sutler who set the price according to what the market would bear.[21] The line dividing soldiers from officers was more than a matter of military protocol and courtesy; it was a line that defined how people lived.

Then there was the civilian population at the fort and these people increasingly resembled the artisans and laborers of an eastern village rather than the work force of a fur trade post of just a few years before. With the build-up of the fort, the civilian population increased dramatically as the army hired more and more people to attend to the needs of the installation as teamsters, bull-whackers, carpenters, bakers, drivers, laundresses, butchers, blacksmiths, housekeepers, barbers, tailors, gunsmiths, clerks, and all of the other crafts and skills that one would find in an American community at mid-century, working either for the government, especially the quartermaster, or for the civilian enterprises associated with the fort. These employees often came from the

[20] Typescript of letter, March 4, 1857, in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.
[21] See the letter from Schnyder to Lieutenant Garnett, October 8, 1853, quoted at length in John Dishon McDermott, "Fort Laramie's Silent Soldier: Leodegar Schnyder," *Annals of Wyoming*, 36 (April 1964), 11,13, and also other documents in the Leodegar Schnyder file in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MP-3.

continuing stream of emigrants passing through. Friedrich Sager wrote home to his parents that he had been on his way to California when both he and his uncle became ill and were hospitalized. While his uncle's fate appeared bleak, Sager got a job at the fort. "I am a baker in the regiment bakery I have no certain wages. I earn more than I could in the states even at 5.00 a week."[22] He decided to remain at Fort Laramie instead of continuing to California. Likewise, Steven Forsdick, on his way east from Utah in 1856, recalled that "I passed the Sutler's Store and a man asked me if I did not want a job." John Tutt hired him to cook at the store.[23] Later, a woman Forsdick had previously known fled from a Mormon wagon train and remained at the fort where she found employment working for the wife of an officer.[24]

The distinct line separating the pattern of life followed by the civilians, whether private or government employees, from that of the soldiers was documented in one of the more revealing documents to come out of Fort Laramie in the 1850s, a report generated by Assistant Surgeon E. W. Johns at the post. Johns noticed in 1858 that enlisted men were much more likely to contract scurvy than were their officers or the "mountain men" at the post; indeed scurvy was rampant among the soldiers and completely absent among the other two groups.[25] When Johns reported this fact to his medical superiors, he was challenged by the Surgeon General's Office; therefore he developed an analysis of the constituency at Fort Laramie comparing the lives they led.

The soldiers at Fort Laramie, Johns reported, lived a life characterized by "hopeless mental monotony, the effects of depressing cold, particularly at night, after a day of monotony pendulistic fatigue." That dull, regimented garrison life, especially noticeable in something like guard duty, contrasted sharply with the activities of the civilian employees of the quartermaster. The life of the civilian employee, he argued,

> is not attended by that monotonous routine and confinement which the soldier is subjected to in the performance of his duties. Each quartermaster man is an *individual*, under general supervision, indeed, but exercising his powers, mental and physical, according to the requirements of the particular work he may have to do. Does he drive a team? He does not drive it up and down over a distance geometrically described as being the shortest between two given points, but he has the management of his animals and varied scenery to employ his thoughts. If he is a carpenter, wheelwright, or blacksmith, his mental motives and physical are those of an *individual* working with forecast, and not by rote. Add to these influences, good pay and regular nightly rest, and the

[22] Letter from Fredrick Sager at Fort Laramie, to parents, June 15, 1852, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-14. The original letter is in German, and while it appears in some particulars to deviate from the handwritten translation accompanying it, the combination of repeated photocopying and less than precise handwriting impair further translation efforts. The lines quoted from the translation appear accurate.

[23] Steven Forsdick, typescript of untitled memoir, p. 41, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CDIA-35.

[24] Forsdick, memoir, p. 45.

[25] "Northern Division, Sanitary Report, Fort Laramie," December 1858, in Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," 322-326.

> wholesome conviction that his employment depends upon his restraint, to at least a great degree, of whatever vicious tendencies he may have, and the sum shows a balance greatly in favor of the quartermaster's man.[26]

Johns also contrasted the life of both uniformed soldiers and civilian quartermaster employees with the circumstances of another group that lingered around the fort still, a group he characterized as mountain men. The "mountain men" are an elusive group demographically but they likely included traders and interpreters, as well as others, who had lived in the area for years. These were the people who had lived at Fort Laramie (and its predecessors) before the arrival of the military, and these were the people to whom Francis Parkman referred when he said, "they seemed to aim at assimilating themselves to their savage associates." And that was exactly the question—whether these people had forsaken white society and its conventions and adopted the patterns of the natives of the area. Thomas Fitzpatrick, himself an old mountain man, had vigorously defended the group in 1851, lamenting that "troops on duty in that country are strongly prejudiced against this class of men, and are disposed to persecute them to any extent, even so far as to separate them from their families and drive them out of the country." The mountain men, he argued, were people "continually in advance and opening the way for a more refined and civilized people."[27] Just a few years later, though, the individual who served in the very position Fitzpatrick held as Indian Agent, turned it around and made it clear that he believed the mountain men were not the advance agents of civilization; instead, Thomas Twiss proclaimed, "those whites who reside among the Indians of the prairies are neither the pioneers of civilization nor settlements, but emphatically fugitives from both . . . ."[28] The mountain men, the traders and trappers who originally established this outpost, were being shunned and reviled as

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[26] "Sanitary Report, Fort Laramie," December, 1858, as printed in Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," 331-347.

[27] Thomas Fitzpatrick, Annual Report, November 24, 1851, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1851*, 336. This volume, identified only in its interior as House Document No. 1, is located in the Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library. Fitzpatrick was specifically referring to the mountain men at Fort Laramie in this report and in a letter to Captain Ketchum asking that the unlicensed traders in the area be considered, *en masse*, licensed.

[28] This is taken from a letter from Twiss to Commissioner Manypenny, September 12, 1856, quoted by Hoopes, "Thomas Twiss, Indian Agent on the Upper Platte," 364. There is, however, an important irony associated with Twiss. He arrived at Fort Laramie in 1855 with considerable zeal in his effort to "civilize" the Indians and to generate locally the values and conventions of established white society. He soon, however, became involved in antagonisms with some of the traders and also the military at Fort Laramie. In 1857 he moved the agency from Fort Laramie to Deer Creek, he fought to retain his office, and he succeeded until 1861 when President Lincoln removed him. While he generally faded from the scene afterwards, Lieutenant Eugene Ware reported encountering him in 1864, with "several squaws" and "dressed thoroughly as an Indian." Ware learned from others that "he was educated in West Point, had been a Major in the regular army, and made up his mind years before to become an Indian, and live with the Sioux. That his name was Major Twiss; was married into the Sioux tribe; came down to Fort Laramie occasionally, and went back up into the unexplored Indian country, nobody knew where. The next day I inquired about him further, because I wanted to see him again, but he had gone out to the squaw camp, and from there he and his squaws disappeared to the north." Eugene Ware, *The Indian War of 1864* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960; 1994 reprint by University of Nebraska Press), 210-211. Thomas Twiss had become one of the fugitives from established society that he had railed against earlier.

enemies of and obstacles to civilization. What Twiss was pointing to, as much as underscoring the existence of a different culture at Fort Laramie, was the way in which expanding civilization made outcasts of people who simply continued their earlier way of life.

These were the same people Assistant Surgeon Johns described at the end of the 1850s. While Johns identified them as living a lifestyle more identified with Indians than with the soldiers, he did so with a spirit that might be dismissed as romantic were it not for his first-hand association and inquiry: "The mountain men, Johns said, ". . . have this favorable conjunction of circumstances. They live a free, open Indian life, crowded neither as to quarters nor as to communities. They have a sufficiently good diet apparently; also sufficiently mixed and varied." Although he focused especially on their diet, his observations broadened to the larger difference of lifestyle when he noted that "They are not all crowded in their accommodations; have plenty of fresh air; do but little labor; and just enough to give them wholesome, but not fatiguing exercise, and to enable them to provide for their families. They have generally domestic relations, of not very elevated degree, indeed, but regular domestic connections with the Indian women, recognized throughout the country."[29] Like Twiss, and even like Parkman earlier, Johns drew a line separating the life of mountain men from life in established society, although he reversed the social valuations they had applied and Johns placed the greater negative burden on military regimentation and restrictions. He may even have done so with a certain amount of envy toward these apparently undisciplined, free-living peoples who represented the past and who represented an alternative to the ascending order of civilization.

If Johns raised the issue of discipline in drawing the line in everyday life, others noted a starker division when it came to the way the army enforced discipline. Even then, however, the civilians were not completely exempt. Civilian Steven Forsdick in 1856 was fortunate one night when, he said, "Taps sounded as I was crossing the parade ground, but the Sentry did not challenge me . . . ."[30] He was fortunate because Colonel Hoffman, according to Forsdick, "was a very stern man, a strict martinet."[31] There is some basis for Forsdick's fear of army discipline. Discipline in the ranks was severe, and punishment of offenders sometimes brutal. Vincent Page Lyman, traveling through the area in 1860, reported one such instance. He described two soldiers punished for desertion. They were handcuffed with their hands behind them, with an iron rod passing between their legs and fastened to the handcuffs by another chain, the rod attached to a short chain which was attached to a cannon ball which they dragged as they moved. Then they were taken to "the Stocks" where they stooped over a small beam with their hands and feet fastened and were stripped of their clothes except for their pants:

> Then they were ready to receive their 50 lashes, which were given by a good-sized Irishman who seemed to be used to the business, (as he rolled up his sleeves and took a raw-hide three feet long in the shape of a

[29] "Sanitary Report, Fort Laramie," December, 1858, as printed in Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," 336.
[30] Forsdick, memoir, 45.
[31] Forsdick, memoir, 45.

> black-snake whip with fine crackers or small buck-skin braided lashes on the end). The music then struck up a slow march by which the man kept good time with his whip as the steady crack could be heared [*sic*] for some distance above the groans and cries of the victim thus tortured in worse than brutal manner.

After describing the savage lashing that left the men gashed and bloodied, Lyman said that he and his companion returned to their camp "not wishing to inlist at present," and "satisfied with ou[r] lot and feeling thankful that were not soldiers of the United States."[32] The line between military service and civilian life has often been drawn with blood, but this incident revealed a form of bloodshed not always reckoned.

Officers, soldiers, mountain men, civilian employees—conventional categories often restrict the analysis of the population to men. And the records documenting the life of women at Fort Laramie in the 1850s are scant. Until the latter half of the decade, at least, there were but few white women at the fort, and it is not entirely clear how many lived there as the fort grew. Of these women some were the wives of officers and some were the women who were employed at the post in one capacity or another, and who appear to have been sometimes the wives of soldiers and non-commissioned officers. While much of the world of women at Fort Laramie is obscured from modern view, this much is certain: there was, among the women, the customary hierarchy that followed military rank. Captain Jesse Gove, a company commander in the 10th Infantry, was on his way to Utah in 1857 when his unit halted at Fort Laramie. While there, Gove reported in a letter to his own wife at home that he was invited to dine with Colonel Hoffman and the colonel's wife, the only woman he mentioned at the fort. "Mrs. H. is a high headed piece of furniture, fully corroborating what I have heard of her before." The next day he seems to have corrected himself or backtracked slightly when he wrote that, "Mrs. H. is a large woman and a very agreeable companion. She is somewhat masculine in her deportment, and comports very much in her manner with what I have heretofore heard of her. I am well pleased with her."[33] While it remains a puzzle exactly what Captain Gove meant by masculine deportment, and perhaps he associated any assertive behavior or outspokenness as masculine, one thing is certain: she was not a withdrawn wallflower and she made herself conspicuous and evidently developed an assertive reputation for so doing.

In addition to the wife of the commander, a few other women were evident at Fort Laramie in the 1850s. There were, first of all, the other officers' wives. At least Charles Page, the assistant surgeon, was married; his wife was the one who employed Malissa Davenport when she fled the Mormon wagon train and was thereby permitted to remain at the fort. And then there were the wives of some enlisted men and non-commissioned officers, and the wives of some of the civilians as well. Steven Forsdick reported that when he and Malissa Davenport were married, "Mrs. Covington made us a wedding supper." This was the wife of Sam Covington, a civilian who cooked for the colonel.[34]

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[32] Diary kept by Vincent Page Lyman, typescript, excerpts copied in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CDIA-14.

[33] Gove to his wife, September 2, 1857, in Otis G. Hammond, ed., *The Utah Expedition, 1857-1858: Letters of Capt. Jesse A. Gove* (Concord: New Hampshire Historical Society, 1928), 50-51.

[34] Forsdick, memoir, 42, 45.

While it appears that most white women at the fort were married, there also may have been some single women. It appears, for example, that at the same time that Malissa Davenport left her train in the dark of night to join her future husband, another young woman left the handcart company she was traveling with and remained at the fort, but it is not known if she managed to stay or if she rejoined the handcart company.[35] In 1858 when Surgeon Johns reported on the health of the various classes of military and civilians at Fort Laramie, he noted that the men employed by the quartermaster "had a Mormon woman to cook for their mess a great part of the time."[36] Given the documentation available, perhaps only one pattern is clear. The white women who were permitted to remain at Fort Laramie fell into one of three groups. Either they were the wives of officers who were at the fort in a privileged position, they were employed at the fort performing domestic service, or they were wives of non-commissioned officers, and the last two groups may have overlapped. While gender differences clearly separated the world of women from the world of men at Fort Laramie in the 1850s, it is unclear how much class differences—as dictated by rank and employment—may have divided the experience of women at the fort. If there was a further line dividing women, it would be that of separating married from unmarried, if, in fact, there were unmarried women living at the fort aside from the daughters in the families there.

Of the experience of children of civilians and soldiers, even less is known and most of that is clouded in ambiguity. In 1854 Reverend Vaux indicated that the officers at the fort had no families present. It appears that Vaux himself, however, had his family with him at Fort Laramie. Describing the fort in the aftermath of the Grattan fight, one of his daughters reported, "My father walked guard on the old fort walls during that time. I was then a very small child."[37] Of course when the post began its reinforcement and enlargement, more soldiers appeared, and by 1856 Colonel Hoffman attempted to start a school for the children of the post. He turned to Vaux to serve as teacher for the school but immediately ran into determined opposition. While the school seems to have started operation, under Vaux's tutelage, in March 1856, Vaux protested vehemently. According to Colonel Hoffman, Vaux refused to teach two of the children, one an adopted child of one of the soldiers, and the other Hoffman's own eleven-year-old bound servant girl. Vaux, Hoffman reported, felt so strongly about the matter that he "has expressed to me how reluctant he is to perform this one of his duties, and has informed me that rather than do this duty he will give up his place at the earliest opportunity. He withholds his own children from the school and there is reason to believe that he hopes by excluding

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[35] Lynne Slater Turner, ed., *Emigrating Journals of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies and the Hunt and Hodgett Wagon Trains* (n.p.: by the author, 1996), 38. The Lucinda M. Davenport reported missing from the Grant and Kimball wagon train is doubtless the same Malissa Davenport who married Steven Forsdick, identified here only as an "apostate Mormon." Christine Brown, the second runaway, left the ill-fated Willie Handcart Company. There may have been others too since the journal keeper for the Willie Company noted, "The first thing this morning, it was discovered that several sisters had left the camp and had taken up their residence at the fort." Entry for October 1, 1856, Turner, *Emigrating Journals of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies and the Hunt and Hodgett Wagon Trains*, 40.

[36] Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," 346-347.

[37] This quotation is taken from an unmarked photocopy of an article by one of Vaux's daughters in the *Wyoming Churchman*. The copy of the article is located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CREL-2.

the two children to whom he objects, the number of his scholars will be so small as to cause the school to be discontinued."[38] Exactly why Vaux declined to accept the two students in his classroom can only be speculated. Perhaps Hoffman was correct and Vaux simply did not want to teach at all. Some have conjectured that the eleven-year-old in Hoffman's house was a slave;[39] that might fit with his description of his bound servant girl, although bonds of indenture and apprenticeship could also apply. The issue surrounding the second student, the adopted child, sometimes referred to as an orphan, is even more opaque, although one casual assumption might indicate that this was the mixed-blood child of a soldier who left the post. This can only be speculated, but other circumstances that would cause a teacher to reject students are not readily discernible. While it is frustrating to try to identify the outcome of this particular incident and the fate of the evidently short-lived school, this scrap of evidence suggests that school was not a regularly established feature of life at Fort Laramie in the 1850s and that its destiny was shaped by a felt need in some quarters to restrict education to a single privileged group, possibly on the basis of race, class, or ethnicity—or all the above. At any rate, there was, it is fair to say, a lack of widespread enthusiasm for establishing a system of education at Fort Laramie in the early years.[40]

For all the development at Fort Laramie in the decade, it would be easy to overstate the extent to which life at the post had moved away from the informality and casual relationships of its predecessor. Life was not yet completely separated and compartmentalized according to the standards of refined taste, prejudice, and class consciousness. There remained in fact two large and significant areas in which barriers

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[38] Letter from Hoffman to Assistant Adjutant General, Fort Leavenworth, September 16, 1856, typescript in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[39] While some undocumented modern speculation in the historical files of Fort Laramie specifically avers that the child was a slave, and even that Hoffman was her father, the more measured interpretation is that presented in Lodisa C. Watson, "Fort Laramie 1849-1869," MA thesis, University of Wyoming, 1963, 38. Watson states circumspectly, "Mr. Hoffman insisted that the bond child was treated as a member of his family, and it was his duty to educate her."

[40] As to the fate of Vaux himself, Hoffman expended significant energy trying to rid himself of the chaplain. He wrote his superiors complaining of Vaux, "The services of Mr. Vaux as Chaplain, which are confined to a short service on Sunday mornings, with, on the average, a half-dozen hearers, and attendance at funerals, are in my opinion of less value than the instruction of a single child at the post school. He never visits the sick nor in any way interests himself in the moral condition of the soldiers, and if he is not prompted to perform these duties so clearly required of him by the regulations, by a sense of his obligations as a minister of the Gospel, it would be vain to exact them of him by an order." Letter from Hoffman to Major Geo. Deas, September 16, 1856, typescript of letter in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. Unsuccessful in these efforts, Colonel Hoffman the following spring seems to have taken a different approach to the Vaux situation and enthusiastically recommended him for a chaplain position elsewhere. Letter from Hoffman to Colonel S. Cooper, April 20, 1857, typescript in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. In the long run, however, Hoffman left Fort Laramie in 1857 and Vaux left in 1860. And whatever Vaux's intentions may have been regarding the constituency of his classroom, one of his daughters many years later said, "We children, as well as our older sisters, talked Sioux and remember many words yet, so that even now my sister and I can converse in that tongue." If Reverend Vaux was busy drawing the lines separating cultures and races, his children were busy blurring those same lines. See the unidentified photocopy of an article by one of Vaux's daughters in the *Wyoming Churchman*, located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CREL-2.

fell and lines blurred. One was under their nose. The sutler store and post office at Fort Laramie served as centers for congregation and social discourse, but they served that function for virtually the entire community at the same time. One emigrant put it succinctly:

> The Sutler's store, where the postoffice is located, like a dog fight in a country village, brought the whole encampment together—officers and soldiers, road masters and teamsters, all congregated to hear the news or anxious to get some kindly missive from home.[41]

If the tendency of "civilized" society was to fragment and isolate different parts of the community from each other, the store was either a vestige of an earlier time where it remained the social center or it was the point of resistance to complete transformation—perhaps both. As an institution that preceded the military presence at the fort and as an institution whose essential function of selling to a broad clientele precluded exclusionary boundaries, the store remained a zone free of social artifice, where social status among the customers melted and yielded to more democratic or egalitarian impulses. Indeed, future, developing class distinctions would, if anything, cause the elite to shy away from and even turn over the store and post office as gathering places for the throngs of humanity.

The other blurring of the lines came in the large mixed-blood population at and around the fort. The various traders in the area seemed universally identified with their Indian wives. Whether it was the lordly Seth Ward or any of the other traders and interpreters around like Joseph Bissonette, John Baptiste Richard, Edmond Guerrier, Sefroy Iott, Nicholas Janis, Joseph Knight, John Hunter, James Bordeaux, Geminien P. Beauvais, Sam Deon, and others, they commonly had Indian wives and not infrequently they had more than one. In the case of interracial marriages, it is important to note that the army at Fort Laramie, at least in surviving documentation, remained officially silent regarding the practice and thus perhaps even offered a tacit approval. After all, it had not been that long since Lieutenant Richard Garnett openly fathered a child with an Indian mother, whether they were married or not, while he served as post commander. On the other hand, after Richard Garnett, the officer corps at Fort Laramie seems to have included no Indian wives in the 1850s. The years after Garnett's experience appear to have been a transitional period in which interracial marriage was accepted, but not among officers, and perhaps only among the civilian population at the post. The strictures and restraints of "civilization" were creeping more steadily into life at the post.

A clue to the process might be found in a report from T. S. Kenderdine, a bullwhacker who came through Fort Laramie in 1858. The year before, the Indian Agency had moved from Fort Laramie to Deer Creek. While Kenderdine offered observations about the military and about his own activities while at Fort Laramie, he said nothing of interracial marriages until he visited Deer Creek:

> These traders had mostly a plurality of wives, which they purchased from their fathers with powder and whisky, and which they put aside at their

[41] Eugene T. Wells, "Kirk Anderson's Trip to Utah, 1858," *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin*, 56 (October 1961), 11.

> pleasure as soon as old age has marred their beauty. We stopped a short time in this village, but none of the Indians came around us, as they were restrained by the traders from mingling among other whites, of whom they were very jealous. These traders were a rough, hardy set, and but a little better civilized than their bronze-faced allies, whom they had a great influence over.[42]

It would be an overstatement and oversimplification to suggest that the "frontier" had moved west, beyond Fort Laramie, but at the same time it is worthy of note that the world that Kenderdine reported prevailing at Deer Creek probably resembled Fort Laramie as it existed prior to the military occupation more than it did the Fort Laramie that he visited a few days earlier.

And Fort Laramie was a vastly different community on the eve of the Civil War than it was at the time of the big treaty council a decade earlier. It would be possible to say, metaphorically and culturally, that the line dividing the East from the West shifted some in the 1850s. At the beginning of the decade, Fort Laramie was clearly isolated in terms of distance, time, and even culture from the organized society of the United States. By the end of the 1850s some of that isolation had been lost.[43] Literally hundreds of thousands of emigrants had passed through, trading, sharing news, interacting in multiple ways with the denizens of Fort Laramie. Soldiers with families came and went in increasing numbers, rotating in and out of the fort instead of remaining there on a permanent basis, bringing the institutions, values, and expectations of the East to this site on the Laramie River instead of adapting to the surrounding environment and culture.

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[42] T. S. Kenderdine*, A California Tramp and Later Footprints* (Newtown, PA: Globe Printing House, 1888), 77.

[43] See also the note in the obituary for John Dougherty, a former trader at Fort Laramie, in 1861: "This trip is now destitute of romance; it has become common—it is the work of a few months—not so fifty-two years ago—then it was a terra incognito—the labor of years and full of danger—as the wily savage watched for the daring adventurer along his entire voyage." Liberty, Missouri, *Tribune*, January 4, 1861, clipping in "The Papers of Major John Dougherty Relating to Fort Laramie, 1848 to 55," typescript in Dougherty file at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files. "Transcribed from the microfilm at Fort Laramie National Monument by Marilyn R. Brittenham & David L. Hieb – 1951" This collection of documents is from materials located at the Missouri Historical Society. Obituary for Dougherty written by Col. Alexander W. Doniphan, in Liberty, Missouri *Tribune*, January 4, 1861. Dougherty had first ventured west in 1808.

The pressures for more change increased, even taking on a life of their own, feeding on themselves, growing at an exponential rate, and in the process altering the social fabric of the whole region. Just as the line separating life at the fort from life in the East faded, the line separating the fort and the area surrounding it became starker. What it all meant was plain. The pressure on the institutions, habits, and customs of life at Fort Laramie to conform to those in the established society of the East accelerated and intensified; as that pressure increased, as social change intensified, the fort grew more like the society back in the states it represented than it did the society that surrounded it.

# Chapter 5

# An Engine of Change, 1861-1866

It is an irony that while the rest of the nation plunged into the darkness of a deep and terrible war during the years 1861-1865, while destruction and calumny reigned elsewhere, and while powerful social forces reshaped the country, life at Fort Laramie seemed almost a haven from strife, and in some instances this military installation that had geared up for battle for a dozen years represented a bit of sanctuary from war and conflict. At least it seemed that way on the surface before the escalation of tension and military incidents with Indians by the end of the period. Beneath the placid surface, however, undercurrents of social change quietly but forcefully shaped social structure in ways that increasingly fragmented life in and around Fort Laramie. And during the Civil War, Fort Laramie became even more of an engine of change in this part of the West, a symbol of the future instead of the past.

If the rest of the nation was being torn apart, the main act of physical destruction at Fort Laramie during the Civil War was the deliberate and purposeful dismantling of Fort John, the old adobe fort that had served as stockade, home, corral, store, and every other important function after the demise of the wooden fort and before the military takeover.[1] And during the war, a variety of new buildings and improvements took shape. The old fort had been a reminder of its fur trade origins, a symbol of the times and society that produced it. Now it was gone. In late 1862, Colonel William Collins reported, "Six shops for company and post artisans have been built during the past month and are now in use."[2] By 1864 Sergeant William Henry Cowell noted after Colonel Collins had the graveyard fenced, "it was a job that needed doing very bad it is a large grave yard for this Country fort Larama is improving very fast."[3] Fort Laramie was coming to resemble the New England village more and more. Historian Alison Hoagland explained the significance of this kind of development in terms reminiscent of a long-standing, city-on-a-hill tradition, as a beacon to those outside the dominant culture:

> When eastern observers equated the fort with the familiar image of a village, they saw in it what was eastern and, to them, civilized. In building forts that recalled villages, army officers served as cultural emissaries of

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[1] H. S. Schell, "Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory," in *A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army*, War Department, Surgeon-General's Office, Circular No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1869), 347: "A portion of the old adobe fort was standing until 1862, when it was entirely demolished and the adobes used in the construction of the front portion of the magazine."

[2] This is from an undated report by Collins that appears to have been prepared in the autumn of 1862, reprinted in Agnes Wright Spring, *Caspar Collins: The Life and Exploits of an Indian Fighter of the Sixties* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1927), 144.

[3] William Henry Cowell, diary, March 22, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MDIA-13, p. 27.

> the government, not just as military representatives. The military's impact in the West included the introduction of a culture that eventually dominated the region. The army not only enabled settlement by Anglo-Americans who re-created villages from back East but also created similar cultural forms itself. Within a military mission, within a strict hierarchy that undeniably made the western posts different from nonmilitary settlements, the military nonetheless evoked a civilian norm that revealed its origins in the dominant culture of the East.[4]

At precisely the moment that the institutions and values of a particular form of organized society were in danger in the states, the material trappings of civilization seemed to be surging forward at Fort Laramie.

The first thing that is noticeable among the soldiers who served at Fort Laramie during the Civil War was that they bore a lighter burden than did their brothers-in-arms who fought against the South.[5] Especially as the war ground on and as the horrors of combat became inescapably brutal, the contrast between a sometimes-leisurely life at Fort Laramie and combat in the East was not missed by anyone. Lieutenant Eugene Ware recalled that "My duties as Post Adjutant were very light."[6] When Orville Root passed through the fort on his way west, he wrote home that he had encountered a friend of the family who served as hospital steward at Fort Laramie, and on the ease of his life: "I am stoping with Kibb and am living on the top shelf. He is steward here and is having a tip top time. He was very glad to see me took me right in to his department and urged me to stay as long as I wanted to. So you see I am in clover living off from Uncle Samuel." Root then went on to say "the soldiers have very comfortable quarters and seem to enjoy themselves highly."[7]

While incidents always emerged that required some kind of military response, while scouting parties were often in the field, and while some soldiers were detached to serve at satellite outposts from Laramie, the bulk of the duty at Fort Laramie was routine garrison life and much of it carried light duty. Corporal Franklin Tubbs, of the Ohio volunteers serving at Fort Laramie, wrote his father that he was helping out a scientist from the Smithsonian Institution who was gathering wildlife specimens: "I am excused

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[4] Alison K. Hoagland, "Village Constructions: U.S. Army Forts on the Plains, 1848-1890," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 34 (Winter 1999)," 237.

[5] At least one person made a point of choosing to remain at Fort Laramie when the fighting started, declining an offer of promotion and a unit of his own. Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder, who had been at Fort Laramie since 1849, was offered a commission as captain in the regular army but chose to stay at Fort Laramie, "saying that he felt he would be of more value on the frontier fighting Indians." This is cited in various sources in the Leodegar Schnyder file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files. In 1851 Schnyder had been detailed as assistant librarian and in 1859 was appointed postmaster at Fort Laramie.

[6] Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960; 1994 reprint by University of Nebraska Press), 199.

[7] Letter from Orville Root to father or family, from Fort Laramie, May 5, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-258.

from all duty all I have to do is skin Birds and hunt them so I have it easy."[8] Some of them readily admitted the favorable circumstance, perhaps even gloating over it. Tubbs wrote his sister in June 1864, in his unique articulation, "I are having good times I think I am having better times than I would down south wee have no fighting here and we would have down south."[9] As if to make sure that everyone understood just how fortunate he was to be at Fort Laramie, a month later Tubbs wrote her again in reference to the friends and relatives from his hometown who had signed up for a different mission: "you was speeking about the independants Boy I am glad that I am not with them for I suppose they are having very hard times now a soaldier cant have better times than wee are having here all the difereance is that wee cant see any towns like they can [but] wee can do with out that then to be down south Ill bet the boys wish they had inlisted for laramie."[10]

Some soldiers obviously found garrison life to their liking. Orville Root wrote home, "The boys are enjoying themselves very well. They say they never saw time fly so fast as it does since they have been here. They hunt fish and *sleep* a good deal."[11] They had a reading room and library containing more than six hundred volumes along with current newspapers and magazines, as well as "all the principal newspapers, and magazines published in the United States, besides telegraph despatches, which are coming in every day"—another sign of the connection with the East. Colonel Collins noted, "The literary material is circulated among distant posts and exchanged in the manner of a traveling library system." While there are scattered references to such a reading room earlier in the history of the fort, it appears to have thrived during the Civil War largely because of the efforts of Colonel Collins himself. Private Hervey Johnson explained to his family back in Ohio that Colonel Collins furnished the reading room at his own expense. "Here," said Private Johnson, "those who are fond of literary pastime, may sit and amuse themselves without being molested."[12]

Church may not have been a great attraction for many, although services were held regularly on Sundays for much of the war. They were discontinued from some time in late 1864 until a new chaplain arrived in February 1866. In the summer of 1864 when Lewis Byram Hull confessed to his family that he had not regularly attended church, or as he termed it, "divine service" in the library, he also noted that it was sparsely

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[8] Letter from Franklin Tubbs to father, May 23, 1864. Franklin Tubbs Letters, 1864-1866, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. Eugene Ware also noted that two civilians were at Fort Laramie gathering snakes for the Smithsonian Institution. Eugene F. Ware, *The Indian War of 1864* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960; 1994 reprint by University of Nebraska Press), 252.

[9] Franklin Tubbs letter to sister, June 20, 1864, Franklin Tubbs Letters.

[10] Franklin Tubbs letter to sister, July 27, 1864, Franklin Tubbs Letters.

[11] Letter from Orville Root to father or family, from Fort Laramie, May 14, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-258.

[12] Collins' description is from the undated report from autumn of 1862, reprinted in Spring, *Caspar Collins*, 146. Letter from Hervey Johnson to Sister, November 23, 1863, in William E. Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country, 1863-1866* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1979), 70. Where Collins puts the collection at six hundred volumes, Johnson noted three or four hundred.

attended: “Attended first time for three months. Not many present.”[13] A perhaps more inviting Sunday activity was riding. Franklin Tubbs wrote home that “me and ome [Homer?] was riding our Ponys yesterday round the fort wee had a nice ride wee take a ride most every sundy the Pony that I have got is a little fellow I can stand on the ground and throw my leg over him he is a nice one all of our Boys has got Indians Ponys.”[14] In addition, it appears that the soldiers would go hunting on occasion and would visit the neighboring Indian camps to trade for moccasins or buffalo robes or perhaps for some other kind of social contact, including possible sexual liaisons, although those last activities remain generally undocumented.

The other side of the lack of urgency and action was the ennui of routine. While Corporal Tubbs may have been able to keep himself occupied, others expressed the gnawing away of time in boredom. Light duty, when prolonged, may actually be the bane of garrison life. Consider the comment of Sergeant Cowell: “Nothing of importants this day transpired or worth of note fort larama is ver nise plase but very lonsom Nothing new just what is the bisness of to day is the bysness for to morow and so on evry day the saim all is old and nothing new tis not like it would be if we ware whare we could see something new.”[15] While this may be one of the most despondent lamentations of garrison life at any time, consider also the letter from an unknown soldier in 1862 as he returned to Fort Laramie from a trip to Fort Halleck: “it is very dull to come here to this post I always dread it when I am out on a march. Every day is the same except the changes of weather. The bugle commences blowing the first thing the morning and is tooting away when you are in bed at night. The same calls all the time.”[16] The weariness seems to have been more mental than physical in this period. Even during the years of increased tactical operations, 1864 and beyond, the frustrations for those remaining in garrison and those wanting to be released from their volunteer duty seemed to rise.

In those circumstances some found the temptation of alcohol compelling. During his stay at the post, Orville Root wrote home, “Whiskey is the ruination of nearly all the men in this country. There are but very few men in the Fort but drink to excess and among that number I am very happy to say is included my very kind friends Dock U & Kibb.”[17] Determining exactly how much drinking took place at Fort Laramie is an impossible task. There are a few clues, though. In 1864 the commander issued an order limiting the officers to the purchase of two gallons of whiskey from commissary

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[13] Myra E. Hull, ed., “Soldiering on the High Plains: The Diary of Lewis Byram Hull,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 7 (February 1938), 13; see also the 1862 report from Colonel Collins in Spring, *Caspar Collins*, 146.

[14] Franklin Tubbs letter to brother, August 1, 1864, Franklin Tubbs Letters.

[15] William Henry Cowell, diary, January 20, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MDIA-13.

[16] Unsigned letter to Dear Mother, October 8, 1862, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-37.

[17] Letter from Orville Root to father or family, May 14, 1864. Typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-258. Although Root’s mastery of grammar proved less than perfect, his intention was clear, that most of the men at the post drank, to his mind, excessively. He said of Colonel William O. Collins, “He is not much of a man drinks a large [amount?] of poor whiskey.” At the time that he wrote, Collins’ wife, Catharine Wever Collins, not only a conspicuous teetotaler but also crusader against drinking, was with him at Fort Laramie.

each month.[18] What is most revealing about that order is that it evidently was based upon the need to reduce the consumption to a still substantial amount. Two gallons a month, if distributed exactly evenly over a period of thirty days would be a limit of more than eight and a half ounces each and every day. This takes into account neither the actual alcohol content or quality of the liquor, nor does it consider the opportunity to purchase alcohol from other traders aside from the government commissary, or the possibility of sharing (both their own and the allowance of others) with guests and family, so any statistical effort to calculate consumption is fraught with vulnerable assumptions.

Of the enlisted men, even less can be determined with certainty except that alcohol was available, was often present, and was sometimes used to excess—hardly striking conclusions. They held parties on post and some of those parties were recorded, especially when they became rowdy. Reflecting either the happenstance of records available noting them or an increase in activity to be recorded, September and October of 1864 seemed to be rife with celebration. Lewis Byram Hull of the Kansas volunteers wrote in his diary on September 20 that there had been "Considerable whiskey about. Dance in Co. I's kitchen." On October 7 he described a dance held in the company area: "dance broke up before midnight. Six women present. Danced two sets. Too much whiskey entirely, the greatest drawback to a good party." A week later, on October 15, he reported that "dance at band room breaks up in a row."[19] Since Hull normally was critical of such activity, his accounts of these incidents, and a few others, may indicate their exceptional nature rather than their routine occurrence.

Some of the entertainment was of a much more orderly, or at least official, nature. The enlisted men organized a series of musical or theatrical performances for the fort and charged admission. Especially for the Fourth of July in 1864, a group of soldiers put on a show with the benefits to go toward the reading room and library. Offering several performances, they charged officers and soldiers different rates, and apparently for the higher rates the officers received prime seating. And the officers came to the show, with William Henry Cowell recording that it "was atended and aproved by the Comander of the post Leutenet Cornal William O. Collons."[20] The content of the show can easily be surmised. Franklin Tubbs said that there were thirteen soldiers involved with three fiddlers "and I play the Banjo and Dance and play the guittarr." He described it as "a Consert and a Nigger Show whitch was quite interesting for the Solgers of fort Larame." Selling tickets at a price that ranged from fifteen to fifty cents, over the three nights, the performers collected a total of $274.[21] They planned to present

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[18] General Orders No. 194, issued November 21, 1864, General Orders files, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files. See also Lieutenant Eugene Ware's account of William G. Bullock, who managed the sutler's store for Seth Ward, and his great pride in the "whisky toddy" that he would labor over with great attention to detail, and which to him was "a work of art." Evidently, however, he prepared his work of art by the gallon. Eugene F. Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 199, 413.

[19] Hull, ed., "Soldiering on the High Plains," 22-24.

[20] William Henry Cowell diary, entry for July 4, 1864, typescript at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MDIA-13.

[21] Franklin Tubbs, letter to [Kate], July 10, 1864. Franklin Tubbs Letters. Tubbs was secretary of the group. These and other performances were held in the upstairs of Old Bedlam. Eugene Ware observed that "during the long and tiresome winter evenings there were theatrical

the show again in a couple of weeks too. Evidently the show repeatedly entertained the Fort Laramie community and, within a year, this had become something of a local institution; in July 1865, Will Young reported, "Went to the Laramie Minstrels last night."[22]

The maintenance of military discipline is always a challenge in garrison situations where a clear and focused mission does not compel reflexive order and obedience (or at least deference) and adherence to standards of appearance and bearing. For the most part the army at Fort Laramie relied on the time-honored military traditions of drills and inspections. Even with the transfer of the post from the regulars to the volunteers, discipline appears to have been maintained at Fort Laramie. Lieutenant Ware noted in 1864, "The old regular army traditions of the post had been kept up, and everything was done exactly as it had been done before the war."[23] Inspections continued on, but the most notable inspection was a new form that took place on Sunday mornings in 1864 when troops assembled on the parade ground and the officers, in addition to routine inspection in the ranks, had them unbutton their jackets so that their shirts could be examined for cleanliness. The soldiers' comments in their diaries and letters home seemed to find no problem with this. Instead they concurred with Lewis Hull that it was new, "but a good idea."[24]

> We have inspection everry Sunday mornning when we are out in line we have to onbutton our coats then the officers comes around and look at our shirts and cloathing if our coathing haint clean and ours boots black they will put them in the guared house but they have not but any one in the guard house in our copany besides they inspect the quarters and see wether they are clean now you may know wether we keep clean or not when a man is to lazy to keep himself clean they make him We are in a place that we can keep clean[25]

A central ingredient of daily life was the line between soldiers and officers, a line that prevailed at each and every military organization. That the rigid separation remained and did not dissolve in this far-away location is evident in a number of ways outside of official duty—preference in housing, in taking meals, in the delivery of mail, and preference in a multitude of small matters of life. In the musicals mentioned above, officers received the best seats, and they also paid the highest prices. Sometimes the officers and soldiers appear to have maintained honorable and respectful relationships, as when Sergeant Hull described the Fourth of July festivities in 1864: "The officers were

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entertainments frequently," although he was not present during the winter. Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 203.

[22] Will Young diary, July 18, 1865. This portion of the diary is printed in an unmarked newspaper clipping in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-108.

[23] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 199.

[24] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 20, entry for August 21, 1864. As for the related matter of cleanliness in the barracks, in 1862 Captain Van Pearse of the Ohio volunteers was ordered to direct the personnel of his company to clean their area, their personal belongings, and themselves because they were so filthy. Troops from other units had requested separate quarters while on guard, "so as not to be infested with vermin as they allege your men are." Letter from Capt. Thompson to Capt. John Van Pearse (signed by T. W. Sullivan, Post Adjutant, November 13, 1862, typescript copy in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[25] Franklin Tubbs letter to sister, November 3, 1864. Franklin Tubbs Letters.

invited to dinner with us, but having mess dinner of their own, none but the officer of the day, lieut. Pettijohn, responded. Officers and ladies visited our quarters and praised our taste very highly."[26] On the other hand, the resentment sometimes directed at the officer corps from the enlisted and non-commissioned ranks surfaced occasionally at Fort Laramie.

In October 1864 the issue became personal. The volunteers serving at Fort Laramie chose their officers and non-commissioned officers through company elections—a system that was bound to leave at least some aspirants disappointed with the outcome. At first, the election of officers for Company K seemed to achieve acceptable results. As Hull noted in his diary, "The boys carry the new captain to the store and make him treat to a box of bitters. As a natural consequence, half the company drunk. A few fights. Everybody apparently pleased with the election."[27] By the end of the month, grumbling had become common and was not stilled by the confirmation of the commissions by the Ohio Adjutant General: "Old non-commissioned staff very much dissatisfied with the election. Think they should be officers."[28] Within a few days the situation intensified: "Some signs of mutiny. The non-commissioned staff and companies A and D want to go home. They send a remonstrance to the colonel demanding that they be sent home, or they will take the matter into their own hands and go."[29] The next day Hull recorded simply that the old sergeants were now under arrest. And with that the crisis quelled.

The surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox in April 1865 kindled not only keen expectations of being released from duty and returning home to civilian life, but deep resentments when that release did not come. When they had to stay on duty, the blow to morale was severe and the line between the officers and rank and file hardened and became a virtual war zone. Consider the sentiment of one Fort Laramie soldier who described the mutiny of two companies of Kansas volunteers at Camp Collins (in Colorado) in June 1865: "it is said, and believed, that two Co's of them have laid down their arms, and will not fight any longer, and are commanding themselves. I suppose their time is out." He wrote that he heard that the colonel and general proposed building a fort in the Powder River country next year "in order to give them a fat office a while longer, for I suppose they have not Sucked Unkle Sams Paps long enough to satisfy them yet." He continued:

> … wherever I go from one end of camp to the other the talk is the same, nearly every one believes that our Officers are going against orders. It is said that Capt. Ames & Co will go no farther and if he goes back it is my candid opinion that a majority of the Regt. will follow him. It is bad to be driven to this desperation, but I do believe that our highest authorities in the War Department do not intend to have volunteers kept in the service, after they can possibly be relieved by regulars, & regulars can certainly be sent here to relieve us some time this summer. I believe some things are

[26] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 25, July 4, 1864.
[27] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 24, October 11, 1864.
[28] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 24, October 31, 1864.
[29] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 27, November 2, 1864.

> too bad to be endured, and if they cannot be cured in one way they will in another. If we are kept here much longer, and it is known that we are kept against orders, then in that case, vengeance is sworn on many an officer if we ever get into a fight, from all I can learn I would not be in some of their place for all the world. . . . whoever is anxious to stay here and keep us here, I hope will be the first to fall in battle[30]

A similar contempt for the officers and suspicion of their motives in desiring to remain on active duty was still clear the following winter when some of the volunteers were still at Fort Laramie. Even Franklin Tubbs, who earlier boasted of the good time he was having, now distrusted and despised the officers:

> if we had the wright Officers over us we would been out of the sevise before this time but they want to make money to bad to get out of the [word missing] they are afraid they will starve to death or got to begin they never had better a thing than they have in the Sevice lay around and put on stile and dog the men around but we can make it all wright some time when we get our papers than we will see who is the big men and who haint I dont want to have anything to do with any man that has been an Officer in the Army[31]

At the same time, Private Hervey Johnson echoed this sentiment, writing home, "I am afraid it wont be healthy for some of our 'Shoulder strap Men' to be along with us when we do start east. I believe half of them are afraid of us now." As if to underscore that point, Johnson wrote home about two officers killed previously but whose funerals were only then being conducted at Fort Laramie: "It was an awful day the rain came down by bucketsfull the day of the funeral, but the boys stood it very well. They think they would be willing to attend a funeral every day rain or shine as long as the officers lasted."[32] The divisions of rank at Fort Laramie, by the time the volunteers left in 1866, had become some of the bitterest and most intractable divisions imaginable.

In one respect, though, Fort Laramie seems to have established itself during the Civil War as an eminently livable place. It was not a fortress in the midst of combat, it was not an isolated outpost lacking the comforts and conveniences of communities back east, and most importantly it was a post with familiar values and institutions. During the Civil War Fort Laramie was sufficiently developed that officers routinely brought their wives and families to reside with them. In February 1863, Caspar Collins wrote his mother that "There is only 11 white ladies, including the soldiers' wives, around the fort, and all of them are married."[33] While that number likely varied, it remained low. When Catharine Wever Collins listed the women present at a Christmas dinner in 1863, she

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[30] Cyrus Scofield to Mary E. Scofield, June 25, 1865. Typescript of letter at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MP-45. Scofield was en route from Fort Laramie to Fort Mitchell at the time that he heard of the mutiny and reported his reaction to the situation.

[31] Franklin Tubbs letter to sister, April 10, 1866, Franklin Tubbs Letters.

[32] Hervey Johnson letters to Brother and Sister, April 1, 1866 and May 8, 1866, in Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire*, 326, 335.

[33] Caspar Collins to Mother, February 23, 1863, in Spring, *Caspar Collins*, 152.

named off the spouses of five of the commissioned officers.[34] While some of the non-commissioned officers also had wives at the post, it appears they were few. How many non-commissioned officers and rank and file soldiers had wives and families present is simply not known, but the numbers were surely small. Some did, though. Sergeant Schnyder, in fact, was married in October 1864 to a woman at the post whose background and reason for being at Fort Laramie remain unknown.[35] Another sergeant, E. H. King, in the Kansas volunteers, was assigned to the sawmill near Laramie Peak, and King's wife and five children joined him at that remote location.[36]

The army wives at Fort Laramie kept busy in a variety of responsibilities. In addition to the normal roles assigned them as women in American society, with primary responsibility defined by family relationships—child rearing, education, maintaining the house, and as the carriers of morality—they also bore additional burdens deriving from their military association. The pre-eminent female at Fort Laramie during the Civil War was Catharine Wever Collins, wife of Colonel William O. Collins, commander of the post and subsequently commander of a broader area that included Fort Laramie and its detachments in the valleys of the North and South Platte Rivers. Catharine Wever Collins came to Fort Laramie in November 1863, leaving her daughter Josephine in Ohio with her sister, and remained at the fort with her husband until August 1864. During those months she wrote a series of letters that reflect something of the duties and opportunities available to women of her class at the post. (Her husband was a prominent attorney and businessman and served in the Ohio state senate at the time of his commissioning in the Ohio Volunteer Cavalry.)

Although living temporarily in the West, Mrs. Collins expressed views consistent with conventional roles ascribed to women in the East. She took her duties of child-rearing seriously and strived to provide guidance for her daughter over the great distance that separated them. Notable elements in that guidance were a persistent encouragement toward religion, away from temptation, and a focus on education with its particular female priorities favoring appearance over substance. Thus she advised her daughter Josephine "that I would rather you would give up some of your difficult studies and give more time to simple writing." Penmanship and letter writing were high on her list of priorities for education.[37] She was likewise proud when her daughter was commended for following rules at her school. At her home at Fort Laramie, she kept busy sewing and keeping house. She did have help with the household chores, though, with a servant named John assigned to her husband and an unidentified Indian woman who worked for her: "The old woman who washes for me comes every Tuesday morning, makes up the fire and puts on the water in a little upstairs kitchen, makes some guttural noise every time I speak or sign to her and washes and starches pretty well, and

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[34] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter December 16, 1863, in Agnes Wright Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West: Letters of Catharine Wever Collins (1863-1864)," *Colorado Magazine*, XXXI (October 1954), 9. Page references to this article are to the reprint in a separate booklet of the same title in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[35] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 25, October 20, 1864.

[36] Lewis A. Eaton, "A Funeral at Fort Laramie," *Annals of Wyoming* (Fall 1983), 36.

[37] Catharine Wever Collins to Josie, March 23, 1864, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 21.

I do the ironing in my own room. Last week she did it as your father was sick but it was not very well done."[38]

Importantly, however, her main activities focused beyond the home and on the military around her at Fort Laramie. If the army had a paternalistic organization which vested its leadership with the duty to look after the welfare of the troops, that stewardship extended to the army wife as well. Thus Mrs. Collins spent considerable time visiting the sick, as she was about to visit "a sick man at the Hospital who belongs to Capt. Rhinehart's Co.—"[39] and she did not restrict her charitable efforts to the men in uniform. When the wife of the telegraph operator had a baby, she went down to Mrs. Brown's home every morning to wash and dress the baby, reflecting how the bonds of womanhood at Fort Laramie sometimes transcended the barriers of class, at least during the volunteer presence at the fort. The problem was, she said, that Mrs. Brown, "poor thing she could get no woman to come and live with her. The Indians they say always dread such places and the women of the Post have too much work to do."[40] And when Sergeant E. H. King, who had been detailed to work at the Laramie Peak sawmill, came in to Fort Laramie and was killed when an adobe wall collapsed, she once again visited and consoled the family. In fact, it was Mrs. Collins, not her husband who was ill, who attended the funeral for Sergeant King, escorted by Dr. Underhill.[41]

Further suggesting the role of women at the fort, Catharine Collins was not alone in these efforts. Mrs. Van Winkle, whose husband was a captain at the post, visited Mrs. Brown each night to take care of the baby even though the Van Winkles had five lieutenants boarding with them. Indeed, once when Catharine Collins was visiting Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Van Winkle appeared and told her that "if she had known I was there she did not think she would have come, as she had a good deal to do at home." The two then went to the hospital to see two men, one in Captain Van Winkle's company and the other a private named Lyman who subsequently died in the hospital.[42] A less generous, and perhaps equally valid, way to view the contact among the women at the fort would be less as activity that crossed the hierarchical lines of ranks and class, and instead as one that fundamentally affirmed the different stations of everybody involved—as givers and receivers of noblesse obligé. These were not visitations of friendship that derived from personal affection on a plane of equality; they were events of military formality, class responsibility, and social charity.

In important ways, the life that Mrs. Collins and the other wives led at Fort Laramie could have been lived in Ohio. Their life was fundamentally separated from the physical circumstances of military service that their husbands knew. So separate was

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[38] Catharine Wever Collins to Josie, December 16, 1863, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 11-12.
[39] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter December 16, 1863, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 9.
[40] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter December 16, 1863, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 9.
[41] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter December 16, 1863, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 10.
[42] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter December 16, 1863, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 10.

the woman's realm from the male world of Fort Laramie, in April 1864, after she had been on post for around five months and was beginning to make plans for her return to Ohio, Catharine Collins wrote her daughter that it was her intention to visit some parts of the fort that she had yet to see. These included the commissary, the various shops, and other parts that were open to the public. Underscoring that separation, or even isolation, she said, "as to visiting any part of the neighborhood or catching a most distant glimpse of the Rocky Mountains I have given up the idea."[43] A month later it became clear that she would have more time and she reported, "Your father wishes me to see something of this country . . . ." and she scheduled an outing.[44] As for any "frontier" erosion of gender roles, the kind that that demonstrated what Frederick Jackson Turner called the "corrosive" effect of the frontier, Catharine Collins was at Fort Laramie but a short time; nonetheless, it is clear from her comment as she left the fort in August that one of the common associations with the fort in those years remained outside her purview. Because of a rumored danger of conflict with Indians, she wrote her daughter, "I that have such dread of fire arms travelled two days amidst loaded revolvers and wishing all the time that I could load and fire a pistol."[45] Exactly how much she had shut herself off from wider exposure and how much she was closed in by her gender and status is far from clear. What can be seen is that a rigid line separated the experience of women from that of men at the fort.

Of the other women, it is mainly evident that during the Civil War there were few. Certainly this may be said for single women. One group of single women was the contingent of laundresses, and while laundresses worked at the post for the several companies, the lives of those people are hidden from careful analysis by twenty-first century eyes. Laundresses were plainly, however, in short supply. Caspar Collins reported that the allowance was for five laundresses per company, although there were only a total of eleven women on the post. Still, there were single women at Fort Laramie; at least they were single for a short while. Although Collins wrote in February 1863 that all the white women were married, we also know that some soldiers still found the opportunity to get married. After several ceremonies, one observer wrote that "Must be going to have a cold winter as weddings are all the rage."[46] Sergeant Hull made that notation after two weddings, which could mean that such a small number was especially noticeable in this community because they were so few.

The other side of this arithmetic was that even those two weddings meant that the number of single women on post declined by exactly that number. In September and October descriptions of two parties in the company kitchens noted the presence of four and six women—a serious imbalance in the ratio of men to women. To compensate for the lack of women, at one party "Hewett dressed in women's clothes and went with Dr. Dryden. Dance broke up in an uproar."[47] Whether or not this was the only time that

[43] Catharine Wever Collins to Josie, April 7, 1864, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 24.
[44] Catharine Wever Collins to Josie, May 7, 1864, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 26.
[45] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter, August 21, 1864, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 31.
[46] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 25, entry October 20, 1864.
[47] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 22, 24, entries for September 20 and October 7, 1864.

cross-dressing was used to help restore the gender balance cannot be determined from the record. Franklin Tubbs wrote home, "We have a dance on the Prade groud once an a while the Boys has to act as ladies."[48] That behavior raises many questions that do not have answers that can be discerned from the historical record. How those designated to "act as ladies" were selected is unknown. How many were so apportioned is also opaque. How commonly this occurred is likewise obscure. As for same-sex relationships at Fort Laramie, it would be perilous to assume either that there was none or that the role-playing at parties and dances was associated with any. The subject is far too complex and ambiguous to reduce to categorical answers or formulas and the evidence either way is lacking.

As to the addition to the population of single women at Fort Laramie, there may have been other cases like that described after one party: "dance at band room breaks up in a row. Welsh and his wife part"—a comment that, from its context and language usage as compared with similar passages elsewhere, implies a separation however temporary or permanent. It is not clear how many, if any, divorces occurred at the post, what the process was for securing one, and what the circumstances of spousal separation might have been.[49] It was necessary, of course, to have official permission to remain on the post, a circumstance that doubtless created problems for women who separated from their husbands, or for that matter, for women and families where the man in uniform died. This shortage may help explain the difficulty that wives of officers had in finding someone to work for them and the reason Mrs. Brown could not find someone able to stay with her and her new baby.

There was, of course, another place to turn for female companionship. This was the same place that trappers and traders had turned and that soldiers themselves had gone in unknown numbers: the local Native American population. It appears that some people developed close, intimate relationships characterized by love and affection. Certainly this was true of many of the trappers and traders, even if it was sometimes polygamous. When it came to the men in uniform, however, the relationships may have been sometimes deep, but they were seldom destined for long term fulfillment. On the one hand there was what sometimes appeared to be a system of prostitution. Mrs. Collins probably alluded to that when she described the extreme penury of the Indians, and the Indian women in particular, who had to resort to picking up scraps of food at the fort: "There is only one other way by which they can save themselves from sharp hunger, that is too humiliating to a woman and a Christian to more than allude to."[50] On the other hand, explicit references to prostitution simply do not surface during the Civil War period. Lieutenant Eugene Ware, who spent slightly over a month at Fort Laramie in the summer of 1864 described what he called the "squaw camp." "It was a place," he said, "where Indians during peaceful times could come, and pitch their tents, and trade. There were always a number of squaws there in their tents, and a lot of half-white Indian papooses running around."[51] That is a far cry from describing prostitution.

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[48] Franklin Tubbs letter to sister, July 27, 1864. Franklin Tubbs Letters.
[49] Hull, "Soldiering on the High Plains," 25, entry for October 15, 1864.
[50] Letter from Catharine Wever Collins to Hon. Wm. P. Dole, Indian Commissioner, from Fort Laramie, May 15, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-94.
[51] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 200.

The evidence suggests much more strongly the existence of marriage relationships between white soldiers and Indian women. Sarah Larimer recorded in her account of life at Fort Laramie in 1864 that "although they were the enemy they had left their homes to fight, they were friendly to them, and many of the officers, as well as common soldiers, had taken of the swarthy daughters for wives."[52] In fact, Ware himself goes on to describe not prostitution but how two officers at the post "bought Indian wives and had them stationed at the squaw camp."[53] In this arrangement, it should be explicit, the proposal was made to the woman's father, not to her, or at least, according to Ware, it had to be approved by her father, and generally upon offering horses as a gesture of good will or in outright trade. This purchasing a daughter from a seller may sometimes reflect more on the market economy the soldiers were accustomed to than it does about Native American customs and protocol, but it also reflects the gendered nature of Lakota society as well. Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun noted that Seth Ward's wife "had loved a young brave, but being a woman she had no choice but to be sold to benefit her brothers."[54] The clear implication of some of these descriptions is one of a market in human lives, at least to some degree, and especially from the perspective of the women bartered or sold.

The situation, however, is more complicated than such bargaining might indicate. The assumption of wives as chattel would mean that women had no say in the matter, and that appears not to be the case generally. In both of the cases Ware described, in fact, the women seemed to have a great deal to say even though their fathers had approved and received horses from the prospective suitors. In one instance "the father ran off with the horse and the young squaw disappeared, and the officer was out his horse." While Ware implies that this was a ruse to secure a horse from an innocent and unsuspecting army officer, the fact that the woman disappeared can not so easily be written off to her cooperation in a swindle; there is no reason to believe that she followed her father's demands any more than she did her husband's. The other officer that Ware mentions may have been more fortunate if his new wife had fled the union sooner: "Another one of our officers bought a wife for two horses, and the Indian girl fought and scratched him up in a most ridiculous way, so that he was in his quarters pretending to be sick for some time until he healed up. The Indian girl was a fighter and a perfect tigress, and broke through the door to the rear of the officers' quarters, and went to the squaw camp, and quickly disappeared."[55]

An example that suggests another level of complexity in the issue is one involving John Fealey who had been a regular, who was drummed out of the army, and who found himself in the guard house at the fort. He dug his way out and escaped with the help of some Indians. His wife, who lived at Indian camps, visited him regularly and

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[52] Sarah L. Larimer, *The Capture and Escape: or, Life among the Sioux* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1869), 34. This volume is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, Newberry Library.
[53] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 213.
[54] Bettelyoun, and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 91. This also should be considered in the context of the difficulties faced by Indians making a living whether by hunting or by working for others.
[55] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 213.

they spoke in her native tongue. Since she visited him the day before he made his escape in the night, suspicion was directed at her as an accomplice.[56]

The sexual relationships (and more) between officers or soldiers and the Indian women constitute a delicate and multi-layered subject of inquiry that hinges on ineffable answers to questions of intent, misuse, and love, questions that only the parties involved can answer. From the outside, the critical distinction in the various relationships may come down to whether the relationship survived the departure of the soldiers' unit. The temporary unions were with Ohio volunteers who anticipated returning to the states shortly; the one permanent marriage alluded to, one of a very few exceptions, was that of a former enlisted man who was living permanently in the West and who ultimately found his home with the culture of his wife. The other cases, the instances of abandonment, were much more common. And while it is always difficult to generalize about intimate relationships, the instances of abandonment reveal a clear pattern that can only be reckoned as personally exploitative and abusive. Going further, some students of this pattern situate it in the social context of colonial relationships, both symbolically and actually, where the brown-skinned woman represented a reward for the colonizing, conquering white male who saw himself entitled to the woman. And when he left, he left his reward, now a burden, behind.[57]

Even though some of these relationships were unions that lasted months or years, and not just momentary liaisons, they were nonetheless unions of convenience for the white soldiers. When the volunteers left Fort Laramie, either individually or collectively, they left behind women with whom some had started families in the Indian camps. Eugene Ware described one specific instance in 1864 in which he declined to identify the officer involved. His fellow officer told him, as the two departed Fort Laramie,

> I came away from Fort Laramie and I did not act right. I have got an Indian baby up in that squaw camp, and I have got to go back and tell the baby's mother that I am never going to see her again, and it is going to raise Cain. I dreaded it, and I was too cowardly to go and tell her before I left. Now I will never see her again, nor will ever see the baby again. I am going to get onto my horse and ride back there, and then I will be here in the morning ready to go on with you down the road.[58]

His remorse notwithstanding, this officer left a woman and their child without material support and evidently had no intention of taking them with him when he left. That also seems to have been the case with others. By 1866 when the last of the volunteers departed, they left their progeny behind, as Major Van Voast described in a letter shortly after his arrival at Fort Laramie:

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[56] William Henry Cowell, diary, March 19, 1864, typescript at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MDIA-13.

[57] Walter Jones has examined literature of the "Con Gai" in French Indochina in literature in his thoughtful and helpful article, "Gender as Colonial Exploitation in French Indochina: Concubines in Selected Pre-1965 Novels Published in or Translated to English," *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, 24 (2012), 1-15. I am grateful to Walter Jones for his discussions of this issue and for sharing his article.

[58] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 256.

> There were several Indians and many Indian women and children living at or near the post. Many of them had been about the fort for years some the wives of mountaineers and Interpreters now dead—some the wives of Interpreters and Post Guides & Etc employed by the Government and others the deserted wives of white men who with the Volunteers have left the Country – and have abandoned their children to the mercy of such charity as might be bestowed. Nearly all of these were very poor and entirely without means to move their lodges and without any one to whom to look for support – depending to a great extent for their subsistence by making of moccasins and doing such work as they could find about the post.[59]

There evidently was more than one kind of desertion taking place at Fort Laramie.[60]

The layers of double standards being applied to these relationships in terms of gender and race are impossible to deny in retrospect. They were obvious at the time too. Ware reported, and seemed to concur, that Charles Elston, a scout at Fort Laramie, "used to say that the Sioux Indians, that is, the women portion of them, were the most virtuous people on earth."[61] That much could not be said of the white men who took advantage of them and left them. Ware noted that, sometime after his own departure, General William Mitchell "took pains to reprove all improper relations; he asked his officers to be examples to their men." He believed that three discharges of officers came about because of "improper relations," although the officers were mustered out on pretexts other than the specific cause of General Mitchell's displeasure. It is not clear if these relationships were "improper" because the men failed their obligations to the women, because they were already married, or because they were with women whose skin was a different color. The only clarity is that if intermarriage or other intimate relationship had at one time been acceptable in the officer corps, it was no longer. In 1867, when the infamous J. M. Chivington accused officers at Fort Laramie of "living openly" with Indian women, General I. N. Palmer, the commanding officer at the post, could categorically respond that there is "not a Shadow of truth in his Statements."[62] There is no mistaking the meaning of Chivington's charges; he was not at all concerned about Indian women being taken advantage of by white officers.

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[59] Major Von Voast to Major H. G. Litchfield, October 9, 1866. Von Voast also wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs seeking provisions to feed destitute Indians living near the fort, including many "poor creatures who are in many instances the deserted wives of white men who have left the country." Von Voast to E. B. Taylor, September 26, 1866. Both letters are excerpted in typescript form in Letters Sent, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[60] This stands in striking contrast to the pattern associated with the trappers who married into the Sioux people, at least according to Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun. Bettelyoun's father was James Bordeaux and her mother was Huŋtkalutawiŋ. She remembered of these trappers, "Their Indian wives, who were patient, kind, and true, made good homes for them. There was not many cases of desertion among them; most of these men, though rough in their way, were kind and loved their children. Some of them, at great sacrifice, sent their children away to schools to be educated." Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 73.

[61] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 214.

[62] Bvt. Brigadier General I. N. Palmer to Major H. G. Litchfield, March 16, 1867, typescript copy of letter in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, military correspondence.

At the same time, Sergeant Cyrus Scofield reported on the double standard in terms of both class and race, writing his wife, "I will just say here, that some of our boys, who have been at Laramie a good deal, say that nearly every officer there has a squaw for a Mistress." Sergeant Scofield even became philosophical as he pondered the injustices of the situation:

> Still I believe our people are the most too blame, except in barbarism & cruelty, for where one Indian cohabits with a . . . white woman, ten white men, or beings in human shape, cohabit with Squaws, I dont know but the sin in the former case is as small as in the latter. But some argue differently, some in Co. K. do. Smith thinks he can run . . . where he pleases when away from home, but if his wife should do the same, he would not live with her any more, and perhaps kill her. How inconsistent.[63]

Recalling Scofield's contempt for officers almost in the same breath as his sympathy for Indians, the picture of social relationships at Fort Laramie at the end of the Civil War becomes all the more complex, with a number of powerful undercurrents. The whites were divided in their ideas and perspectives just as the Native American population was divided. If there was a pattern in social relations at Fort Laramie during the Civil War, it was a pattern of splintering and fragmentation.

The pattern of fragmentation is anything but neat and is often marked by contradictions. First of all, during the first half of the 1860s instances of cross-cultural contact appeared to blur some of the lines dividing different groups of people. There were, for example, the employment possibilities for Native Americans. In addition to the hiring of Indian women for domestic help, some men hired out to operate a ferry. In 1860 William Earnshaw, traveling west, paid an Indian ten cents to take him across the Platte to the fort to mail letters and noticed the great many Indians around.[64] Some hunted to bring the meat for sale to people at the fort.[65] Some were members of the families of traders on and near the post and who participated in the various commercial operations. There was, in addition, the sutler's store and post office, which brought everybody together. In 1864, when Lieutenant Caspar Collins, son of Colonel William O. and Catharine W. Collins, drew a picture of Fort Laramie to be sent home, his mother provided a narrative and noted: "where you see three Indians with their backs against the wall is the sutler's store . . . ."[66] Moreover, Native American men and women circulated among the buildings of Fort Laramie with some frequency. Caspar Collins, as

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[63] Letter from Cyrus Scofield to Mary E. Scofield, June 25, 1865, typescript of letter in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MP-45. George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955; a reprint of the 1915 Charles Scribner's Sons original), 225. See also Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 119.

[64] William Earnshaw, "Recollections," typed manuscript, from Waterford Wisconsin *Post*, June 5 to Sept. 4, 1897, p. 35, in Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

[65] Steven Forsdick, typescript of untitled memoir, p. 42, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CDIA-35.

[66] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter, January 16, 1864, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 16.

early as 1863 boasted that "I am learning the Sioux language. I can talk a little."[67] In the same year, troops prepared the post at Christmas because "there are going to be several hundred Indians here during the hollidays, to have a big war dance."[68] In November 1864, the favor was returned and Colonel Collins invited the Indians to the fort for a show, one of the stage entertainments that had become popular on the fort. On this occasion, as Franklin Tubbs wrote, "the Boys had a show for the Indians the other knight thair was about 100 indians in it was by the order of the colonel." This was not a universally harmonious occasion, though. Tubbs continued: "the soaldiers did not like it mutch the old Colonel let the Indians have the seats and made the Boys stand up he thinks more of and Indian than he does of a white man We had a big fire that knight somebody set our Cook House a fire on account of the Indians."[69]

The lines—sometimes blurred, sometimes transgressed—were also being redrawn along different divisions. Whites were divided from whites and Indians divided from other Indians. Economic lines separated whites from each other, but there is also evidence to suggest that similar lines separated Indians from each other in ways that they had not in earlier years. One feature of Native American life became increasingly pronounced in the perspective of white observers at Fort Laramie during the Civil War. While begging had long been viewed as a habit or custom of local Indians, the begging became more pronounced. And it also became different. In the 1850s, some whites as well as Indians understood the exchange that was taking place, an exchange that others dismissed as begging. By the 1860s, though, the impoverishment of the Indians was becoming an inescapable reality. Hervey Johnson wrote his sister in 1863, "they run all over the fort picking up every thing they get their eyes on, just imagine what you would think on sitting down to dinner, to see six or eight squaws poking their heads in at the windows and door, and it does no good to give them any thing, for they are ten times worse to hang around the kitchen after you have given them a scrap than they were before."[70] The next year Eugene Ware described the Indian women roasting grasshoppers to make meal for bread and also their delight in gathering up the entrails from beef butchered at the post. And while he acknowledged that some of this was a cultural difference rather than an index of privation, he also noted how one young Indian woman declined to participate in the distribution of rations so eagerly awaited by others. When he pressed her to do so, she responded, "I am the daughter of Shan-tag-a-lisk. I have plenty to eat."[71] Shan-tag-a-lisk, or Sinte Gliska, was Spotted Tail, the leader of accommodationist Brulés. The economic division was not restricted to the whites.

Catharine Collins took it upon herself to write the Commissioner of Indian Affairs urging assistance for the Indians who now depended on the whites. She noted that the Indian women at the post would hire out for work but, when they did, they earned so little that they could not afford the goods for sale on post. As for the men, she said that they could not afford ammunition, and without ammunition they could not hunt, so they were drifting into a pattern of indolence and dependence. ". . . The consequence is that many

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[67] Caspar Collins, letter to his mother, February 23, 1863, in Spring, *Caspar Collins*, 152.
[68] Hervey Johnson letter to Sister Sibyl, December 23, 1863, in Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire*, 75.
[69] Franklin Tubbs letter to father, November 15, 1864. Franklin Tubbs Letters.
[70] Franklin Tubbs to Sister Sibyl, October 23, 1863. Franklin Tubbs Letters.
[71] Ware, *Indian War of 1864*, 212.

of them are in almost a starving condition and they will gather up from the ground scraps that our very dog has left untouched."[72] Her suggestion was for the government to create a commissary for the Indians so that they would be able to pay lower prices.

While there is sparse evidence to suggest that Indian children could associate with white children, it is plain that they would explore the fort, hunting for birds and small game, and playing.[73] On the other hand, the *Métis* children commonly known at Fort Laramie as "half-breeds" seemed to find some limited entrée into white activities. These sometimes provided a bridge across cultures and at other times simply had experiences common to those of their class. Sarah Larimer noticed the children and their mothers both around the post, although it is unclear how much they mixed with other children at the fort.[74] Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun recalled that when the soldiers "would all chip in and get up a dance," the mixed-bloods and soldiers alike would fiddle away and the children would dance. "There were quite a number of half-breed girls, all dressed up in bright calico with ribbons in their hair and on their waists, that could fly around in a quadrille as well as anybody, stepping to the music in their moccasined feet. There were many little girls my size that were right in the swing as well as myself."[75]

To some unknown extent, the opportunities for children of different backgrounds to associate continued when they went to school. Bettelyoun, a prime source of information on this period, noted, "Now, there was no school building at Laramie, but a class was taught by a scholarly soldier. There were many officers' children and many of the laundresses' children attended." She then adds, "My brother John attended also."[76] This school was replaced by a new one begun in 1866. Hervey Johnson noted something of that school when he wrote home that three white women arrived at the post in 1866, and while two were the wives of officers, "the other is a single woman, she came out to assist the chaplain in teaching the white, half breed, and native children."[77] On the other hand, Chaplain Alpha Wright, whose project the school was, notably excluded one of those constituencies when he announced, "I intend to open a school soon for white and half breed education in and around the garrison, whose parents are very anxious for them to be educated."[78]

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[72] Letter from Catharine Wever Collins to Hon. Wm. P. Dole, Indian Commissioner, from Fort Laramie, May 15, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-94.

[73] See the various letters from Caspar Collins in Spring, *Caspar Collins*, 132, 135, 136, 149.

[74] See her intriguing statement that "Walking, standing, or sitting in the shadows of the houses, singly or in groups, could be seen these Indian women and their children, chatting and playing with each other—pitiable-looking children of aboriginal descent, half surrounded by civilization, yet held in the lap of barbarity, smiling upon fair fathers, yet kissed by swarthy mothers. Some of these children were of fair complexion, with pleasant countenances, and, under dissimilar circumstances, might have been deemed of Saxon descent." Larimer, *The Capture and Escape*, 34.

[75] Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 91.

[76] Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 74.

[77] Hervey Johnson letter to Folks at home, May 30, 1866, in Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire*, 342.

[78] Chaplain A. Wright, report on burial of Spotted Tail daughter, March 6, 1866, published in *The Missouri Democra*t, March 21, 1866, typescript in Spotted Tail Daughter file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

Further muddying the situation was the fact that some sent their children away for education. The trading businesses sometimes provided the traders with sufficient resources to send children away to boarding schools. Thus Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun's father, James Bordeaux, sent his children to Hamburg, Iowa, where his oldest daughter lived.[79] In 1864 Hiram Kelley married Elizabeth Richard, daughter of Pete Richard (or Reshaw, as it was commonly pronounced) and his wife, a full-blood Sioux, when "She had just returned from St. Louis where her father had sent her to an exclusive girl's school to learn culture and the ways of the white man."[80]

It is possible to overstate the educational opportunities available to these children of mixed ancestry. Clearly the children of Indian and white couples were not always those of prosperous traders who were able to document their educational careers. Indeed, this merely suggests the danger of generalizing too broadly about the education experience at Fort Laramie. Even among the whites it is not clear. Having left her own school-age daughter in Ohio, when Catharine Collins departed Fort Laramie in 1864 she took with her Florence Schnyder, the eleven-year old daughter of Ordnance Sergeant Leodegar Schnyder, and three hundred dollars the sergeant had given Mrs. Collins for her benefit.[81] Only one generalization holds: those who had the resources to send their children elsewhere for education often did so, whether they were officers, non-commissioned officers, or civilian traders. And those who lacked the resources often did without. Relationships had changed enormously from the time that Francis Parkman painted a picture of freedom and relative equality and mingling of peoples at Fort Laramie.

In the years since Fort Laramie became a military post, life had changed dramatically at that point on the map. The society had become more structured and more fragmented, with authority more centralized, more impersonal, more divided by class, more economically and socially specialized. Fort Laramie had also lost much of its isolation and was now part of a larger network of communications and transportation. Regular mail came through at least once a week, but the telegraph provided nearly instantaneous communication with points east and west as well as with the emerging population centers in Colorado. Major W. H. Evans, of the Ohio Cavalry Volunteers, reported shortly before his unit departed, that the roads also connected the fort broadly:

> The main road of travel up the North Platte and thence via Salt Lake City and Lander's Cut off to California and the Northern Mines passes the Post. Another road from the South comes from Denver following the valley of the Laramie River. There is every probability that a new road to Montana will be opened this year, which will give increased importance to this Post.[82]

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[79] Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 5, 168.
[80] Dazee Bristol and William R. Dubois, III, "Highlights in the Life of 'Hi' Kelly," copy of article in Hiram Kelly file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.
[81] Catharine Wever Collins to daughter, August 5, 1864, in Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West," 27.
[82] Major W. H. Evans, letter to Major Roger Jones, May 21, 1866, *Annals of Wyoming*, 9 (January 1933), 753-754.

Not only was Fort Laramie coming to resemble in its social structure and in its customs and habits the organization of society in the organized states, but the area that it served was also showing signs of developing like the settled areas too.

In the coming years at Fort Laramie, society would be defined by this pattern of American civilization and by its detractors. Some of those adversaries and opponents of the new order would be labeled as savages and others as outlaws. The rose in the wilderness was no longer just a matter of an outpost of Eastern society surrounded by peoples with different cultures; it was an outpost from which this particular form of civilization endeavored to spread and reshape the entire landscape. It was well on its way when the volunteers went home and the regulars took their place, when the Indians came to the fort to talk about peace and a road through their land, and when greater numbers of people wanted to course through that land on their way to the gold fields of Montana. The world had been transformed from the days of Francis Parkman, and indeed, from the days of Richard Garnett and any of the other peoples—red, white and mixed—who found the informal, decentralized, free-living, and independent life more to their taste than they did the expanding civilization engulfing them.

# PART TWO

# The Struggle over Hegemony on the Plains

Fort Laramie entered an important phase of its military existence in the years following the Civil War as army regulars again occupied the post, as the trails coursing along the North Platte were replaced by other roads and by the Union Pacific Railroad to the south, and as armed conflict with the Native American population increased in frequency and intensity in the Powder River Basin. But the heightened military activity can be deceptive in its meaning. From a broader view, over the next two decades Fort Laramie became less and less an isolated outpost, remote from manners and institutions in the states, and more and more an institution promoting and reflecting the swelling tide of social changes abroad in the nation.

Several distinct elements converge to demonstrate a coherent pattern of social change in these years. A starting point is the simple, even simplistic, fact that Fort Laramie represented a military garrison in the hinterland of the nation. Yet, that is just a starting point and it was always much more than that. Even in military terms, the post evolved in those years, but that evolution was part of a larger and powerful process of social change, even social transformation. In addition, and as part of that larger context, the military introduced specific relationships of authority, of discipline, of gender, and of ethnicity, relationships that reflected the rising industrial society of the United States. In fundamental ways, the structure of life for people at Fort Laramie conformed increasingly to the habits and institutions of industrial society and, as that process continued, it generated tensions like those in the rest of the nation. Plus, another element in this pattern is the expansion of those institutions and relationships of the established social order into the territory around and served by the fort. This growth, neither inevitable nor always salubrious, pushed aside other cultures with different values, goals, and customs. In what was both amazingly fast, in terms of the displacement of a previously dominant group of peoples, and tortuously protracted, in the anguish it generated, the undermining of a way of life and then the removal of the Native Americans who had lived in the area around Fort Laramie represents a crucial development in the transformation of eastern Wyoming.

When it became a military post, Fort Laramie constituted an isolated, remote outpost of American civilization, surrounded and overwhelmed by a different culture, but especially after the Civil War, the once dominant society increasingly became the outsider and was pushed aside by the new institutions emerging in the region. Moreover, it was not just the Native Americans who found themselves on the outside looking in. It was also the congeries of other peoples, people sometimes white, sometimes of mixed ancestry and culture, people of varied callings or no calling at all, people who for a variety of reasons sought a haven from civilization's restraints and repressions. As they lived what some called "a wild, free life," they found themselves in conflict with the rising social order. The dominant position of earlier values and practices and assumptions in this area, at some indefinable point, had been replaced with new

institutions and values, and the people who held onto the earlier customs lived in this modernizing world now as outcasts and fugitives.

# Chapter 6

# Questions of War, Questions of Peace in the 1860s

For the Native Americans around Fort Laramie (and also for those well beyond the physical location of the fort), the pivotal years of the 1860s turned, at one level, on the question of war and peace, but at a deeper level it was a question of what kind of life would be lived by the Indians and what kind of society would be built by the whites who were taking their place as the dominant force and prevailing social order on the plains. For it was not just a rivalry between whites and Indians for land, although there was that; it was a rivalry between competing ways of life, between different cultures and social orders that challenged the purposes, assumptions, and precepts of each other. In the struggle of the 1860s, the questions were large and powerful and ultimately they culminated with divisions within the Indians over their own cultures and also with the removal of the Indians who had made their homes at and near the fort. As recently as 1851 the U.S. government had secured from Indians in conference the right of emigrants to pass through this area along the Platte River Road; by 1868 the Indians were being denied the right to live and trade in that very place. That outcome, however, was not inevitable. It was the result of choices made, choices made by people who sometimes understood their consequences and by people who sometimes were deceived into believing the consequences would be otherwise. The choices made were existential choices, choices having to do with the meaning of life, the priorities of their cultures, and the alternatives available.

## *i. Roads and Inroads*

In various ways the decade after the Grattan fight of 1854 was marked by a growing white presence and increasing pressure on the Indians in the Fort Laramie area. Sometimes the white pressure was explicitly military in form, as with General Harney's punitive expedition of 1855. More often that pressure took subtle, but unmistakable, form in the commercial development of the region by white people. Emigrant traffic was key to this development. Traffic along the road continued unabated in the 1850s and this had two profound consequences. The thousands of people who traveled the road to Oregon, to California, and to Utah were obviously not the lonely, isolated travelers of Hollywood mythology; they were masses of people on the road and those people needed supplies and provisions and livestock and services of all kinds. To the entrepreneurial inclined, those emigrants represented a vast market to be exploited. So trading posts emerged all along the roadway offering fresh livestock and foodstuffs for

sale, places for repair work to be done, and even ferries and bridges for crossing the waterways—for a toll. Trading posts along the road meant not only the ability to serve (and attract) that traffic better; it also meant additional commerce on the road with supply wagons to serve the needs of the trading establishments themselves.

The cycle of commerce built on itself with more facilities attracting more travelers and more travelers feeding the growing number of commercial establishments. By 1859 and 1860, historian John D. Unruh writes, "there were, literally, hundreds of supportive facilities en route. Rarely did the emigrant travel more than twenty-five or thirty miles without encountering at least one habitation. Usually there were more."[1] This included the area that would become Wyoming, with posts cropping up near Fort Laramie and all along the trail east and west of the fort.[2] It was thus possible by around 1860 for the traveler on this road to make the passage without wagons and livestock, simply traveling on a stagecoach that carried mail, traveling with luggage as a modern passenger might, and doing so in a relatively short period of time, stopping to take meals, sometimes spending the night at one of the posts along the way, sometimes not tarrying at what a few years before would have been a major oasis worthy of pausing for several days. That was exactly Mark Twain's experience on his way to the California gold fields in 1862, Twain commenting on his coach, "We passed Fort Laramie in the night . . . ."[3]

The burgeoning traffic made the Oregon-California Trail substantially more than a mere "trail." It was, rather, a road, or even a highway, and that highway held important implications, all with an impact on the Native Americans who lived in the area it traversed. Communications systems, beginning with private contractors carrying mail by stagecoaches, became faster and more pervasive, representing an element of nothing less than a transportation and communication revolution. The stagecoaches carrying mail were replaced with a speedier system, the Pony Express. With its transport of mail from April 1860 to October 1861, carrying its last letter two days after the completion of the transcontinental telegraph, the Pony Express hastened not only the mail but the larger social revolution of which it was a part. Using a system of wires strung on poles along the road, for large stretches at least, the telegraph replaced the ponies and their riders and communication became even faster, even more modern. When the telegraph connection was made in 1862, not only did the Pony Express become obsolete, but now Fort Laramie was connected instantly to the East, to army headquarters and to other posts, and to the emerging network of information distribution. Moreover, the system worked both ways so that what happened at Fort Laramie and environs could be immediately communicated eastward and soon westward.

Plus, the telegraph represented yet one more significant intrusion into the Indians' domain. The telegraph wire, a thin, vulnerable reed of communication, had then to be patrolled and protected from those who resented its presence and this meant more soldiers and more outposts and stations for those soldiers, year round, not just during the months of emigrant traffic. The road through this country was not just carrying

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[1] John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 298.

[2] Unruh quotes one emigrant as early as 1853 who reported, "within 20 miles of Laramie . . . probably 25 establishments for trade with emigrants." Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 289.

[3] Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872; reprint: New York: New American Library, 1962), 66.

people through it, as had been initially anticipated by the terms of the Treaty of 1851; the road was transforming the area and unleashing more and more forces that were transforming it even more.

Another element of that transformation had to do with the native fauna. In 1843 when John C. Frémont recommended Fort Laramie as a suitable place for a military post, he noted not only the roads connecting the location to points east but also observed that the roads and location "would not in any way interfere with the range of the buffalo, on which the neighboring Indians mainly depend for support."[4] But interfere they did. This proved to be an issue at the 1851 treaty council. As LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young write, "It was true that the buffalo were becoming scarce and that the emigrants' horses and cattle were eating up the grass. For these injuries the Great Father expected to make compensation."[5] Over the ensuing years, the numbers of bison on the plains, of course, fluctuated according to the location, the season, and the year, but the trend appears to have been downward and, as the numbers of bison in the Fort Laramie area declined, so too did the livelihood of the Indians dependent upon them become more difficult to sustain. The bison were becoming less and less a presence in the Platte River valley. By 1864 the bison population had thinned out appreciably and one westerly-bound traveler wrote from Fort Laramie, "I have seen 3 Buffalo since reaching the Valley. I have been more lucky in that respect than many others as the Buffalo are very seldom seen in going up the valley now."[6]

What is notable about these observations of decline is not so much that the emigrants were the culprits in the reduction of the bison, for they were hardly systematic and extensive in their hunting and the numbers of their livestock, which consumed important grazing resources, while numerous, certainly paled in comparison with the bison. And it was not that the decline of bison reflected the disruption of an ecological equilibrium between humans and animals, for it did not; the Indians were hunting buffaloes and trading their robes. And it was not that this was the great decimation of the bison from the Great Plains; that would come especially in the 1870s. The point is, rather, that this pressure on the bison was already being felt and being felt seriously by the tribes who depended on the bison, even if some of that dependency was commercial.[7]

Unsurprisingly, with the increased emigrant traffic and the increased military presence, opportunities for conflict between whites and Indians likewise increased and

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[4] John C. Frémont, *A Report on the Exploration of the Country Lying Between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains, on the Line of the Kansas and Great Platte Rivers* (Washington: By Order of U.S. Senate, 1843), 45.

[5] LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; originally published, Glendale, California, A. H. Clark, 1938), 187.

[6] Henry ----------, to Melissa, June 27, 1864; in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CCOR-50;

[7] We do not have for this area a sensitive ecological analysis of the complex relationships of bison, Native Americans, and white Americans, and their cultures, such as that which historian Dan Flores has presented for the Southern Great Plains. See especially, Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy Redux," in Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

raids and counter-raids followed. Plus, the army divided the Indians into "friendlies," south of the Platte, and "hostiles" to the north, a serious and substantial fragmentation. And the Indian Agent for the Upper Platte, Thomas Twiss, contributed to the growing pressure. Taking his post in 1855, Twiss exercised considerable power with the Sioux; as George Hyde writes, "At Fort Laramie, Agent Twiss was acting the part of a dictator in control of the Sioux. He ordered the Indians in the friendly camp on Laramie Fork to do this and to do that."[8] While Twiss also developed plans for converting Indians to farming, urging the opening up of farms for the Indians, he subsequently abandoned those ideas and allied himself with the Oglalas to the north of the Platte and moved his agency to Deer Creek, thereby placing additional burdens on the "friendlies" who had to travel farther to reach the agency. All in all, these developments, and more, further divided and splintered the Sioux—geographically, economically, and culturally. The tension was not just between whites and Indians; it was also within the Indian nations. Again, George Hyde writes about the years 1856-1865:

> The Sioux were too busy living to mourn for any length of time over the probable fate of their people, and they were incapable of presenting a united front with the purpose of holding back the flood of whites coming into their country. Every camp thought first of its own interests, as had been demonstrated during the Harney campaign of 1855 and the Sumner campaign of 1857.[9]

The divisions were complex, were never neat and tidy, and were not always permanent either, but generally after the Grattan fight and the Harney expedition of the next year, the separations became more distinct as the Sioux moved away from the Platte River and the emigrant road along it into hunting grounds far to the north in the Powder River country (taking it from the Crows who had secured it in the Treaty of 1851) and far to the south in Nebraska and Kansas. Still others, a minority, the group often called the Loafer band because of their dependence on emigrants and soldiers at the fort, remained near Fort Laramie. Many of the various distant bands journeyed to Fort Laramie to trade regularly. Fort Laramie remained a hub for social and economic activity.

In just a decade or less the world of the Indians in the Fort Laramie area—and beyond—had changed. Since the Treaty of 1851 the roads through the lands promised for the Indians, the traffic on those roads, and the institutions to serve that traffic had all grown, and the inroads into the elements of Indian life on those lands had also grown dramatically, all of these developments placing greater stress on the native inhabitants. As the pressure mounted, any kind of mutually satisfactory resolution of that tension seemed to become an increasingly remote possibility.

*ii. Treaties and Social Struggle*

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[8] George Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk: A History of the Brulé Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 74.
[9] Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 94.

Following the treaty council of 1851 a new map had emerged, a map not just of the physical and political geography of the high plains but a map of altered social relationships in that area. So too the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie redrew the map of social relationships in the area and did so with perhaps even greater consequence for the peoples who lived at and around Fort Laramie. But, unlike the 1851 agreement, the 1868 treaty was not really drawn up at a single conference of all the interested parties; instead, the final document that was signed had been rejected by some and was only agreed to at different times by different groups and individuals. The final Treaty of 1868 was not a sudden development but the culmination of a long, convoluted process that began around 1864. While some of the Indians ultimately signed the treaty to mark their victory over the U.S. Army, the government did not see the document as an admission of defeat. Instead, the military and peace commissions alike saw the treaty as a way to secure more fundamental objectives, objectives impossible to achieve on the battlefield. The peace that emerged thus came not as ratification of the Indian victory but as part of a more subtle process of subjugating and "civilizing" the people who had once been dominant, on their own terms, in the area around Fort Laramie.

In the environment of increasing traffic, institutional development, cumulative change, and social fragmentation, already fragile and tenuous relations became increasingly at risk each year. In 1864 the situation became that much more volatile with two developments, neither of them near Fort Laramie but both disrupting hopes for peace in profound ways. One had to do with the traffic along the main Platte River Road, for that traffic spawned still additional roads, including roads for gold seekers headed toward Virginia City in Montana. Susan Badger Doyle writes that, after the failed attempts of 1863, "fifteen hundred emigrants and 450 wagons traveled Bozeman's cutoff in 1864."[10] This amounted to a violation of treaty assurances, was a clear provocation, and was supported and protected by the army; and it meant war. Meanwhile, to the south, in Colorado, the killing of about two hundred Cheyennes, mostly women and children, by Colonel John Chivington's Third Colorado Volunteers at Sand Creek, contributed to the atmosphere of tension in the entire region in 1864. As historian James C. Olson writes, "it is difficult to overemphasize the effects of the Chivington massacre" at Sand Creek. If it was designed to quell the Indian unrest, Olson argues, it was actually counterproductive and "it increased rather than reduced the danger."[11] By the end of 1864 and into the spring of 1865 a general condition of war obtained, though perhaps intermittent and complex in its makeup, not only in the Platte Valley but also beyond. At Fort Laramie, Colonel William O. Collins wrote in his report on the situation in May 1865:

> It is proper to remark that almost all the Indians are just now liable to become hostile. The rush of emigrants through their country in search of gold is immense, and their game is being rapidly destroyed or frightened away; the whites who come in contact with them generally know nothing

[10] Susan Badger Doyle, untitled essay in Serle L. Chapman, ed., *Promise: Bozeman's Trail to Destiny* (Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2004), 148.
[11] James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 11-12.

> of Indian habits or character and often do them injustice; and then they complain that the treaty promises of the Government are not kept.[12]

About a month after Collins wrote those words assaying the contours of friction in the area, the tension escalated and was evident at Fort Laramie. In the aftermath of the Chivington massacre, Loafers and other Sioux had gathered near Fort Laramie to try to stay on good terms with the military and to avoid conflicts with emigrants. By June 1865 between 1,500 and 2,000 were located within five miles of Fort Laramie. The alternative, as Franklin Tubbs wrote home, was that "if they are seen that far off they will be shot they haint a lowed to run a round outside of 5 miles line."[13] Soon, however, as George Hyde explains: "the troops at Fort Laramie performed the remarkable feat of exasperating the Loafers and other Sioux, members of the friendly camp located near the post, to such an extent that they actually turned hostile."[14] Several events occasioned a revolt by these Indians who were anything but "hostile." Aside from the backdrop of increasing violence and tension following the Chivington massacre on Sand Creek the previous winter, they experienced a forced relocation, they were prevented from hunting, they suffered a dependence on government rations, and they witnessed the hanging of two Sioux chiefs, Two Face and Blackfoot, who had brought in a white woman captive secured by Two Face from the Cheyennes. Not only were the two chiefs summarily hanged, but they were hanged in a fashion calculated to be publicly humiliating and their bodies left dangling for months.[15] Moreover, after that, the Indian camp was moved to the east under military escort, the Native Americans' apprehensions and fears of relocation notwithstanding.[16] When they made camp on Horse Creek, the Indians, friendly though they had been, attacked the soldiers, killing their officer, Captain William Fouts, and four others, and escaped to the north. The specific provocation for the revolt at this particular moment appears to have been, as Hyde observed, "At the first camp on the journey, the Indians were enraged by the soldiers' taking a number of Sioux girls to their camp and keeping them all night."[17] That assessment seems to have been confirmed by Cyrus Scofield who wrote his wife about the incident as he went over the site in the next few days. Scofield said, "The prisoners may have had a very good reason for doing as they

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[12]William O. Collins to William P. Dale, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 12, 1865. This document is reprinted in Agnes Wright Spring, *Caspar Collins: The Life and Exploits of an Indian Fighter of the Sixties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927; reprint edition, New York: AMS Press, 1967), 164-168.

[13] Franklin Tubbs letter to father, August 21, 1864, Franklin Tubbs Letters.

[14] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 119.

[15] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 120; Dorothy Johnson, "The Hanging of the Chiefs," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, XX (July 1970), 60-69. One should also note the interview with Edgar Fire Thunder by Merrill Mattes in 1942 in which Fire Thunder said that the tension generated by the hanging caused the "loafer" group to be moved. Mattes Interview with Edgar Fire Thunder, October 30, 1942, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, FTE-1.

[16] The composition of this group suggests that it likely included the people Ware identified as residents of the "squaw camp." In addition to others, there were a large number of women and children, and also "twenty-five to fifty white citizens, mainly men who were married to Sioux women," and Charles Elston (sometimes spelled Elliston) was the supervisor of the camp. Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 120. Moreover, afterwards, Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun writes, "All single women were to be taken" east. Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 100-101. See also Dean Knudsen, "Death on Horse Creek," *True West,* 36 (March 1989), 14-19.

[17] Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 119.

did. I will not pretend to say, only to guess at it, for many of them were women, & Soldiers were with them on the Plains, what restraint had they?"[18]

And so tensions mounted. In 1865 the U.S. government proceeded along two different paths, one of making war on the Indians in the Powder River Basin (General Connor's orders: "You will not receive overtures of peace or submission from Indians, but will attack and kill every male Indian over twelve years of age."[19]), and the other of sending out a peace-making commission—making "overtures of peace"—to negotiate with Sioux, and also Arapaho and Cheyenne, Indians in the Missouri and Platte River valleys. Of these, the efforts to negotiate a peace treaty were more successful than the military campaign, although the treaty, or treaties, negotiated had very serious limits. Led by Newton Edmunds, the peace commission did in fact secure agreements with nine bands of Sioux in the upper Missouri River valley in which the signers agreed to allow roads through the Powder River country.[20] The problem with those agreements was twofold. First, where in 1851 the government required centralization of authority in the tribes signing that agreement, now the government encouraged and reinforced fragmentation of the tribes by negotiating with various bands within the tribes and securing their separate agreements to treaties. This created a situation where acceptance and agreement by some could lead to and exacerbate internal tribal divisions and could foster serious misinterpretation by authorities and people far away who were unfamiliar with the tribal divisions. Secondly, those bands whose leaders signed the agreements were not those defending the Powder River area from the white intruders. As James Olson writes, "Not one chief who had been engaged in hostilities along the Platte or in the Powder River country signed the treaty, and yet the Commission and the Bureau of Indian Affairs blandly announced that peace had been made with the hostiles and that they had agreed to allow the establishment of roads through the country."[21] The treaties signed, despite the claims of the government otherwise, were worthless except as an indication of what the government wanted of the Indians.

Following those agreements, in the spring of 1866 a peace commission under E. B. Taylor journeyed to Fort Laramie to make what was intended to be the final, and conclusive, treaty with the tribes gathered there. These, of course, were the Indians who mattered most in the issue, the Indians who claimed the Powder River area, and the Indians who mounted an armed resistance to the intruders. And this treaty was an important social document for it had to do not just with war and peace but with the very circumstances of life for the Indians in the coming years. This treaty, signed or unsigned, was significant because it provided a guide to the future. Like other treaties presented to (and signed by) other bands of Sioux and other tribes, this treaty stipulated

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[18] Letter from Cyrus Scofield to Mary E. Scofield, June 25, 1865, typescript of letter in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MP-45.

[19] Brigadier General Edw. Connor, Fort Laramie, July 4, 1865 to Colonel N. Cole, Second Missouri Light Artillery, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1 - Volume 48, Part II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), Chapter LX, p. 1049. This collection of documents is available online at http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar/text/waro0102.txt.

[20] Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 14.

[21] Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 14.

that the Indians would "cease all hostilities against the persons and property" of American citizens and would use their influence to persuade or force others to do the same; plus, they would cease attacking other tribes unless attacked first. These were obvious considerations in a treaty designed to promote peace.

But there was more than just calling for peace. The treaty also provided, "The said bands represented in council shall withdraw from the routes overland already established, or hereafter to be established, through their country;" in return, they would be compensated by the government with annual payments of thirty-five thousand dollars each to the Brulé and the Oglala bands for twenty years. This was most pointedly a reference to what had been the Bozeman Trail but what was now a military road and this was what the Indians in that area especially objected to. Some did not object, of course, and these were the bands who did not hunt there and who had moved elsewhere, especially well to the east of Fort Laramie and to the south of the Platte River. The treaty thus not only would move the Indians out of the area traversed by the road, out of an area guaranteed to Indians in the Treaty of 1851;[22] it also deeply divided the Indians over the way they saw this removal, over the territory to be occupied, and over the way of life to be followed in the future by their bands and their children.

To that way of life in the future the treaty also spoke and outlined a path, although quite general and apparently only voluntary at the time:

> Should any individual or individuals, or part of the different bands and tribes represented in council desire hereafter to locate on any lands claimed by the said bands for the purpose of agriculture, it is hereby agreed by the parties to this treaty that the same shall be protected in such location and pursuit against any interference on the part of the whites or Indians, and whenever at least 25 lodges or families of any or either of the bands or tribes so represented shall have so located on lands for agricultural purposes, and signified the same to the agent or superintendent, they, as well as other lodges or families so locating, shall receive the sum of $125, payable as follows: Fifty dollars for the first year after such location, and $25 in annual payments for three successive years thereafter, the same to be invested in the purchase of teams necessary for farming purposes, agricultural implements, seeds, and such other articles as the Secretary of the Interior may determine. And whenever 100 lodges or families shall have so engaged in agricultural pursuits they shall be entitled to a farmer and a blacksmith, at the expense of the Government, as also teachers for such schools as may be required for the education of their children, subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior.[23]

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[22] This specific Powder River area was designated as Crow land in the 1851 treaty; subsequent to that, however, the Sioux had taken it from the Crows.

[23] "Articles of a Treaty Made and Concluded at Fort Laramie, in the Territory of Dakota, by and between Edward B. Taylor, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Robert N. McClarren, Thomas Wistar, and Col. Henry E. Maynadier, Commissioners on the Part of the Government of United States, duly appointed by the President for that Purpose, and the Undersigned Chiefs and Headmen of the Upper Brule and Ogallala Bands of Dakota or Sioux Indians," in *Papers Relating*

This provision would protect and encourage the Indians in their pursuit of agriculture, in the building of communities based on farming, and in the maintenance of schools to assist them in that pursuit. The direction the treaty pointed the Indians was away from the life of the hunt in the Powder River Basin and toward a life of farms and schools.

One other provision included a stipulation that may have been fine print even to those who could read the rest of the provisions for this had to do with what would legally happen *after* the Indians signed the treaty. The treaty stipulated that in the case of questions or disputes between the band signing the treaty and other tribes or bands, the president of the United States would arbitrate the controversy and the band had to accept the decision of the president (or the Secretary of the Interior or other appointee) as final. This represented a significant loss of autonomy to a government in which they had no voice, and indeed to a government with which they had been at war.

Finally, it needs to be remembered that the Indians with whom the government was dealing not only did not have lawyers counseling them in the discussions—the "negotiations"—but they could not read the document on which they were expected to make their mark. True, the discussions were interpreted, but Red Cloud did not trust the interpreter that Spotted Tail and some others used (and probably vice versa), their interpreters being different traders with whom they had dealt. Even at that, one wonders how the trader-interpreters, whatever their level of commitment or detachment, whatever their level of expertise, navigated the legal language of the document before them, how they rendered "abitrament," and how they interpreted the meaning of "acknowledge themselves to be subject to the exclusive jurisdiction and authority of the United States." This was not a true "negotiation" in any meaningful sense in which different parties presented their perspectives and proposals and worked their way through them in an honest, forthright way, perhaps even with some give-and-take, to arrive at a mutually satisfactory agreement. The many treaty parleys with the Indians in general probably were seldom meaningful negotiations, but that does not mean that this one can be excused thereby. This was, at any rate, a far cry from the informal discussions that had once taken place between Indians and emigrants where each spoke their needs and concerns and arrived at a settlement, albeit temporary. Another part of the map of the future was becoming clear.

The key element of the treaty, of course, was the road through the Powder River area. Regarding that road (and future roads to be established), Commissioner Taylor gave scant information and glossed over it as nothing more than allowing travel on the existing route. Again, George Hyde: "He is reported to have told them that there was to be no new road through their country and that the roads mentioned in the treaty were really one road which already existed."[24] The story from this point on is a familiar one, a

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*to Talks and Councils Held with the Indians in Dakota and Montana Territories in the Years 1866-1869* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 19. Compare this with the other documents where the wording is almost identical: Treaty With the Sioux—Oglala Band, 1865, in Charles J. Kappler, ed. and comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II, Treaties* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1904), 907.

[24] George Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937), 139.

dramatic one, and is often retold with varying flourishes and details, but the core is clear: In June 1866, while the various bands gathered at Fort Laramie and while their leaders were in council with the peace commission led by Taylor, Colonel Henry Carrington arrived leading a large body of soldiers and supplies. Carrington's mission, he plainly explained to all, was to build forts along the road in the Powder River and Bighorn River areas and defend the road from Indian attacks. This, of course, gave the lie to what Taylor had been saying and made clear that the government was determined to secure that road, and to secure it by force if need be.

The result was predictable and unmistakable. Red Cloud and his followers rejected the terms of the treaty and left the council, thereby causing the deliberations to completely collapse. Robert Utley writes, "Red Cloud made a stinging speech about white perfidy and vowing to fight all invaders, angrily led the Sioux delegation back to the north."[25] George Hyde similarly describes how "Red Cloud made a violent speech, accusing Commissioner Taylor of deliberately lying about the road in the treaty and of concealing the fact that troops were on the way to build forts in his country."[26] Although the Powder River Sioux protested and left, Commissioner Taylor did manage to secure the agreement by some to the treaty—once again, bands who did not hunt in the Powder River area and who had less to lose from the agreement; moreover, by signing they would not only receive the presents to be distributed but would also gain the favor of the government and the ability to hunt in other areas. This partial assent, however, hardly settled the matter.

The objections to the treaty notwithstanding, and despite the departure of the Indians who lived in the area under contention, and even with a clear division in the tribe, Commissioner Taylor called the treaty conference a success and reported his satisfaction with the proceedings. During the conference, to the Indians, Taylor had downplayed the significance of the road through the Powder River area; now, to the government, he downplayed the objections of the Indians to the treaty. As for the opposition to the terms of the treaty, he conceded that the Indians "were reluctant to allow the proposed road to pass through the best of their remaining hunting grounds," but reported that "when informed of the wishes of the government, and of our disposition to give a liberal equivalent, they acquiesced in our request in a full council, after a full expression of sentiment had taken place on both sides." The only change they asked, he said, was that the annuity goods for the Indians be distributed semi-annually instead of annually. And, as for those who did not agree to the treaty, he expected them to come to the fort and sign it and receive their payment. Finally, as to the general mood of the failed conference, Commissioner Taylor gave not a hint of what had transpired: "The presents and provisions issued were received cheerfully and thankfully, and the whole conduct and speech of the Indians were indicative of their sincerity and intention to abide by their treaties."[27]

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[25] Robert M. Utley, *Indian Frontier of the American West 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 100.

[26] Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 130; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians*, 139.

[27] "Report of the Commissioners appointed by the President of the United States to Treat with the Indians at Fort Laramie," Report No. 87, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1866* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 208-9.

In this sense, the Fort Laramie treaty conference of June 1866 was more than about war and peace. It was a lesson in the rules of civilization to which the Indians were expected to accede, both in what the treaty said and in the way the "negotiations" were conducted and reported. And in that way the duplicity of the Treaty Commission can be best understood, not merely as an effort to take from the Indians what had previously been assured, although there was that, and not simply as a crude effort to trick them into agreeing to terms they did not understand or about which they were misled, although there was that too, but as an effort of people like Commissioner Taylor to achieve something unattainable by operating within the rules of honest and sincere discourse. As George Hyde astutely observed, "In this affair Mr. Taylor assumed the attitude which men who are sure of the virtue of their purpose often adopt, that any act is justifiable if done in a worthy cause."[28] This was indeed a lesson in the ways of "civilization."

It did not matter if the Indians objected or not and it did not matter if they signed or not; the government was going to proceed with its plans anyway. The commissioner called the treaty conference a success and the troops went forward to build three forts to protect the traffic along the road through the Powder River and Bighorn country. And the conflict over that area, the conflict that had precipitated the peace conference, moved into a full-scale war. It was also a one-sided war with little to show for the U.S. Army's efforts to assure safe passage along the road; for that matter, the military suffered catastrophic defeats and the soldiers were generally confined to the proximity of their own forts. The war did not go well for the whites.

By the summer of 1867, which is to say after the Fetterman catastrophe and after repeated frustrations by the army to clear the road or even to gain the offensive, the policy of the U.S. government, vacillating between efforts at a war against the "hostiles" in the Powder River region on the one hand and seeking to negotiate peace treaties on the other, finally tilted towards peace as the only practical option. That shift in emphasis, however, can be illusory for the goals remained the same. The common denominator in both avenues of treating with the Indians—war or peace—after all, was the subjugation of the Indians, either through armed conflict or cultural dominance. And the cultural dimension of the struggle was one that held very large stakes, was clear at a number of points, whether Indians were far or near, and became evident in a variety of contacts. Reflecting the degree to which cultural and material needs of the native inhabitants were sliding in the priorities of whites was the observation of Captain Robert Patterson Hughes in 1867 that "Had they gone to war to secure something to cover their nakedness or for some Christian provisions it would have been reasonable but to get to

[28] Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 140. This also raises, indirectly, the additional contextual issues surrounding authority—especially paternalism—and those issues beg for exploration in the nineteenth-century transformation from a society dominated by customary, status-based restraints to a market-oriented society of competitive individuals. Three very different, and profoundly important, starting points for such an exploration would be Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980); C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); and Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

fighting about a herd of buffalo or flock of antelope which neither of us can tame or catch is so foolish that I am almost ashamed to be one of the actors in the scene."[29] According to Captain Hughes, the Indians were not only the enemy, but they even lacked legitimacy in their goals since they did not accept his social values. An important step in the pressing for cultural hegemony had been taken when the enemy's very culture was denied external legitimacy and respect.

It was not just the military that denied the Native Americans any cultural or social legitimacy. The political faction in Washington that argued for peace instead of war shared the antipathy to Indian cultures. The peace proposals of the "humanitarian" contingent sought more than an end to armed conflict; these people pushed forward with their charge to come up with a "plan for the civilization of the Indians" and saw as their goal not just the cessation of warfare but turning the Indians on the plains into farmers on reservations. This became clear when a new commission went into the field with an explicit agenda. On the reservations, the new commission asserted,

> agriculture and manufactures should be introduced among them as rapidly as possible; schools should be established which children should be required to attend; their barbarous dialects should be blotted out and the English language substituted. . . . Let farmers and mechanics, millers and engineers be employed and sent among them for purposes of instruction; then let us invite our benevolent societies and missionary associations to this field of philanthropy nearer home. The object of greatest solicitude should be to break down the prejudices of tribe among the Indians; to blot out the boundary lines which divide them into distinct nations, and fuse them into one homogeneous mass. Uniformity of language will do this -- nothing else will. As this work advances each head of a family should be encouraged to select and improve a homestead. Let the women be taught to weave, to sew, and to knit. Let polygamy be punished. Encourage the building of dwellings, and the gathering there of those comforts which endear the home.

The alternative to this plan, the commission said, was not promising: "Aside from extermination, this is the only alternative now left us."[30]

So said the Peace Commission of 1867-68, a new commission, with new members, with new energy and official support. This commission invited the Sioux to another conference to be held at Fort Laramie, this one in late 1867, but received an unenthusiastic response; in particular, Red Cloud refused to come to Fort Laramie until the army abandoned its forts on the road known as the Bozeman Trail. Rebuffed and facing a political, economic, and military reality, the government in early 1868 agreed to abandon the forts. In April 1868 the Peace Commission and some of the Indians met in council at Fort Laramie. It was an august group. Prominent military leaders included

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[29] Captain Robert Patterson Hughes to Miss Maggie Douds, August 13, 1867, located in Mrs. Earle Holmes Collection, 1867-1909, H63-28, Wyoming State Archives.

[30] "Report to the President by the Indian Peace Commission, January 7, 1868," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1868* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868) 26, 44-5.

Generals William T. Sherman, William S. Harney, Alfred H. Terry, Christopher C. Augur, and John B. Sanborn (who had investigated the Fetterman debacle for the army). And peace advocates included N. G. Taylor (not to be confused with E. B. Taylor), the president of the commission and Commissioner of Indian Affairs; Senator John B. Henderson; and Samuel F. Tappan, who had investigated the Chivington massacre at Sand Creek. On the other side, however, was Spotted Tail and his Brulé band. Conspicuously absent, once again, were the Indians against whom the war was being waged and with whom agreement in a treaty was especially the goal. Despite the government having yielded to Red Cloud and Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse their principal demand—the agreement to abandon the posts—the Powder River Indians did not show up.

This meeting at Fort Laramie, without the presence of the principals who had been at war with the military in the Powder River area, is the treaty conference much recorded and chronicled, the "grand council" as it was sometimes heralded. It was, however, more complicated and less grand than that. In some ways even, it was a protracted affair with constantly changing participants. The first ones there, after the commissioners themselves, were Spotted Tail and other Brulé leaders; they signed the treaty quickly and then departed back to the Republican River valley in late April. Red Cloud and others from the Powder River area, however, had not appeared, had not participated. Then the bulk of commissioners left, leaving Generals Sanborn and Harney to negotiate additional treaties, which they proceeded to do with the Crows, Northern Cheyennes, and Arapahoes in May.[31] Still Red Cloud and the others stayed away. By the end of May Sanborn and Harney had succeeded in getting additional Sioux signatures, but still no Red Cloud. When the remaining commissioners left at the end of May to go to the Upper Missouri to negotiate treaties there, they had, as James Olson writes, "done little more than confirm the peaceable disposition of the friendlies."[32] Finally, at the end of July and beginning of August, the forts in the Powder River Basin were abandoned and the Sioux burned Forts C. F. Smith and Phil Kearny.

But still, and even with this triumph, Red Cloud declined to come to Fort Laramie to sign the treaty. Only at the beginning of November did Red Cloud and, as Olson reports, about a hundred twenty-five other chiefs and headmen from the various bands come to the fort to sign the treaty. Red Cloud made a speech in which he told the gathering that his people did not intend to give up the life of the hunt and move onto a reservation, that they had no intention of becoming farmers, and that they wanted to trade as they had in the past. Red Cloud and the others made their mark on the treaty. Finally the treaty had been concluded with its approval by the Indians who had resisted and fought and won. It appeared, by some lights, that with this treaty removing the forts that the Indians had achieved their victory. That triumphal appearance, however, would fade quickly.

The content of the treaty aside, the social dynamics of the event (or, more correctly, *events*) provide an insight into deep cultural tensions that portended a troubled future. First, the treaty involved a changing cast of characters, with different government representatives and different groups and bands of Indians in succession, not at the

[31] Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 75.
[32] Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 75.

same time. There was perhaps some prudence in that, even though it appears to have been not entirely the plan. The previous summer when a peace proposal was circulated by the government at a time that Red Cloud and some of his followers came to Fort Laramie, friction had been the immediate result. G. P. Beauvais, a trader in the area, had been appointed a special commissioner for the occasion and he reported that the "hostiles" did not even meet with the commission. He also reported that Red Cloud "found fault at their meeting the Commission at Laramie, and the result was a fight among themselves killing one another's horses, destroying property and in some instance some of the Indians on both sides were hurt, none however were killed."[33] This tension and violence revealed a deep cultural war within the Sioux nation. The next year, after the treaty was negotiated with the Brulés, came the Crows—again, possibly prudent to keep separate from the Sioux with whom they were at war.

Additional social dynamics were documented in images that captured the treaty conference, or at least a part of the treaty process. The photographs Alexander Gardner produced contrast strikingly with the descriptions of the peace conference of 1851 as the material trappings of white society can be seen in various photographs. Where descriptions of the earlier council emphasized the traditional regalia the various tribes wore and their effort to impress each other and demonstrate their cultures, in 1868 the attire, equipment, and iconography appeared differently. The wearing of trade cloth and manufactured clothes was common at the councils, and often traditional garb combined with clothes provided by the army. Military uniforms, sometimes the gray cloth of confederate uniforms, frequently appear in the pictures. Women and girls are sometimes seen wearing cloth dresses and sun bonnets. One photo shows an Oglala Sioux with an army hat bearing a metallic cross.[34]

Then there are other indications in the photographs. There are the Indians cooking with coffeepots and with metal pails, wine bottles, and other trade items in evidence. And it is by no means a consistent picture. On the one hand there is the Crow chief on horseback wearing military hat, shirt and pants, and on the other hand there are the Oglala Sioux ready to cross the Platte on the ferry, with the long hairplate ornament hanging from the scalplock and another Oglala man whose metal hairplate ornament reached the ground when he was astride his horse. On the one hand there is a shirtless Man-Afraid-of-His-Horse wearing a hairpipe necklace in the council. On the other hand, there is the canvas wall Sibley tent used by Spotted Tail that, according to one analysis of the photographs, "symbolize Spotted Tail's acceptance of the Americans and his desire to adapt to the white man's customs." ". . . No more eloquent symbol," anthropologist Raymond DeMallie said, "speaks for Spotted Tail's separateness from his

[33] G. P. Beauvais, Special Indian Commissioner, to O. H. Browning, Secretary of Interior; December 14, 1867, copy in Beauvais file in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-29.

[34] Raymond J. DeMallie, "'Scenes in the Indian Country': A Portfolio of Alexander Gardner's Stereographic Views of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty Council," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, (Summer 1981), 42-59; in addition, DeMallie (page 59) noted another distinction evident in the photographs: "the mixed bloods are clearly differentiated by their white man's clothing and hats."

own people and his allegiance to the whites."[35] The cultural war was evident in the artifacts of everyday life. While tradition persisted among some individuals, others jettisoned tribal customs and symbols and accepted those of the ascendant white social order.[36]

Compare this scene to the one that obtained when Red Cloud and the others came in November. At that time Ada Vogdes, the wife of Lieutenant Wayne Vogdes, recorded in her diary that a feast was held for some of the principal men of the tribe. William Bullock, the post trader, hosted a large group at his home. Covering the floor with sailcloth, Bullock invited them inside and they lined the walls of the room, sitting on the floor where they were then served. Ada Vogdes described several of the men she met on this occasion:

> Red Cloud is a plain looking Indian about forty years old, and about six feet high and very quiet hardly answering, when spoken to, has a pleasant smile, and no show, or dash, in any movement. . . . Red Leaf, a short little Indian, but quite different from Red Cloud, he is all beads, and finery, wears an old uniform hat, with all the colors of the rain bow scattered around him. His face is one that wears a constant smile, and his expression is rather fiendish, but still at the same time, it strikes you, as a good fatherly looking countenance, & one to whom you would go in trouble, were he in different circumstances . . . . Big Bear was another that particularly struck my fancy, as he was more sociable and tried to say something to us. His style of dress coin sided more with my idea of the Indian in his wild state than any of the others, with but one exception. All the clothes he had on, consisted only of legins, & moccasins, with a buffalo robe thrown over his shoulder, which exposed to view the most splendid chest, and shoulders, I ever laid my eyes upon.[37]

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[35] DeMallie, "'Scenes in the Indian Country'," 50, 56, 58, 49, 46. See also the diary entry by Ada Vogdes for that summer when she and her husband, away from the fort, saw "a party of them . . . approaching on horse back, women also who rode like men, and some, had sun bonnets, while others again only held shawls over their heads." Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, July 23, 1868, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California. One should also note the recollection of Frances Carrington from her visit to Fort Laramie in 1866 (her name was Grummond at the time). She and her husband went hunting, accompanied by Indian boys: "These little boys had adopted the American boy's dress, with some difference of adjustment, minus the seats of their trousers." Frances C. Carrington, *My Army Life and the Fort Phil Kearny Massacre* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971; originally published, 1910), 59.

[36] The photographs form one component suggesting how much the circumstances and context of the treaty discussions had changed from those of 1851. There was another element too that is often forgotten. In 1851 the discussions were covered by distant correspondents like B. Gratz Brown who sent his dispatches back to *The Missouri Republican* for publication. In 1868 the protracted, on-again, off-again discussions were also reported in the *Cheyenne Leader*, published in the new railroad town about eighty miles south of Fort Laramie. For that matter, when the generals left Fort Laramie in May to go to North Platte, Nebraska and then to Fort Rice, they simply went to Cheyenne to take the train east. They also visited the military post at Cheyenne, Fort D. A. Russell. See *Cheyenne Leader*, May 14, 1868, p. 4.

[37] Diary entry for November 5, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

What was most noticeable about these visitors was not the symbols of white culture they used to adorn themselves, although there were some of those, but the authenticity of their countenance and of their customary attire. But even here, there were the occasional uniform accoutrements and social graces on display for their white hosts. After the meal, they adjourned: "As they each finished, they went into the parlor, and sat themselves down in rocking chairs and on the sofas with as much ease and grace as if they had been born there, and knew no other life." Vogdes went on: "Col. Bullock introduced us all to them, & we shook hands and said 'How' and they seemed to enjoy the day, as much as we did."[38] Even in celebrating victory and achieving what they believed to be a peace that allowed them to continue to live as they had, they did so in the living room of the home of the post trader, making light conversation with the wives of their enemy's officers. The process of social change is seldom bold and revolutionary, but there was an extraordinarily delicate subtlety to this particular undermining of traditional custom, perhaps on both sides of the handshake.

Once the Treaty of 1868 was signed by the various parties, there was surely cause for celebration and there were probably people who breathed a heavy sigh of relief at the end of hostilities and the resumption or initiation of peaceful relations between all concerned. It was not long, however, before it became clear that those people who saw this treaty as a triumph of the Indians who had, after all, prevailed on the battlefield, were living either in denial or under mistaken understandings of what had been agreed to. The truth was that the fighting war may have subsided, at least for a short while, but it was being replaced by a deeper cultural struggle around Fort Laramie. An important step toward dispossession, of various kinds, had been taken.

### *iii. Graves, Memories, and Dispossession*

The turmoil within the Native Americans around Fort Laramie involved at one level opposing views of their own culture and the acceptance or rejection of the inroads made by white society; on another level it was about the day-to-day way they lived. In both cases this struggle became increasingly evident in the years following the Civil War. Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun related the nature of the cultural conflict as she saw it. While her exact chronology is unclear—by context, she seems to suggest that she was describing events in 1865 but her reference to the treaty indicates it was probably about 1867—she nonetheless clearly spelled out the line separating the Indians from one another:

> There was a division of opinion, or stand, among them. Some were for the signing of a new treaty then being talked of. Others said the treaty of 1851 was the only treaty they wanted to live up to. The treaty signers hung around the agencies living on rations, while those who wanted to

[38] Diary entry for November 5, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

> retain their land as it was pulled out on their travois to live by hunting as they had always done.[39]

What she did not articulate, though, was the set of consequences for each choice. Those who lived on rations and what they could make at the fort would, as Catharine Collins and others made clear in their letters and protests, suffer in impoverishment and dependency.[40] The others, those who sought to retain their traditions and land and life of the hunt, did so only in the face of government opposition and compulsions to do otherwise, and were thereby viewed increasingly as hostile because of their refusal to embrace the goals and structures of white society. The choices available to the Indians who had lived around Fort Laramie had been reduced to two unattractive options: either abandon their culture and traditional economy and become dependent upon the whites and suffer poverty, or resist the whites and become labeled a hostile, and perhaps go to war. The future, given those choices, was inauspicious. At the same time that Bettelyoun wrote of the division, G. P. Beauvais also described the division, framing more bluntly, referring to those who chose to preserve their hunting lands: "They openly say, that it is better for them to die of a Ball than starve to death."[41]

The decisions, however, were not always so stark. Sometimes they were subtle beyond measure, and that subtlety becomes evident in an intriguing, opaque, and widely reported event involving the Sioux at Fort Laramie. The "burial" of Mini-Aku, in fact, has emerged as one of the singular events of Fort Laramie history, an event, however, that has been put to a variety of purposes in its manifold retelling. An examination of the incident is appropriate to determine its historical significance, first for what actually happened and second for the meanings given to it then and later.

The event itself is clear. Mini-Aku, the proud daughter of Spotted Tail who had declined the rations distributed at Fort Laramie in 1864, as reported by Eugene Ware, died in February 1866, in the Powder River country. She was probably eighteen years old. Spotted Tail informed Colonel Maynadier that he was bringing her body to the fort for burial and after a trip of about two weeks the commander and his officers rode in great ceremony to meet the returning Indian party as the cortege approached the fort.

Spotted Tail met with Colonel Maynadier and tearfully described the vicissitudes of life in recent years, protested the roads being built and the decline of the buffalo in the area, and also expressed his desire for peace. Colonel Maynadier, in return, told him about the anticipated visit of peace commissioners and articulated his own hopes for peace. He consented to a "burial" in the post cemetery and asked Spotted Tail if he

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[39] Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun and Josephine Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes: A Lakota Woman Tells her People's History*, ed. by Emily Levine (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 85.

[40] See, for example, letter from Catharine Wever Collins to Hon. Wm. P. Dole, Indian Commissioner, from Fort Laramie, May 15, 1864, typescript copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-94.

[41] G. B. Beauvais, Special Indian Commissioner, to O. H. Browning, Secretary of Interior; December 14, 1867, copy in Beauvais file in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-29.

would permit a Christian service. After Spotted Tail mulled over the question and then agreed, the preparations were made and later the entire post, followed by the Indians who had come, congregated at the cemetery where Chaplain Alpha Wright performed the obsequies. At the same time that the white protocol was followed, it should be noted that the service also followed traditional Indian customs, though somewhat modified. The body was placed in a coffin, but that coffin was mounted on a scaffold in a way similar to the convention of placing the remains of Indians high in trees, a practice many emigrants had commented on when traveling near Fort Laramie. In addition, two of Mini-Aku's ponies were killed at the site and their heads and tails placed on the scaffold supports. Various mementos were placed in the coffin, including famously, a pair of leather gauntlets that the commander himself contributed.[42] It was perhaps an example of on-the-spot religious syncretism in an effort to satisfy different traditions, perspectives, and beliefs.

Through records left by Chaplain Wright and by Colonel Maynadier, this much can be ascertained. But, of course, the symbolism of the funeral was enormous then and later for its insight into social relationships between whites and Indians. First of all, that the interment would take place in the Fort Laramie cemetery is important. While there may possibly have been other such funerals at the fort in the years since Fort Laramie became a military installation, emigrants appear to have noted, besides Mini-Aku, only the 1864 grave of Smoke, leader of the group around Fort Laramie. (In fact, it appears that Mini-Aku expressed a desire to be buried near, or next to, Smoke.) This is in contrast with the pre-military days. In 1843 Matthew C. Field reported a much different scene that would soon fade: "The grave yard a few hundred yards from the fort – red men and white reposing, as it were, in each other's arms!"[43] So this funeral represented an association between whites and Indians more consistent with pre-military, fur trade practices than with the subsequent protocol. Secondly, this was a momentous occasion for the military leadership to pay tribute to an Indian and perhaps especially to an Indian woman—a member of a group of people generally regarded as anonymous in the historical record, people pigeonholed and confined to the category of "squaw," and even regarded as without individual names by the white people who knew them and employed them.[44] In other words, that such ceremony and significance were attached to the funeral of Mini-Aku reveals all the more the lack of dignity and individual

[42] Much has been written about this event and much of it simply reflects a story that was passed on many times and embellished with each telling according to the lesson various people sought to draw from or impose onto the story. The most careful accounting of the Mini-Aku story is that rendered by Wilson Clough, "Mini-Aku, Daughter of Spotted Tail," *Annals of Wyoming*, 39 (October 1967), 187-216.

[43] Matthew C. Field, *Prairie & Mountain Sketches,* ed. by Kate L. Gregg and John Francis McDermott (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 75.

[44] In fact, arriving at the name of Mini-Aku, also known as Hiŋziwiŋ, or Hinzinwin, or Hinzmwin, depending on the source, requires focused inquiry. Ordinarily, despite all of the stories and legends surrounding the event, she is commonly referred to only as Spotted Tail's daughter, although some obviously made-up names have been introduced in the story. See Clough, "Mini-Aku, Daughter of Spotted Tail" and also Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 124-26. As for the names of other Native American women, it is worthy of note that despite Catharine Wever Collins' profound sympathy for the Indians at Fort Laramie, she does not record the name of the Indian woman who worked for her. Nor does Frances Carrington identify the Indian woman who similarly worked for her performing domestic service.

respect accorded others. But the most revealing aspect of this incident was that Mini-Aku plainly wished for her remains to be placed in the burial grounds of the fort. The full understanding of this derives obviously from the context in which it occurred—a situation of enmity and even war between whites and Indians, at worst, and of cultural tension, at best. At a time when some Indians were struggling to survive and others were struggling to hold onto their culture, Mini-Aku embraced the white culture, or so it appears. For both sides, the funeral ceremony for, and even the body of, Mini-Aku represented a trophy in the cultural war.

It is at this point that subsequent uses—and embellishments—of the incident sprang forth, and an entire mythology emerged over the years in which the story took new turns. She died, according to variants of the story, of a broken heart that resulted from her pining away for an officer whom she sought to marry, or because she was denied the association of the whites she admired and yearned to be with. She had, by some accounts, declined various Indian suitors in favor of a white officer, either past or future, and rejected a husband chosen for her by her father. In addition, some stories suggest that among her dying wishes (in addition to being interred at Fort Laramie) she was able to solicit a promise from her father that he would sign a peace agreement and live by it.[45]

Although concrete evidence verifying these legends is simply not there, there could be germs of truth to some of them. Plus, in subsequent years the story took on romantic colors that passed over Spotted Tail's protest of the roads and loss of food supply and dramatized the beauty, insight, and nobility of the "princess."[46] Some more modestly suggested, as Colonel Maynadier noted, that the emotional scene in which Spotted Tail and Maynadier and the chaplain discussed the funeral, and especially Spotted Tail's tears at that moment, "satisfied some who had never before seemed to believe it, that an Indian had a human heart to work on and was not a wild animal."[47] The actual event provided people otherwise predisposed to crude categorization and prejudice to rethink some of their assumptions, although this was usually done in such a way as to suggest the exceptionalism of Mini-Aku, and thus confirm their larger views of others.

In truth, the meaning of this event, when it is not clouded by the tropes to which it was reduced, is ambivalent. Like the funeral itself, the incident is mixed. The sacrifice of the ponies, the use of a scaffold, and the deposit of symbolic cultural items into the coffin

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[45] See Clough, "Mini-Aku, Daughter of Spotted Tail."

[46] This was not the first or last time that the "Indian princess" image would be used for larger cultural purposes. See Sherry Smith, *The View from Officers' Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 55-58. For an example of the contradictions in ethnic prejudice such a view usually entailed see Alfred J. Mokler's description of Mini-Aku as "the lovely Indian maiden" at the same time that he assesses Indians generally: "The lazy savages would go on the war path nearly every spring." Alfred J. Mokler, *History of Natrona County Wyoming 1888-1922* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co., 1923), 443. Obviously, both images, princess and lazy savage, reflect more on the individuals making the stereotypical assessment than on the people they attempt to describe.

[47] Chaplain A. Wright, report on burial of Spotted Tail daughter, March 6, 1866, published in *The Missouri Democrat*, March 21, 1866, typescript in Spotted Tail daughter file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file IIN-3.

were not conventional elements of white funerals (Hyde says, "The rites were mainly pagan Sioux."[48]) any more than a Christian ceremony, the use of a wooden coffin, and the location in the Fort Laramie cemetery conformed to Sioux customs. These were all key elements reflecting the compromises at work, but the pivotal point on both sides came earlier, at the moment when Colonel Maynadier consented to Spotted Tail's request to inter his daughter in the post cemetery and then when Spotted Tail, "after a few moments of thought," consented to a Christian service.

From the perspective of the whites, the incident revealed perhaps a hope for peace that some had been reluctant to acknowledge, and the basis for that peace was a sign that Indians might aspire to the form of civilization promoted by the whites. It is not clear that this resulted in building additional bridges to—or from—the white community, though. There were too many obstacles, especially since a common use of the story was to indicate explicitly how unique Mini-Aku was, how she was an exception that condemned the others who did not share her sympathies—real or imagined.

What the Indians, especially those who were less inclined than Spotted Tail to pursue an accommodationist course, made of this event remains unknown. Spotted Tail's efforts to secure peace, however, were not universally shared and Red Cloud's vigorous defiance of the same treaties that Spotted Tail acquiesced to is well recorded. Even so, and whatever symbolism whites attached to the burial site, a dozen years later, in 1876, Spotted Tail returned to Fort Laramie, removed his daughter's remains from the cemetery, and took them elsewhere to be buried, evidently at Spotted Tail's reservation.[49] If there was symbolism in the original interment of Mini-Aku at Fort Laramie, there must be an equally valid symbolism in the removal of her remains, a symbolism with quite opposite meaning.

Perhaps more than anything the incident raises fundamental questions about the relationship between whites and Indians at Fort Laramie. How much acculturation was taking place there? What tensions were overcome in this dramatic episode? To what extent were the acculturation issues generational or family or band-driven? These questions do not have solid answers in the historical record and perhaps the only thing exposed is the subtlety of the cultural war underway at the fort and beyond.

The key to understanding this event, as to so many others surrounding white and Indian relations at the time, was its ambiguity. The "burial" of Mini-Aku fit into the ambiguity of official relations with the Indians generally in the Fort Laramie area in those years. For this was some of the same ambiguity that prevailed in the treaty negotiations where different interpretations and different meanings were communicated to different parties as if different versions of truth, even conflicting versions, could be embraced at

[48] Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 126.

[49] See the various sources compiled on Mini-Aku in the file IIN-3, located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, and also Cynthia Capron's comments on this removal while she was at the fort, in her letter to Mary, June 21, 1876, Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron Family Papers, American Heritage Center. It appears that Spotted Tail attempted this removal in 1875 but for some reason did not succeed, and returned the next year to finally remove her remains. Emily Levine in Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 149, places the date of the removal at the summer of 1876.

the same time without consequence. And, to some extent, that worked, at least long enough to secure Indian agreement to the treaties set before them. Once the treaties were signed, however, the truth of the meaning crystallized and the real consequences began to take shape. And that reality was a hard one for the Indians.

The defining element of that reality was a forced relocation of the Sioux to a reservation. Once Spotted Tail and other leaders signed the treaty, and well before Red Cloud and others agreed, the government made plans to move the Indians away from Fort Laramie. At the end of May 1868, Commissioner Sanborn wrote James Bordeaux, telling him, "The white men of this country legally incorporated with the Indians and quite a large number of the Ogallala and Brulé Indians are about to remove to the Missouri River."[50] The ones who had to move first were the very ones who had been the most peaceful and accommodating, the ones who had performed labor at the fort, who had traded, married, and otherwise made their homes near or with the personnel of the fort. Sanborn placed Bordeaux in charge of subsistence for the move and he named Adolph Cuny, another trader, to supervise the transportation from the post.[51] This expedition would go in June to the new agency on the White Clay River near Fort Randall. For those who went, this was not a desired relocation nor was it an easy trip. George Hyde expresses the uprooting cogently:

> The Laramie Loafers, most friendly of all the Sioux, were the first to learn what the new treaty really meant. Hardly had the Loafer chiefs signed the document when they were brusquely informed by the officers at the post that they were no longer welcome to live there but must go at once to their new reservation on the Missouri in Dakota. This was apparently the first the Loafers heard of the reservation. Stunned, they made no move to go. The government agents had planned carefully for this. They had hired a number of Indian traders and white men married into the Loafer Band to put pressure on the Indians, and presently—led by these men and pushed vigorously from behind by the military—the unhappy Sioux bade farewell to their old home and started on their long and sad journey. Many of the families had lived at the fort so long that they had lost the old Sioux ability to travel. They had no horses or camp equipment, and the army had to load them into wagons and transport them.[52]

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[50] John B. Sanborn, President pro tem, Commission of Indian Affairs, letter to James Bordeau [*sic*], May 27, 1868, typescript copy located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, Cuny file, CIN-17.

[51] Sanborn to Adolph Cuny, May 27, 1868, typescript copy located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file CIN-17: "The application of the committee of half Breeds, to have you appointed Master of Transportation for the Half Breeds and Indians about to move to the Missouri River, has been considered and approved."

[52] Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 143. See also Hunton, "Early Day Happenings in the Vicinity of Fort Laramie," page 6, where he reports, "in the spring and early summer of 1868 the government, having induced the Indians to be moved to White Clay river near fort Randall on the Missouri river, then to concentrate into one large camp east of Fort Laramie about eight miles, preparatory to starting about the latter part of May or the early part of June. This mobilization included all whites with Indian females who cared to make the move." Copies of this and other items from Hunton's papers are available in various archival collections including the American Heritage

Possibly the agents hired by the army to press the Indians to make the move were Cuny and Bordeaux and others. There is no doubt that the Indians did not want to leave the area and it is likely that the military participated in some behind-the-scenes coordination of the move. Sutler William Bullock at that moment wrote commanding officer General Slemmer at Fort Laramie that he had conducted an investigation of moving "the Half breeds and Indians to the reservation to be established upon the Missouri River, . . . . I do not find any person or persons that have endeavored to stop the expedition. But there are some white men, who are acting in such an improper and illegal manner that they should not be allowed to go."[53] If Bullock was instrumental in drawing up the list of people who should not be permitted to join the Sioux who were leaving, it is altogether probable that others acted to motivate those scheduled to leave.[54]

So in a great forced migration, Trail-of-Tears fashion, the Indians moved away from Fort Laramie, at least those who had already sacrificed a good portion of the life of the hunt on the plains for acceptance and subsistence by the whites. And the number of Indians who now ventured onto the post fell precipitously. By the middle of August, William Bullock wrote the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on another matter, but added a postscript noting, "No Indians has visited this post since the 10th of July when three came in here from 'Red Clouds' camp . . . ."[55] It may seem odd that Bullock cooperated so readily in this effort to move people with whom he traded to a distant place and thus risk suffering a personal loss of their business. The fact is that Bullock appears to have believed that he would continue trading with the Sioux much as he had always done. That it would be otherwise became clear only in November when the other Indians came to Fort Laramie and signed the treaty.

At that time Bullock discovered how complete the prohibition on Indian activity at Fort Laramie was to be. William G. Bullock was not a casual bystander in this process; his position was that of an intimate, one deeply involved in the treaty discussions. Pictured in the treaty photographs from the spring, Bullock spoke as a firsthand observer and participant in the making of the Treaty of 1868. And he was sensitive to where the Indians would be trading after the treaty. He recorded subsequently that he, and the Indians, were all led to believe that their removal to the reservations was voluntary and that they could still trade anywhere they wanted. But after the signing of the treaty, on November 18, Bullock returned from a trip to find an order dated November 4, preventing Red Cloud or any other Indians from trading at Fort Laramie, saying that they were restricted to trading on their reservations. Bullock felt betrayed and was irate:

This order is directly contrary to what has been told the Indians both by

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Center at the University of Wyoming, the Wyoming State Archives in Cheyenne, and the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

[53] Bullock to Bvt. Brig. General A. J. Slemmer, June 3, 1868, typescript copy of letter in John Hunton Collection, box 13.

[54] Bordeaux not only traveled with the group and provided subsistence on the way, but he, like many other whites who had intermarried with the tribe, also took up residence on the new reservation.

[55] Bullock to Sanborn, August 13, 1868. Typescript copy of letter in John Hunton Collection, box 3.

> the Indian Peace Commission and the different Post Commanders who have been acting under their instruction, and they [induced] the Indians to sign the treaty by their representations. These wild Indians were *plainly* and *repeatedly* told that they need not go on the reservation or anything unless they wanted to go but that no *presents* would be issued to them except on the reservation by Genl. Harney but they could come and hunt and trade at Fort Laramie.[56]

Bullock also protested that "from the operation of the Peace Commission I fear we will not have any Indian trade in the future as all Indians half-breeds and white men of the country are to go over to the Missouri River near old 'Fort Pierre' where a reservation is to be established and no Indians are to be allowed to come here. The Indians are kicking against this proposition and it will doubtless lead to a renewal of hostilities."[57] Not as a result of a military victory, but as a result of a social process in which the Indians had become dependent upon whites for trade, a social process that included the destruction of the buffalo—even the followers of Red Cloud who had fought the inroads of the new social order with open warfare had become partially dependent on the institutions, goods, and practices of the new regime—that trade was then shifted elsewhere, and in that way the other Indians, not just those who lived at the fort, were being forced to leave Fort Laramie.

Of course it was not so neat as that, and on occasion some returned. The life of the Indians on the plains, with the decimation of the buffalo, and also the life of the Indians at the new agency where privation was rampant, was one of enormous suffering.[58] Ada Vogdes wrote in her diary that about a thousand appeared on the parade ground one morning in March 1869. They assembled there because they needed food. Red Cloud made it clear that although they were now required to leave the fort, they wanted to remain. Bullock put the number at two thousand, and he further reported that they were "in a starving condition." He added gloomily after their departure, "they have left in great want and I am informed that many of the women and children have perished since they left here."[59] Although they were forced to leave the fort at that time because they did not have permission to come in such large numbers, the next day they returned in smaller groups. For that matter, as an indication that the

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[56] Bullock to Robert Campbell & Co., November 19, 1868, typescript of letter in Box 13, John Hunton Collection. Emphasis in original.

[57] Agnes Wright Spring, "Fort Laramie Letters: The Letters of William G. Bullock, Sutler's Agent (1858-1871) at Fort Laramie, Neb. Terr., Idaho Terr., Dakota Terr., Wyoming Terr. 1868-1871," unpublished typescript in Wyoming State Archives, 16-17.

[58] See for example a letter to B. B. Mills, a trader at Fort Laramie, from Charles Guern. Guern had gone to the Whetstone Agency, and came to rue that decision: "I wish I had never started from Laramie I would been better off to day I am Sheme of myself to go back to Laramie after been told not to come over here but I would not listen to good advise it is good for me it will learn me some since Indians here are all dissatisfied for not getting anything and don't believed that they will get anything it was told to them that the would get something this fall but the said they was fools so many time that the won't believed what a White man will tell them any more…." Chas. E. Guern letter to B. B. Mills, August 25, 1869. A photocopy of this letter is in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file CCOR-7.

[59] Bullock letter to Robert Campbell & Co., April 1, 1869. Typescript of letter in John Hunton Collection, Box 13.

military order did not necessarily reflect sentiment even in the officer corps and their families, Ada Vogdes herself invited Red Cloud, Red Leaf, and Old Crow to her home for dinner.[60] She also rushed about seeking to trade for a beaded blanket that she particularly wanted. When the party finally left Fort Laramie, though, it was plain to all that their visits would be fewer and fewer. The hegemony on the plains reached deeper into society and economy. What the U.S. Army could not achieve on the battlefield was now playing out in a cultural war that was also an economic war.

It was painful for the Sioux to give up their association with Fort Laramie, an association that reached back further in time than the military's. When Red Cloud and his followers appeared at the fort in 1869 an account in a Cheyenne newspaper inquired why they just did not go to the reservation: "When asked why he didn't go to the Missouri Whetstone Agency to trade, Red Cloud answered he didn't belong on the Missouri. He was born here and had always traded here and always would trade here."[61] He was mistaken about the future; he and his followers, and all the others who signed the treaties, were flatly denied access to Fort Laramie.

That does not mean, however, that they willingly gave up the effort and abruptly ceased showing up at the fort. Over the next several years, the army prevailed upon Red Cloud and his followers particularly, and all the Indians generally, to go and stay at the reservation, but Red Cloud, at least for a while, attempted to resist and to live the life of the hunt. Occasionally he and some others would come to the post and attempt to trade or beg some food since hunting was not so successful as it once had been when the buffalo were more numerous.[62] When they showed up at Fort Laramie, these people usually attracted attention they had not received when they were regular visitors. In 1870 telegraph operator Oliver Unthank wrote, "I noticed a few of the 'Red Women of the forrest' in the Post to day."[63] That summer, another correspondent, suspicious over their presence, wrote from the fort, "There are few lodges left here but that is supposed to be

[60] Diary entry for March 26, 1869, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

[61] "Red Cloud at Laramie," *Wyoming Weekly Leader*, April 3, 1869; typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file IIN-4.

[62] The post surgeon in 1875 reported, "The only aboriginal inhabitants residing at this time near the post are a few of the Ogallalla and Brulé Sioux. By the treaty which was concluded with the Indians in the spring of 1868, they were to have reserved for them a large tract of land bordering on the Upper Missouri, and nearly all have removed to their reservation or confine themselves to their hunting grounds north of the North Platte, only coming to the post occasionally to beg or trade. The individuals who still remain, however, belong to a large tribe which call themselves Lakotas, or, in the northern lands, Dakotas." H. S. Schell, "Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory," in *A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army*, War Department, Surgeon-General's Office, Circular No. 8 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), 345-346. This note that a larger tribe of Lakota roamed the plains appeared not nearly so ominous as it might have been, given the very substantial number of tribespeople to the north who declined to settle for reservation life and would be the object of a campaign in 1876 to force them onto the reservation.

[63] Diary entry for February 21, 1870, Diary of Oliver N. Unthank, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file UON-1.

a blind."[64] At one point, driven by despair and misery, Red Cloud's followers—certainly a far different group from the Loafer band that had lived at Fort Laramie—temporarily established themselves in the winter of 1870-1871 at Fort Laramie in a force of nearly three thousand people. In February 1871, a correspondent who signed his letter "Frontier" described the scene near Fort Laramie, "the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes are mostly camped about two miles down the Platte river, and come in daily for rations; they say they are starving and that they can get no ammunition. There has been small issues of ammunition to them for past two weeks."[65] By 1871, there were still some Indian camps near the fort, but contact was kept to a minimum, and a measles epidemic ravaged the camps.[66] Subsequently they went thirty miles down river from Fort Laramie to the agency there.

By the end of 1872 they had moved on to still other locations, either on the White River or on Hat Creek.[67] Of course, by the time Red Cloud resigned himself to trading not at Fort Laramie but at the Red Cloud agency, he, like Spotted Tail before him, had lost the support of a significant portion of the Sioux who still refused to accept a reservation life of farming and ration subsistence.[68] The priorities of the old tribal culture remained powerful, even if the pressures for trade and sheer physical survival grew, and even if their own leadership counseled accommodation. The hegemony was not complete.

The effort to remove the Indians from the vicinity of Fort Laramie turned out to be broadly defined, taking in more than just the Indians themselves. As was the government's intention, most of the mixed marriage people and their children also left Fort Laramie and moved to the reservation. In 1867 a long list of petitioners, including the prominent names of Richard, Bordeaux, Beauvais, Janis, Cuny, Ecoffey, Ward, and others, urged Congress to set aside land for themselves, people who "are each and all heads or members of Indian families" and whose "half-breed children now number on the Platte and Missouri Rivers more than Two thousand (2000) souls." They argued ". . .that the construction of the Rail Road across the Plains has so changed business and travel that all ostensible means of support along the North Platte are destroyed, that they are anxious to locate with their families upon some good agricultural land in the Indian Country and commence farming, and that their settlement in any country would draw them their Indian Relatives & friends and would aid much in locating & civilizing the

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[64] Letter signed "Frontier," from Fort Laramie, July 27, 1870, published in Titusville [Pennsylvania] Morning Herald, and also in Paul H. Giddens, ed., "Seven Letters from the Wyoming Territory, 1870-1871," *Annals of Wyoming*, 50 (Fall 1978), 305.

[65] Letter signed "Frontier," from Fort Laramie, February 17, 1871, in Giddens, ed., "Seven Letters from the Wyoming Territory, 1870-1871," 316.

[66] Post medical report for June, 1871; this is located in Medical History of Posts, Fort Laramie, at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[67] Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 130, 155. See also John Hunton, "Old Fort Laramie," typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file CIN-37, page 1. Hunton says that up until 1872 there were "during very much of the time from the beginning of the Fort up to 1872, a great many Indians in its immediate neighborhood. After the big Indian Agency was established thirty miles down the Platte River from the Fort, there were not so many."

[68] See on Red Cloud's loss of influence especially, Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 131-33.

Indians."[69] The irony in this is that their pleas may have been heard, but with an adverse effect on their Indian relatives. At the 1868 treaty council at Fort Laramie, Man-Afraid had argued, much as others had argued in 1851, in the interests of the *Métis*, as anthropologist DeMallie says, "the mixed-bloods' case, urging that they be allowed to stay with the Indians, together with their white fathers, and not be forced to move to a separate reservation on the Missouri River. 'All these old mountaineers are our children,' he said, 'I consider them as part of ourselves . . . . I want the half breeds to take care of this land.'"[70]

As it turned out, the government granted the mixed bloods the opportunity to reside with the tribespeople, but the location would not be near Fort Laramie, but rather on the new reservation near the Missouri River. Some chose to go to the reservation with the Indians. Minnie Sutherland, a white woman who grew up around Fort Laramie, recalled,

> as soon as the U.S. Government assigned the definitive boundaries of the different Indian Reservations these squaw-wives with the exception of one or two expressed a desire to go back to their own people. One, whose name was Lila Lee was so nice looking and spoke English well, left before the reservations lines were established. Shortly after returning to her people it was reported that Lila Lee married Billie Brown, whose Indian name was Billie MacGaw.[71]

Many mixed-blood families made the move. Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun was in Iowa staying with her sister and attending school at the time of the move to the reservation. When she returned to her family in 1871, she joined them at the Whetstone Agency. Her summary of the change is brief, undetailed, but nonetheless pointed in its impact: "nearly all the French fur traders who had mixed-blood families moved up on the reservations at Rosebud and Pine Ridge where their families had rights from the Laramie country, where, in the earlier years, they had lived and grown. They left behind only memories and graves."[72]

In fact, the deeper, cultural, dimensions of the social change became evident in 1870 when Red Cloud indicated that he wanted James Beauvais as superintendent of the new agency and B. B. Mills as the Indian Agent. Mills seemed a reasonable choice from the perspective of many people given his background at Fort Laramie as a trader and his familiarity with the Indians. Yet there was resistance and that resistance was based exactly on Mills's association and identification with the Indians; he would not be

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[69] Letter from John Richard, Sr., James Bordeaux, J. Bissonette, G. P. Beauvais, Adolf Cuny, Sefroy Iott, Hiram Kelly, Jules Ecoffey, John Hunter, Nic Janis, et al. to "the Congress of the United States & to the Hon. Commissioner of Indian Affairs," November 16, 1867. While a number of copies of this letter can be located, the typescript copy in the Beauvais file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, CIN-92, with a complete list of signatories, is one of the most useful.

[70] DeMallie, "'Scenes in the Indian Country,'" 47.

[71] Cecile Stoll Taylor, "Looking Backward to Frontier Days about Fort Laramie," p. 5. Taylor begins her story with the explanation that "My name was Minnie Sutherland." This is a typescript item in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file FLGH-13.

[72] Bettelyoun and Waggoner, *With My Own Eyes*, 103.

an agent of cultural and social change. Felix Brunot, a member of the Indian commission, particularly voiced his opposition:

> Mr. Mills who was named for agent lives a few miles from Fort Laramie – has an Indian wife – and half breed children – formerly it is said he was intemperate, but it is also said has been steady for several years. He is well spoken of by most persons at the Fort, and has the reputation of an honest well behaved man. . . . I do not think it would be best to appoint Mr. Mills Agent. He is too nearly on a social level with the Indians, and has too long been identified with them and the frontiersmen to have either the capacity or the inclination to do any serious work for the salvation of the Indians. To appoint him agent would it seems to me to be a step in the direction of perpetuating past evils.[73]

It was one thing to allow whites who had intermarried with Indians and their children to follow the tribes to the reservation. It was something far different to allow such people "on a social level with the Indians" a position of authority with them. The work of "salvation of the Indians," of establishing cultural hegemony, required a different choice.

In the ensuing years the Indian presence at Fort Laramie was invariably characterized by suffering and despair. Small groups passed through now and then and individuals occasionally congregated in the 1870s and 1880s. This was less a sign of acculturation, though, than a sign of bleak hopelessness. When they were seen, they were often spotted at the post dump, as David Hieb recorded G. O. Reid's recollection: "The dump was east of the Corral and squaws would scavange there for condemned bacon etc."[74] Others reported that following the blizzard of 1878, the cattle that had replaced the buffalo perished in large numbers, and "The old squaws followed out over the range and after the men took the skins, they would jerk the meat, and use it for food. We never knew whether they used the bad as well as the good or not."[75] In this way, the Indians who had provided a culture to which whites had adapted in years when they were the dominant force, Indians who had gathered wild vegetables for the whites to fight scurvy, Indians who had assisted emigrants, Indians who had gathered in huge numbers in 1851 to seek peace, Indians who had traded with and worked for soldiers and emigrants at the fort, Indians who signed one agreement after another in treaty councils, in this way those Indians were ushered out of the Fort Laramie area and when they remained or returned, it was to pick up scraps from the table of the dominant culture.

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[73] Felix R. Brunot, Chairman, Board of Indian Commission, to E. S. Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 10, 1870, typed copy in Beauvais file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library file, file CIN-29. Brunot conceded, however, that his colleague commissioner, Robert Campbell, spoke in favor of appointing Mills. Campbell, of course, was the same man who had originally built Fort William in 1834.

[74] Memo from David L. Hieb to files, October 5, 1950, re: "Interview of Old Timers George O. Reid and Jacob J. Tomamichael," in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, RG0-7.

[75] Cecile Stoll Taylor, "Looking Backward to Frontier Days about Fort Laramie," p, 7.

What had happened in a short period, a period of around two decades, was truly revolutionary. In 1851 the assembled tribes in the Treaty of Fort Laramie granted permission for white people to pass through on the road west. In 1868 the United States government declined to give the same Native Americans the right to live and trade at Fort Laramie, required them to move onto reservations far away, and then pressed them on every front to give up their lands, their economy of hunting, their languages, their customs, their identities, and their freedom. All in the name of civilization.

# Chapter 7

# A New Social Order and New Social Tensions 1867-1890

During what has sometimes been described as the mature years of Fort Laramie, the dynamics of social relationships at the post took on forms that both paralleled and sometimes even exceeded the model of social organization prevailing in eastern society. As the United States was becoming an increasingly urban nation, Fort Laramie was also becoming a community, even a city, with modern relationships. Far from the crucibles of industrial capitalism, Fort Laramie nonetheless resembled the emerging mechanical society far more than it did its own society and culture of a generation earlier and it generated the social tensions, the distances and the bonds, characteristic of the growing commercial cities, though always tinged with a military hue. The military model of organization that dominated Fort Laramie, instead of providing a marked difference with the industrial cities of the nation, actually served to make a connection; the industrial model and the machine-based society moved closer and closer to the military organization—and vice versa.

While it would be jejune and one dimensional to say without further elaboration that the nineteenth-century army was deliberately and intently disciplined, highly organized and institutionalized, and demanding of complete obedience, that point takes on a larger significance if it is placed beside the society it sought to protect. American society in the late nineteenth century was overwhelmingly rural and socially isolated; people operated according to pre-industrial rhythms, standards, and patterns of organization; and the notion of a society organized like a vast, powerful machine was as revolutionary as the growing power of machines themselves, which were transforming production and also life in the industrial centers, from which Wyoming Territory was far away, whether measured by culture or miles. Fort Laramie helped reduce that distance.

## *i. Like a Machine*

In 1868 Ada Vogdes returned to Fort Laramie after being away two weeks, camped with her husband and his detachment on the Laramie River. Formerly a resident of Manhattan, her observation of what she saw bears more than casual significance: “I was as happy to get back to the post, as I would have been getting back to N.Y.C. after an absence of two weeks. Laramie was in fact a great contrast, & looked

like a large city as we approached it."[1] This was no longer the quaint New England or Midwestern village to which so many had previously compared the fort. Of course, those villages back east were also changing and they were increasingly population centers in a world of cities, machines, and industrial order. So too was Fort Laramie coming to resemble the world of the East, and that world was increasingly an industrial world.

It is not necessary to pursue conceptions of "the frontier," mythical or real, to realize the contrast between Wyoming civil society—native or white—and the military. The values, discipline, institutions, and organization of army life challenged virtually everybody in and around Fort Laramie. Most directly this ordered life governed the actions and activities of the soldiers. Consider merely the daily schedule of life at the fort. That schedule, generally familiar to all who have worn the uniform, reflects the synchronization of activity and coordination of tasks performed by a large number of people in a single, concerted effort, assuring that necessary duties would be fulfilled and that the day would be well (and efficiently) occupied. Punctuated by bugle calls, the day with its landmarks in time would be segmented into blocks designated for automatic, mechanical routines. Reveille would typically be at 6:00 a.m. followed by Stable Call and then Mess Call at 7:30 and Fatigue Call at 8:15 and Guard Mount Assembly at 8:55, Water Call at 9:45 and Drill Call at 10:30. And so it went during the day, concluding sometimes with a dress parade in the evening at retreat. The drills and chores varied in intensity, of course, and the cavalry and the infantry followed different routines, but the segmentation of the day with clock-like precision and the coordination of activities on this scale represented a world apart from the casual and flexible schedule of the farmer, of the craftsman, and even of the village merchant in the rural order.[2] The apprehension of time, the dominance of the clock, and the drill of routine at Fort Laramie was the world of the new urban order, the world of the machine age.

On a smaller scale, this is exactly the mechanical nature of work and life that Assistant Post Surgeon Johns had lamented when he contrasted the activities of soldiers with their civilian counterparts employed by the quartermaster. His report of 1859, which contrasted the lives of the civilians at Fort Laramie with those of the soldiers, captured some of this distinction as it compared the independence and individuality of the artisan to the drudgery and monotony of the soldier walking guard duty. The quartermaster civilian employee, Johns wrote, had independence and individuality in his work. He made decisions as he proceeded, and he was responsible as an individual for specific tasks. On the other hand, Johns described the hopeless mental monotony of the soldier performing repetitious, unthinking tasks, especially in something like guard duty. The civilian was "exercising his powers, mental and physical, according to the requirements of the particular work he may have to do."[3] The soldier in the ranks, following orders,

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[1] Diary entry for July 31, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

[2] The literature contrasting pre-industrial social organization with industrial patterns is considerable, and of critical importance, in American and European social history, but there is no better starting point than E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, No. 38 (1967), 56-97.

[3] "Sanitary Report, Fort Laramie," December, 1858, as printed in Marie H. Erwin, "Statistical Reports on the Sickness and Mortality of the Army of the United States, 1819-1860," *Annals of Wyoming*, 15 (October 1943), 335-336.

doing a task over and over again, was, notably, not exercising those mental and physical powers. Johns suggested, with thinly veiled envy, that the mountain men around the post lived lives of substantially greater freedom and satisfaction. Johns did not argue, of course, that the army was wrong to have such an organization and system; he simply made the distinction because it had profound medical, or at least health, consequences. The significance may have been more than clinical, however, since it also connects to the observation by Lewis Mumford regarding the role of the military in shaping modern society. As Mumford argued, "it was mining, mechanization, militarism and their derivative occupations that took the joy out of daily work and turned it into an implacable, mind-dulling system of drudgery."[4] A new system of work, a new system of living, a new organization of social relationships was rising on the plains.

The military society of Fort Laramie was, not surprisingly, a highly stratified, rigid, rank-conscious society. Rank served both to divide and unite the residents of the fort—dividing them into their different strata, but sometimes unifying them within the layers of authority. Within a given rank, people lived next to each other, they socialized with each other, they supported each other. Outside any particular layer of rank, they lived apart, they interacted only in official capacities, and they maintained often huge distances from each other, physically and socially.

The system of rank dictated the privileges and responsibilities of this command system of authority. The example of Leodegar Schnyder reveals some of the contours of the centrality of rank. Not at all the average soldier, Sergeant Schnyder emigrated from Switzerland to the United States in 1829, joined the army in 1837 at the age of twenty-three, fought against the Seminole Indians in Florida, and served at Fort Gibson in Indian Territory during the Mexican War.[5] In August 1849 he arrived at Fort Laramie and began a period of service that would continue until he finally left the post in 1886, thus having the distinction of being not only the fort's longest serving soldier but also one who gained a reputation more widely circulated than perhaps any other individual at the post. He was its living monument, an institution by himself. In 1874 when Laura Winthrop Johnson wrote an article about her trip to the West in *Lippincott's Magazine*, she referred to "the old artilleryman, a character always pointed out to strangers, who has lived at the post ever since it was a post, and is distinguished as the ugliest man there. His seamed and scarred face looks as if it had been through many storms and Indian fights."[6] Schnyder, while at Fort Laramie, his training and previous service as an artillery sergeant notwithstanding, had been detailed as assistant librarian in 1851 and in 1859 he was appointed postmaster, a position he held until 1876, apparently in addition to other duties.[7]

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[4] Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1964), 148; Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1966), 238.

[5] John Dishon McDermott, "Fort Laramie's Silent Soldier: Leodegar Schnyder," *Annals of Wyoming*, 36 (April 1964), 5-6.

[6] Laura Winthrop Johnson, "Eight Hundred Miles in an Ambulance," *Lippincott's Magazine*, XV (June 1875), 696.

[7] Order No. 56, 1859, typescript in Orders, Post Records, Record Group 98, bound volume, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library; certificate of appointment of Schnyder as postmaster, Leodegar Schnyder file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MP-3. See also Harry

What Schnyder was most known for, though, was his personal regard for military authority, discipline, and protocol and his insistence that others adhere to the same severe standards. Possessing almost a Junker mix of class consciousness and military authority, Leodegar Schnyder was the post martinet. As one person remembered him, "When meeting Snyder [*sic*], citizens as well as soldiers were expected to salute him in regular military style. When officers approached him, Snyder invariably stood at attention and saluted, and woe be the officers who did not return the salute, for he would immediately remind them of their military training and would always conclude his rebuff with two loud coughs." His position as postmaster—a political appointment—became a fiefdom from which he exercised boundless authority. On one occasion when an officer came in to get his mail and proceeded to sift through the stack of mail, Schnyder ordered the officer out. The officer, not accustomed to being ordered by a sergeant, reminded him that he was an officer and Schnyder finessed military rank by informing him that he was postmaster and that the post office was his domain and physically expelled the officer from behind the barrier.[8] His manner of distributing the mail suggests his approach to his office and the organization of the military and civilians at Fort Laramie:

> All citizens and soldiers were compelled to go in person for their mail to a small room set aside as a post office, and unless they saluted on approaching the window, he would motion them aside, telling them to go and discipline themselves. This compelled them to take their places at the end of the line and again await their turn. The officers' mail was delivered by him in person, and was carried in a leather bag—which hung by his side, showing the inscription 'Officers' U.S. Mail, Sergeant Snyder [*sic*], Postmaster.' His first call was to the commanding officer's quarters, and then in succession, according to the officer's rank, ending with the 2nd-Lieutenant. Should any officer of lesser rank than those already called on, being ignorant of the Sergeant's custom, accost him and ask for his mail, the sergeant would salute and tell him, that he would receive his mail at the proper time, in his turn. Army officers occasionally did this to try the old man, but the result was invariably the same.[9]

In some ways Schnyder may have been an extreme, but if so, not by much. And in the fundamentals, he appears to have represented the mainstream of discipline and duty's demand. No less than Ada Vogdes documented an instance where a soldier in her husband's command learned a lesson, and so did she. The wife of a lieutenant assigned to Fort Laramie, Ada Vogdes accompanied her husband on a detail to cut wood for the post and they remained encamped for a number of days. During this encampment, one of the soldiers accused the lieutenant of mistakenly taking the soldier's rifle. After a brief exchange in which, according to Ada Vogdes, "the soldier contradicted him," Lieutenant Vogdes "had him tied up by the thumbs." In her diary Ada Vogdes continued, "this frightened me, so, I *cried* all the afternoon, until he released him. Officers must be obeyed so I had to endure this for some time before Wayne let him

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(Sam) Young, *Hard Knocks: A Life Story of the Vanishing West* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, Inc., 1915), 91-92.

[8] Young, *Hard Knocks*, 91-92.

[9] Young, *Hard Knocks*, 91-92.

down, & after he convinced him he was right, & the man begged his pardon for contradicting him, all was well again in camp for this evening." The soldier learned not to contradict the officer and the lieutenant's wife learned the military requirement of unquestioning obedience. Nonetheless it was a hard a lesson for her, maybe as hard as it had been for the soldier. That evening she decided to leave the camp and return to the post.[10] Similarly, Frances Grummond, in 1866 the wife of a lieutenant, and who together passed through Fort Laramie on their way to Fort Phil Kearny, remarked that "It was anything but a pleasure trip, except so far as loyalty to that duty and obedience to orders brought their compensations in doing things because 'they can be done,' 'they must be done,' 'they will be done.'"[11] Discipline and order was the army way, not just for those in the rank and file, but for everybody connected with the army. Each person had to play his—and her—role to make the military machine work.

Into this rigid system came individual officers and their families, individual enlisted men and their families, and the various other people who supplied essential services in the infrastructure of operating a military organization and a concentration of people far from established society. This represented a significant challenge inasmuch as beneath the common uniform and beyond their connection to the army, they had their own individual identities. Few were automatons, completely internalizing the demands of the system and sacrificing their individuality to it. Moreover, for virtually everyone at the fort, the pressures for conformity and the desires for individuality came into conflict and always lurked beneath what often appeared to be a placid surface of acceptance of social role.

*ii. Toeing the Line on Officers' Row*

Parting the veil to examine the contours of life for officers and their wives in the period following the end of the Civil War reveals much that could be expected—the social roles of responsibility, the highly structured and formal relationships, the military ritual, the acute stratification, and the importance of restraint and reserve in personal demeanor and behavior. But such an inquiry also reveals that life at home on a military post, especially for the person whose existence was in part defined by that home on Officers' Row, carried substantial internal costs. A fundamental challenge was simply to meet the large expectations of such a life without entirely repressing individual needs and sacrificing individual identity.

The officers and their wives, the small group at the pinnacle of Fort Laramie life, saw themselves, and often accurately so, as representatives of an eastern elite, almost an aristocracy, and this implied a demographic difference in the commissioned and enlisted ranks of the denizens of Fort Laramie. In fact, they *were* different. First of all,

[10] Diary entry for July 31, 1868. Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.
[11] Frances C. Carrington, *My Army Life and the Fort Phil Kearny Massacre* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971; originally published, 1910), 38.

unlike the enlisted men, the officers tended to be born in the United States. An examination of the census returns for 1860, 1870, and 1880 reveals that the vast preponderance of officers were born in the United States, and when the census returns indicate the birthplace of their parents (as they did only in 1880), that their parents were also born in the United States. In 1860 none of the officers were born outside the U.S., while the returns for 1870 show three and those for 1880 show one. This is not a pattern except that those born outside the United States were consistently in the minority; the total number of officers in those years averaged a little over a dozen.[12] While the homogeneity of the officer corps is hardly startling, it does set that group apart from others at the fort.

The officers lived in the same section of the fort. One end of the parade ground held the commanding officer's home and also that of other officers. Many families, as well as individual unmarried officers, took up residence in Old Bedlam, divided into at least four sets of residences, two above and two below. There was a rotation in housing set in motion by the arrival of a new officer who would lay claim to the housing appropriate to his rank, causing others to move sometimes like a string of falling dominoes. Cynthia Capron marveled at the mysteries of the bumping process (which she somehow escaped) when she wrote her sister, "we have expected to move every time any one came, as our quarters are one of the best, but we still keep them."[13] Once they arrived at the post, of course, they would have to find temporary lodging until their quarters were ready. So the newcomers often moved in with another officer and his family. Elizabeth Burt described the process, and some of its implications for the host family, and also reveals some of the uneven burdens generated in the household: ". . . every officer's wife is called on so often to be hostess to new arrivals, who are frequently perfect strangers to her. However, when the necessity arises, no matter how few her bedrooms or scanty the larder, she rises to the occasion and fills the role to the best of her ability."[14] To make such a system work, with all its intrusiveness, and to work without generating resentments, required sacrifice on the part of all involved.

Ada Vogdes wrote about the welcome she and her husband received upon their arrival at Fort Laramie: "We drove into the garrison & there we met the officers, & ladies who took us home until we had gotten our quarters . . . ."[15] Cynthia Capron described the process more completely, when they were put up by the Munson family:

> . . . Mrs. Munson in particular doing everything she could to make it pleasant for us. I, or we, I should say had six calls Sunday while at the captains. Then we had no more till we were partially settled Thursday, and nearly all called before the week was out. We returned our calls the first of the next week.[16]

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[12] Copies of the manuscript census returns for Fort Laramie for 1860, 1870, and 1880 are available in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files. These are the materials I have used in all references to the relevant census data.

[13] Letter from Cynthia to Louise, July 1, 1877, Capron Family Papers.

[14] Elizabeth Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," copy of typed transcript of the original, which is located in Library of Congress, in Fort Laramie library, 33.

[15] Entry for July 8, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

[16] Cynthia Capron to Mary, April 30, 1876, Capron Family Papers.

Even after being assigned their own domiciles, the sharing continued to some degree. When finally they moved into their own quarters, Cynthia Capron reported that she and her husband lived in the large residential building at Fort Laramie, "called 'Bedlam' because there is room for so many families."[17] At another point, the Caprons moved into the half of a house divided for officers, with Elizabeth and Andrew Burt on the other side.[18] As for Elizabeth Burt, she recalled in her stay at Fort Leavenworth the arrangement of officers' housing, and then suggested it was the same at other places she and her husband were assigned: "The hall and stairway were in common with our next door neighbor who was a volunteer paymaster, having his wife and daughter with him. This mode of building quarters prevailed generally in those early days, bringing families in closer contact than was sometimes pleasant."[19] How much they complained of this "close contact" is not known; Mrs. Burt herself appears to have tried to keep perspective and a positive outlook: ". . . my husband's rank gave him better quarters than many of the other officers had, even if they consisted of only six rooms poorly constructed. With good stoves and plenty of wood we could keep comfortable in our living room at least."[20] If these were among the best quarters, the condition of the others may be questioned, but the least of the officers' quarters were still superior to those of others on the post.

This system of elite association internally served two powerful functions. One was to set the officer corps apart from the masses of soldiers and the other was to cement the relationships within the officer corps. The camaraderie in theory worked to develop effective teamwork and cooperation, but it also solidified the leadership and served to reinforce the aristocracy of military leadership. None of this should be surprising or remarkable except for one point. This highly organized and stratified social arrangement, this established elitist structure, thrived not only in the old forts and garrisons of the republic, but also in the West. The routine corrosion of rank and status and elites by the open ways and circumstances of life in the absence of fixed authority and highly structured institutions, a wearing away that had once been evident at early Fort Laramie, diminished at the fort in its years as a mature military post; that corrosion, like the larger social order the new society replaced, was a thing of the past.

When the system of brevet rank fell by the side at Fort Laramie in 1870, the action provided a more uniform, single standard of reference in the stratified system of authority, but it also suppressed more of the individuality that the dual-rank arrangement had allowed, and in which some people could achieve greater honor and privilege than their permanent rank carried. When officers previously had advanced in rank during the Civil War but were subsequently reduced in rank, the higher rank was their brevet rank

[17] Cynthia Capron to Mary, April 30, 1876, Capron Family Papers.
[18] Cynthia Capron to Mary, June 21, 1876, Capron Family Papers.
[19] Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," 37.
[20] Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," 171. See also her comment, pp. 45-46, while moving from one station to another and living in tents at night on the trail: "One lady objected to the proximity and told the pioneer party to change the locality appointed for her tents; but orders were orders and in that spot her tent must be pitched. This happened in the early part of the trip. We ladies soon learned the full significance of an order and that to submit gracefully was the only, as well as happier way."

and they were entitled to be addressed by that higher title. This system came to an end locally with some satisfaction on the part of those forced to yield to colleagues who held the higher brevet rank and with some consternation on the part of those who lost their loftier status. One individual at Fort Laramie described the reaction in these words:

> Nearly all of our officers having gracefully dropped their brevet rank (lately-abolished) without awaiting the order to that effect, and, in consequence, instead of "General," "Colonels," or "Majors," we have plain "Captain" and "Lieutenant" . . . . O! what a fall was there! Some of them were loth, no doubt, to tear from their shoulders what did them so much honor but it was inevitable, so with a sigh they assumed their lineal rank and patiently await some more substantial token for past services from the hand of their grateful (?) countrymen. Some very cruel jokes were cracked at their expense by those officers who were not honored by brevet rank, but they bore it bravely and kept a smiling countenance.[21]

In either case, whether losing prestige or gaining from the loss of others, this placed everyone in the same system with the same frame of reference for reckoning their position in life.

If the officers represented an elite, then so did their wives. In 1869 one letter to the *Army and Navy Journal* from Fort Laramie described the wives of the officer corps at the fort thus: "The officers are nearly all married; and it would be difficult to find in any regiment a greater number of educated and refined ladies. They are daughters of men who have occupied responsible and honorable positions in society, and exhibit all the results of intercourse with refined society, to say nothing of [their] beauty, which is conceded by all who have the honor of their acquaintance."[22] That description of a monolithic demography and culture (and even appearance!) doubtless carried much truth, but there was more to the officers' wives than that suggests. It is worthy of note that the women who served at Fort Laramie as wives in the officer corps were themselves a mixed group of distinct individuals with different ambitions and priorities and outlooks on their own fortunes and on the circumstances that brought them together at that military installation. A few left records of their experiences—diaries, letters, journals, memoirs—that provide some insight into the lives, opportunities, and frustrations of the women who served, in a broad social sense, in the officer corps at that station. That they provided some—any—evidence is remarkable. It was not easy to write, and to do so they sometimes had to go against the expectations held for them by others. Some molded their writings to shape those expectations, but others ventured into delicate and revealing territory.

The two successive wives of Henry Carrington indicate some of the boundaries women encountered. Margaret Carrington passed through Fort Laramie on the way with her husband, Colonel Henry Carrington, in 1866 to Fort Phil Kearny and then on their

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[21] Letter signed "Frontier," from Fort Laramie, July 27, 1870, published in Titusville [Pennsylvania] *Morning Herald*, and also in Paul H. Giddens, ed., "Seven Letters from the Wyoming Territory, 1870-1871," *Annals of Wyoming*, 50 (Fall 1978), 306.

[22] Typescript copy of letter to editor of *Army and Navy Journal*, December 18, 1869, p. 274, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, MR-1.

way back in February of the next year. Later she wrote a book about her experiences, although much of the volume focused on the military events around Fort Phil Kearny rather than exclusively on her own personal experiences. After Margaret Carrington died, Colonel Carrington married Frances Grummond, the widow of an officer killed in the Fetterman battle, and she too wrote about her experiences as an army wife. Notably, both of these women, who seemed to find encouragement from their husband to pursue writing, adopted an attitude of supportive wife and obedient adjunct to the military, and neither offered much of a glimpse into personal affairs or revealed life behind closed doors. That, in itself, however, is revealing. In the case of Elizabeth Burt, she also wrote in support of the career of her husband, Andrew Burt, providing along the way a formal and guarded account of her own life, even though the manuscript was never published and was finally transformed only into typescript. Perhaps the most intimate insight she provided came when she recalled her distress upon her husband's leaving to go on campaign.

Cynthia Capron, while she was at Fort Laramie, kept the letters that she and her lieutenant husband wrote to each other and to their families. But she did more than write home. In 1876, she wrote her husband announcing her theretofore-secret project: "I am writing very discreet letters to the Chicago Tribune occasionally. They are generally a third of a column or shorter. They pay me $2 apiece. Of course, I keep it a secret. Have you any objections? . . . They are very forcible I think." Everything she sent the *Tribune* was, in fact, published, and she was encouraged by S. J. Medill, the editor.[23] As it turned out, though, her husband did have objections. She recorded that "He answered that he did not wish his wife to send any more correspondence to a dayly paper. If it was something for a ladies paper it would be different."[24] She obliged, perhaps painfully, and ceased to write for publication; she did, however, keep the private correspondence. After her husband's death in 1890, she felt free to return to the same project and began transcribing her and her husband's letters, editing and commenting on them as she went. They remain accessible, though unpublished, but in 1921 she published two long articles about the Indian wars based on those letters. Thus her publishing career spanned forty-five years, with a series of newspaper articles in 1876 followed by a long hiatus, and then her final articles in 1919 and 1921.[25] She also moved from a mass circulation daily newspaper offering recent accounts of great public interest, to writing an obscure historical piece in a state journal. Of course, her private correspondence is now available, at least what remains of it, to the researcher who tries to understand the issue of gender at Fort Laramie.

There are other sources too. One was penned by an officer who became famous for his fictional accounts of nineteenth-century army life. Captain Charles King never actually was stationed at Fort Laramie, but he served at posts nearby—notably Fort D. A. Russell near Cheyenne—and he spent considerable time at the fort on the banks of

[23] See S. J. Medill to Mrs. C. J. Capron, August 28, 1876, Capron Family Papers.
[24] Cynthia Capron, letter to husband Thad., September 24, 1876, Capron Family Papers. Her articles were published as letters in the Chicago *Tribune* for June 28, July 22, July 24, August 9, and August 15, 1876.
[25] Cynthia J. Capron, "The Indian Border War of 1876," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 13 (January 1921), 476-503 and "War Diary of Thaddeus H. Capron, 1861-1865," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 12 (October 1919), 330-406.

the Laramie. His novel *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, reflects a thoughtful and careful understanding of local buildings and activities, a fact which lends credence to part of his portrayal of social relationships at the fort. But his account, which focuses especially on the life of women at the fort, sometimes diverges from that suggested by the women themselves. Collectively, however, this variety of sources provides an unusually rich reservoir of information about life at Fort Laramie, especially about the life of the wives of officers, and the first thing it shows is that these people struggled with the expectations of their class and gender in different ways, with different results.

One expectation, clearly, was that of supportive helpmate to the husband, an army officer at Fort Laramie. Captain King attempted to portray a range of women at Fort Laramie in his fiction, and he did so with some nuance and sophistication, although his characters often became caricatures, representative types, and naturally they usually lived in dramatic situations rather than confronting the routines, boredom, and ennui, even anomie, of everyday life that the women confronted in real life. King, for example, fictitiously portrayed the wife of a commanding officer of Fort Laramie with these words:

> a faithful and devoted spouse she was,—something of the Peggy O'Dowd order, and prone at times to order him about with scant ceremony, but quickly resentful of any slight from other sources. She could not bear that any man or woman should suppose for an instant that her major was not the embodiment of every attribute that became a soldier and a man. She stood between him and the knowledge of many a little garrison squabble or scandal rather than have him annoyed by tales that were of no consequence; ….[26]

What Charles King portrayed in those words was less any specific person, although there may have been such a woman, as he described his own notion of an ideal woman and what might be expected of her. And even King attempted to temper that depiction and deviate from that burden of supportive spouse on another occasion when he had one character describe a woman:

> "A singularly handsome and self-possessed young woman that, Mr. Holmes!" remarked the major. "Now, there's the sort of girl to marry in the army. She has nerve and courage and brains."

Just as quickly, though, King had the major add this patronizing comment: "By Jove! That's one reason, I suppose, the women don't like her!"[27] Even in the fictional world of Charles King, not all women and not all men valued the subordination of a woman to the needs of a husband.

From the outside and from the perspective of the life of an enlisted man, the life of an officer's wife may have appeared an unalloyed delight, with no greater hardship than frequent entertaining and maintaining social circles. The day lived by the wife of the

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[26] Charles King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1889), 70. Peggy O'Dowd was the honest, devoted, self-sacrificing, and always-assisting wife of the Major in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.
[27] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam,* 109.

officer, like that of her counterparts back East, was usually consumed with family matters and housekeeping. Cynthia Capron described briefly her general activities at home in Bedlam:

> We have a good man to cook but I have all of the rooms except the kitchen and dining room to take care of. Parlor, bedroom, with three beds, dressing room, a store room and hall. I don't sweep it all every day, I can't. We stay in the bedroom a good deal so that I don't have to sweep the parlor thoroughly more than once or twice a week and the children play out of doors some, so that helps keep clean. They have a nice play house in the back yard under the stairs to the upper sett of quarters.[28]

Compared to the plight of others, that routine was not particularly wearing, except when one realizes that Cynthia Capron was describing not only her work, but her life too. And that suggests a larger meaning for the entertainment that formed a significant part of their daily activities.

Their evenings and weekends, and often their days as well, required an amount of time devoted to entertaining others that must have been burdensome. But entertaining was an important activity for several reasons. One reason was to cement the personal relationships of her husband and his peers as comrades and leaders, and much has been made of the necessity of this form of nineteenth-century networking for promotion in the army. In the twentieth-century military, the importance of a male officer's wife in certain activities and appearances in matters of promotion and assignment and the attendant sublimation of her own ambitions and sensitivities was legendary, whatever its actual basis. In this regard, that entertaining simply served the conventional support role for the husband.

There was a still deeper substance to this entertaining among the women of the fort's officer corps families. It was vitally important for wives to maintain contact with other people, especially with other women. There was clearly a sorority of spirit at Fort Laramie among the officer wives as they reached out to each other for daily and special needs, offering companionship, support, and solace. They came together to sew, to play croquet (even in the dead of winter), to share a meal, to sketch a picture, to walk, to go horseback riding, or just to sit on a porch and talk. They invited others to dine and joined others for evening meals often.

Ada Vogdes's diary provides a glimpse of these activities: "invited to dine with Mrs. Slemmer, but as I had a previous engagement could not go, but played croquet in the evening with her;" "went to a picnic to day given by Mrs. Sloan;" "took breakfast with Mrs. Bullock;" "Mrs. Cooper & Miss Abercrombie came down to see me this evening."[29] In fact, Ada Vogdes was doubtless one of the most sensitive and open observers of personal life at Fort Laramie. Unlike others, she revealed much of herself, even her intimate moments and thoughts, in a diary which remains a remarkable record of life at Fort Laramie. A native of Manhattan, New York, she had been married about six months

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[28] Cynthia Capron to Mary, April 30, 1876, Capron Family Papers.

[29] Diary entry for August 14, August 18, September 4, September 27, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

when she arrived at Fort Laramie at the age of twenty-three in 1868. One wonders whether she shared with others around her the same feelings she shared with her diary, which of course would be a significant commentary itself.[30]

Vogdes noted in her diary the other women whom she visited and she also recorded those who came to visit her: "I received calls with Mrs. Price. . . . In the afternoon when all the officers had called the ladies all went down to Mrs. Bullock's and there we had an elegant entertainment, equal to a New York table."[31] It was not just Ada Vogdes, as others reported the same togetherness. Cynthia Capron wrote her mother, "There are so many ladies at the post, I have to go out often to call. I like the ladies who were here last summer best, but these are pleasant." And she wrote her husband, for example, "I went to see Mrs. Burroughs this forenoon with my sewing and had a very pleasant time."[32] With their husbands gone during the day, with few other activities permitted, they found support and sisterhood with each other.

There were, in fact, specific burdens they had to carry that doubtless made for some long days and long nights. One was the simple absence of the husband while away on campaign. While the men were away on a mission the women appear to have drawn even closer together. And those could be stressful moments for a wife, anxious over the fate of her husband, living by herself in the less than warm and comforting environment of the male bastion of Fort Laramie where her official status derived from that of her husband. Elizabeth Burt relates in her account more than once the pain and sadness brought on by the departure of her husband.

> These partings were always great trials to me. Our family farewells were always made in quarters behind closed doors. Then he to his duty and I in a back room to my tears and prayers. I would choose a back room to shut out the tune the band played, marching the company out of the post, "The Girl I Left Behind Me." To this day when I hear that air tears come to my eyes.[33]

In June 1876 while their husbands were far away, and fearing the very worst for them, and indeed, apprehensive at precisely the moment that the battle on the Little Bighorn took place (although they were not aware of that), Elizabeth Burt and Cynthia Capron spent considerable time on their porches talking and worrying. Capron reported one conversation the two shared:

> She keeps up wonderfully well, but that morning she said she would be

[30] Biographical information supplied by the Henry Huntington Library suggests that either Ada Vogdes or her father, Rev. Charles Coffin Adams, wrote a biography of John James Audubon "published in part under the name of Robert Buchanan." See also, Michele Nacy, "Ada Adelaine Adams Vogdes: 'Follow the Drum,'" in Kriste Lindenmeyer, ed., *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives: Women in American History* (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 2000).

[31] Diary entry for New Year's day, January 1, 1869, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

[32] Cynthia Capron, to Ma, July 22, 1877, and to Thad., July 19, 1876, Capron Family Papers.

[33] Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," 32. Significantly, Mrs. Burt recalls her dealing with her husband's departure alone, a recurring feature of her account, which may demonstrate the limits of the sisterhood or her own predilection.

> glad when we left this post. I had said I wish we could leave the army. Mrs. Burt felt rather blue even after the dispatch came, for she thought her husband would not be back by the 1st of Aug. now.[34]

The irony is, in fact, that with their system of mutual support, the officers' wives helped each other to stand by and support their husbands as much as they helped each other as women in a man's world.

But it was not just the temporary absence of a husband that caused anxiety among some of these women. They were hemmed in by a code of protocol and respectable behavior common to other middle class and elite women in the East, but with the added restrictions of being in the military. Certainly the wife of an officer felt both the demands of restraint and reserve known to the military and the limitations on her aspirations by virtue of her gender. Charles King revealed, perhaps unintentionally, some of the pressures under which they lived. Although he may have valued women of "nerve and courage and brains" himself, he knew that there were limits to the allowed independence that those values implied. When some women in his story proposed to walk to the camp of a visiting battalion, the voice of restraint came to them from an older woman: "Of course you girls must have a 'matron.'"[35] King's fictional women dutifully secured an escort so that they would not walk alone to the battalion.

It is clear that the voice of restraint spoke to women at Fort Laramie constantly. Whether they always heeded that voice in real life, however, is another matter. They sometimes declined to toe the line of proper thoughts and behavior for people of their gender and class. When Ada Vogdes secretly admitted to her diary that she admired "the most splendid chest, and shoulders, I ever laid my eyes upon," of a visiting Sioux named Big Bear, she crossed some line, if it was only in her inner desires.[36] When she recorded in her diary that "Christmas I drank so many different kinds of liquor, that I retired quite upside down to my couch, and although I was perfectly still & quiet myself, the bed & things around, would roll & keep in perpetual motion. I think my brain had St. Vituses dance," she surely crossed another line of decorum.[37] When Cynthia Capron invited ministers to her home for tea and then quizzed them on their religion and challenged their views, she too crossed the line. When one minister responded to her skepticism about his own brand of Christianity and told her to "Take what has satisfied the hunger of others without question, as you would for physical hunger," she thought on

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[34] Cynthia Capron, to Thad., June 26, 1876. Capron Family Papers. One should contrast this conversation with a similar conversation Cynthia Capron had with Major Burt, in which the candor was sharply, but subtly limited: "Maj. Burt asked me when we were out on our porches last night which I thought it was hardest for, the officers or their wives. I said I could not tell. You have the satisfaction of the active duty and of doing it well, but I know you would like very much to be with us and have the comforts of a home." She neither expressed what the hardships were for women nor did she indicate what the major's thoughts on the issue might have been on the issue, if, indeed, she learned them. Cynthia Capron, to Thad., September 24, 1876. Capron Family Papers.

[35] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 42.

[36] Diary entry for November 5, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

[37] Diary entry for December 27, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

the advice and then determined, "I could just as easily take the Roman Catholic religion or Indian belief, because they satisfy their followers." She questioned authority, perhaps the ultimate authority.[38] Cynthia Capron, though yielding to her husband on the issue of writing for publication, also evidently disagreed with her husband in other matters. "I am glad we do not have to move," she wrote to her sister on January 14, 1877, when the prospect of a change of station withered. On the same date, her husband, Thaddeus, wrote his mother, "We did hope for a change to Cheyenne Quarter Master's Depot but have been disappointed and will try to be contented here."[39] Giving at one point and taking at another, these women did not automatically fall into line.

Given the circumstances under which they lived, it would be surprising if there were no indications of depression among these women. And, indeed, some of the conversations recorded (like that quoted above between Elizabeth Burt and Cynthia Capron) suggest that some level of depression was a familiar, even recurring, problem among the women of Fort Laramie. The expressions of "feeling blue," of being lonely, are common in the correspondence. There are other indications too. When Cynthia Capron wrote her husband on another occasion, she lamented her plight at the fort and pondered moving east.

> I think there is news that they are keeping back for fear we will be afraid. I was awake most of last night. I wish it did not cost so much to go East and if you were willing I would go. Sometimes it seems as if I could not endure it all, and if I was where I would feel safe it would be better. I know that I could not be more pleasantly situated than I am now as regards other things.[40]

It was not just the fear for their safety or fear for their husbands or the apprehensions upon watching them leave that caused depression. Sometimes it was simply being required to wait and wait for orders that may or may not come, living in uncertainty, or just living on a military post, that gnawed at them. When word circulated that some of the troops would be leaving Fort Laramie, Ada Vogdes responded honestly to her diary: "This separation every four month, a year, at farthest, is very trying & depressing to one's spirits. I feel like drowning myself this morning." At another point she noted that she felt well, rather upbeat even, by contrast with her earlier mood: "now I feel perfectly happy again after some weeks of despondency."[41]

Sometimes the tensions and the frustrations reached a breaking point. In 1958 Lois Parker wrote a novel for young people about two Swedish emigrants to the United States, Haakan and Karen Nilsson. The two found themselves at Fort Laramie in 1883, she the domestic help for a captain's wife and he driving a wagon. This particular officer's wife "seemed to live only from one letter from the East to the next," and her

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[38] Cynthia Capron to [her husband Thaddeus], September 1, 1876; Cynthia Capron to Mary, January 14, 1877, Capron Family Papers.
[39] Cynthia Capron to Mary, January 14, 1877; Thaddeus Capron to his mother, January 14, 1877, Capron Family Papers.
[40] Cynthia Capron to Thad., July 19, 1876, Capron Family Papers.
[41] Diary entries for March 27, 1869, April 17, 1869, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

loneliness and frustration deepened into despair. She brightened at the social activities, but, as Parker related in this story based on the tales told by her own grandparents, "her unhappiness grew. Karen was ashamed to overhear some of her nightly complaints and reproaches of her husband." Recognizing this, the captain spoke to the servant: "I'm sorry you heard this, Karen. My wife just doesn't seem able to adjust to the life of a frontier post. I have asked for a transfer East, but Mrs. Maynard does not wish to wait for it to come through. If she asks you to pack her belongings, it will be all right to do so."[42] Before this is discounted as entirely fictional, it should be noted that Lois Parker based this account on her own family, on the experiences of two real people named Karen and Haakan Nilsson. While she changed the name of Mrs. Maynard, the captain's wife, she seems to have changed little else. And, in fact, Fort Laramie's files include a family photo featuring Karen and Haakan Nilsson.[43] The wives may have walked side by side with their officer husbands, but they did not always march to the same inner drumbeat. And sometimes they did not walk side by side.

The character Mrs. Maynard clearly lacked the network of friends and the support group that some others had. The experience of Cynthia Capron provides a huge contrast since, for her, in a genuine crisis, the sisterhood vigorously mobilized. While her husband was away on the 1876 campaign in the north, Cynthia Capron's three-year-old son Henry died. Immediately her friends came to her aid and Capron writes:

> I stayed at Mrs. Munson's last night. This morning I came over to our parlor. Mrs. Burt came in, and took me home with her where I have been ever since. Mrs. Munson has been here for me three times, and when I finish writing I shall go over there. The ladies have all without exception been as kind as friends could be. They have hardly ever left me alone night or day. Last evening Mrs. Burt, Mrs. Mattison, Mrs. Townsend, Mrs. Egan, Mrs. Burroughs and Mrs. Noyes were there doing all they could. . . . . Mrs. Munson told me to send all bills to her and she would pay them. You can settle with the captain when you come.[44]

The commiseration and sorority are plain enough. But there remains the question of closeness in these relationships. The intimacy and openness could have known real limits when they accepted larger social distance and stilted manners, addressing each other as Mrs. Burt and Mrs. Mattison and Mrs. Capron. Or, Mrs. Maynard.

Even for the wives of officers, army life at Fort Laramie held its significant challenges, challenges of gender and responsibility and prescribed role in a man's world that mirrored, and then some, the tight-knit, closely-disciplined protocol under which their husbands operated. To live in a system characterized most of all by its requirements of protocol and restraint and discipline and orderly behavior was one thing. To live in it as

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[42] Lois M. Parker, *Brave Heart* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 68.
[43] Lois M. Parker, *Brave Heart* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 70. See also the Fort Laramie Library database of names and also in the photograph collection, Photo LL, d-17.
[44] Cynthia Capron to Thad., June 7, 1876, Capron Family Papers.

a woman without the compensations that theoretically derived from those sacrifices, except indirectly and vicariously through a husband, was something else.

*iii. Opaque Cultures, Separate Lives*

The limited private records of officer families provide a glimpse behind the closed doors of their abodes. Those records are even less available in the families of the enlisted ranks. Thus, if the lives of the elite are difficult to draw with precision, the lives of the great mass of people who lived at Fort Laramie are especially opaque for the modern historian. The records are so limited and the glimpses so sparse that generalizations can be offered only at the structural level, not the experiential dimension. But that does offer a beginning in determining something of the life of others at Fort Laramie. And the basic fact is that there was a remarkable diversity of peoples at Fort Laramie, both in the ranks and also in the families of those enlisted people. These people brought a variety of backgrounds, experiences, cultures, and expectations to their service at Fort Laramie, Wyoming.

The enlisted men at Fort Laramie held a much more diverse background than the officers. In 1867 Louis Simonin, a French mining expert, traveled with the Indian Peace Commission and described the enlisted ranks bluntly: "As for the soldiers, they are as in all the army the sweepings of the population of the United States. They number rebels from all countries, except true Americans."[45] Trader John Collins reported in the same vein that when he was at Fort Laramie, "The soldiers during my stay were a rough, devil - may care assortment from all states. Many of them were refugees from justice, some had been former penitentiary convicts, and nearly all were as tough a lot of men as could be sifted through the mesh."[46] The census materials say nothing of the character and previous experiences of the enlisted men at Fort Laramie, but they do indicate clearly that many of these men were at least born in other countries. In 1860 only 119 of the 363 soldiers, less than a third, were born in the United States. The others came from Ireland (149 or 41%), from Germany and Austria and the German-speaking principalities that would soon be unified into a German state (47 or 13%), from England and Scotland (19 or 5%), and from Italy, France, Holland, Belgium, Hungary, Switzerland, Denmark, Madeira, Norway, Sweden, Canada, and Poland. Ten years later the U.S.-born soldiers made up just over half of the enlisted population reported at Fort Laramie (167 of 320), while the Irish contingent dropped to 60 (about 19%) and the Germans remained about the same number (45) but their percentage of the whole rose slightly to 14%. The remainder included a similar scattering from other European countries. By 1880, the U.S.-born soldiers finally increased to 195 (around 55%), but that number is deceptive.

[45] Simonin's diary is reprinted in "Historical Reprints: Fort Russell and Fort Laramie Peace Commission in 1867," ed. by Wilson O. Clough, in *Sources of Northwest History* No. 14, State University of Montana, Missoula; reprinted from The Historical Section of *The Frontier: A Magazine of the Northwest*, published at the State University of Montana, Missoula, Vol. XI, No. 2, January, 1931, 177-186.

[46] John S. Collins, *Across the Plains in '64* (Omaha: National Printing Company, 1904), 6.

These people, many of them, were themselves second generation immigrants, removed from the land of their parents only by the circumstances of the date they were born. Louis Brechemin, Jr., recalled of his youth at Fort Laramie in the 1880s that even late in the history of the fort, "The Companies were composed largely of foreigners."[47]

While a dearth of documentation on ethnicity at Fort Laramie inhibits sustained inquiry of the subject, it is nonetheless clear that soldiers maintained multiple cultures, languages, and ethnic identities at the post. The Fort Laramie library reflected some of the ethnic taste of the soldiers; it included, at various times, newspapers like the *Illustrated London News American Edition*, *London Weekly Graphic*, *Vashrikten* [*Was Richtung*?] *& Deutschland & der* ____, the *New York Staatz-Zeitung* and others.[48] When Captain Von Hermann delivered a series of discussions in 1873 on the Franco-Prussian War and the organization of the German military, it is not clear if his audience included American born officers interested in the theory of military science or German countrymen interested in news from their homeland. Quite possibly it was both.[49] Occasionally instances of ethnic tension will creep into the official record, and it will usually take the form of one soldier's view of another in some kind of affray. In one instance a familiar form of bigotry became evident in 1870. Private Delong filed a complaint against Bvt. Major Cain who was officer of the day when Delong was under his charge in the guardhouse. The adjutant's letter to Cain informed him that Delong "complains of ill treatment and abuse at your hands while you were Officer of the Day. He has reported to the Commanding Officer that you struck him with your sword and called him a Damn Jew."[50] Instances such as this notwithstanding, the ethnic conflicts within the ranks seldom exploded into public view. One thing can be said: the cultures and languages represented at Fort Laramie, never officially recognized or articulated, not to mention encouraged, had much more in common with the factory towns and workplaces of the East than with the monolithic culture that military uniformity often portrays.

Moreover, the enlisted subculture at the fort also included an additional group of females. The vast majority of enlisted men did not have spouses and families present, but there were some wives on post, and these represented a distinct component of Fort Laramie's population. In 1880 only eighteen soldiers out of 357 (around five percent) in the census return had wives living with them; of those, three reported no children in the household. Significantly, this group also included laundresses, the second most identifiable group of women, after the wives of officers, at Fort Laramie. These women served an important and honorable function at Fort Laramie, just as they did at other military posts. A set of quarters was arranged for them behind the commissary, wooden buildings that varied in their condition and in their need of maintenance. An 1867 inventory identified three quarters for laundresses, capable of housing eight women, but

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[47] Louis Brechemin, Jr., Recollections, typescript, 1948, p2, and David L. Hieb, Memorandum for the files, August 12, 1948, both items located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, BCL-1.

[48] Eben Swift to QM, November 21, 1880; letter from post adjutant, April 9, 1883, in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library bound volumes. See also the typescript list of newspapers recommended to be supplied to the post in file MCOR-48.

[49] Cheyenne *Daily Leader*, January 25, 1873.

[50] Typescript of letter to Bvt. Major A. B. Cain from Thos. F. Quinn, post adjutant, May 9, 1870, located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MCOR-35.

then it went on to proclaim the buildings "utterly worthless."[51] Some progress was made, with additional quarters constructed in 1872, and by 1875 the post medical report notes, "There are seventeen sets of quarters for laundresses or married soldiers."[52]

Of course, that notation precisely articulated the situation. Many of the laundresses were also the wives of soldiers. At Fort Laramie this dual role—enlisted wife and laundress—became increasingly the norm. The 1860 census lists twelve women as laundresses, but does not list any children at the fort except for those in the family of Chaplain Vaux and Henry Forbes, a farmer, which suggests that the laundry women did not have families with them. In fact, aside from the laundresses, there were only four other women at the post according to the census: the wives of Vaux and Forbes and also Caroline Bennett, apparently the wife of the Quartermaster, and S. A. Johns, apparently married to Post Physician E. W. Johns. Nonetheless, and even with the system of enumeration in the census that did not place soldiers with their family residences, it appears that at least half of the women were married to soldiers, most often noncommissioned officers. A comparison of names that were singular at the post—Ladendorff, Lenox, Stanley, Maroney, and a few others—hints that some of these women, at least, were not unmarried. Ten years later the evidence is stronger, but still not entirely conclusive. Again, because of a census methodology that used separate enumerations of soldiers and civilians, it is not possible to say with certainty, unless additional evidence confirms it, that a woman was married to a man with the same name, although the likelihood is often great. One thing is clear, though, in 1870: of the sixteen laundresses, eleven listed dependent children. Married or not, they knew the responsibilities and burdens of family life.

Probably because the army in 1878 began to phase out the institution of laundresses as an official attachment to troop units, the census of 1880 lists no such vocation at Fort Laramie. Laundresses continued at Fort Laramie, but they were privatized and no longer an official part of the post; they no longer received rations and they could set their own rates instead of being regulated by a price structure. That they were still around in some form, though, is indicated by the post medical history for 1880, which indicates that the measles epidemic of June afflicted one laundress and twenty-four children of laundresses at the post.[53] But the laundresses were, officially, on the way out. By 1884 the situation had changed completely and one lieutenant even urged

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[51] This is from the report of an inspector, July 1, 1867, and is reproduced in LeRoy R Hafen and Francis Marion Young, *Fort Laramie and the Pageant of the West, 1834-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; originally published, Glendale, California, A. H. Clark, 1938), 355.

[52] Assistant Surgeon H. S. Schell, "Fort Laramie, Wyoming Territory," in "A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army with Descriptions of Military Posts," Circular No. 8, 1875, 347; a copy of this report is included in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MM-8. See also the medical history, August 1872, which notes "three sets Laundress Quarters erected, being each 16x20. Slab side and shingle roof, boarded floor and adobe lined. One building erected for two sets Laundress Quarters, 30 x 15 with shed kitchens 20x8 framed, adobe lined, shingle roof." A typescript copy of this report is included in the bound volumes, Medical History of Posts, Fort Laramie, at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[53] A typescript copy of the medical history for the post for June 1880 is located in Medical History of Posts, Fort Laramie, at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. While it may be possible that the census for surrounding districts included the laundresses as civilians, the immediate vicinity of the fort census includes farmers and cattle herders, but not laundresses.

the adoption of steam laundries so that the free-marketing laundresses would be put out of their jobs: "It seems that there are as many if not more married soldiers now than when laundresses were allowed. These women having no [recognized government] rights usually receive more than the former laundresses did and are in many ways a great nuisance. I think steam Laundries would do more to abolish them than any orders."[54] From the officer's perspective, soldiers should not have wives and families and the women were charging too much when they took in laundry to support their families. The burdens of the wife of the enlisted man and noncommissioned officer just began when they entered Fort Laramie. The pressures on them were considerable—by virtue of being women and thus also by their husbands' rank.

Moreover, the census indicates that in all likelihood they were of foreign birth. In 1860 three of the twelve laundresses were born in New York, five in Ireland, two in Norway, and one each in England and Holland. Ten years later, twelve of the sixteen were born in Ireland, two in the United States, and one each in Canada and Prussia. In Charles King's novel explicitly about Fort Laramie, the row of laundress dwellings was entirely Irish in population. King described a rider carrying news of a detachment about whom many were worried:

> The hoofs thundered across the rickety wooden bridge, and the rider was hailed by dozens of shrill and wailing voices as he passed the laundresses' quarters, where the whole population had turned out to demand information. . . . . In an instant an Irish wail burst upon the ear, and, just as one coyote will start a whole pack, just as one midnight bray will set in discordant chorus a whole "corral" of mules, so did that one wail of mourning call forth an echoing "keen" from every Hibernian hovel in all the little settlement, and in an instant the air rang with unearthly lamentations. . . . Having been wrought up to a pitch of excitement by the rumors and rapid moves of the past forty-eight hours, nothing short of a massacre could now quite satisfy Sudstown's lust for the sensational, and, defrauded of the actual cause for universal bewailing, was none the less determined to indulge in the full effect. . . . No sooner did the Irish wail come floating on the wind than the direst rumors were rushed from house to house.[55]

King describes the laundry women with a distinct air of condescension, and has characters refer to them as "distracted geese" and "D------ outrageous Bridgets down there!"[56] But he also yields to them a measure of respect. When a woman is taken prisoner (a black woman who served as a domestic servant in an officer's home), she is locked away in the laundress's quarters, "where stout 'Mrs. Sergeant Flynn' organized an Amazon guard of heroines, who, like herself, had followed the drum for many a year; who assured the major the prisoner would never escape from their clutches, and whose

[54] Handwritten, extract copy of letter from 1LT E. E. Hardin to Quartermaster General, June 23, 1884, located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MLA-4.
[55] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 114, 115, 116.
[56] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 119.

motto appeared to be, 'Put none but Irishwomen on guard to-night.'"[57] They were, in their own way, professionals. They were also, according to King, Irish to the core.

The circumstances of life for the laundresses and the families of the enlisted men were shaped partly by their rank, or, more accurately, by the rank of their husbands, and also by their dwellings. As late as 1881, the living conditions of the laundresses rankled the sensibilities of many, including the post physician who deplored the lack of sanitation. In the spring of that year he officially protested the quarters of a Mrs. Coyle, laundress for Company K. The rear room of her quarters adjoined a room that was used as a cowpen by a sergeant. As a result, "the effluvia escaping exuding through the partition wall is highly offensive and renders Mrs. Coyle's room at times scarcely inhabitable."[58] Physician Carvallo also noted that garbage was routinely thrown near the laundress quarters and the commissary and other quartermaster buildings; meat bones accumulated and were allowed to rot in front of laundresses' row near the footbridge. Moreover, the physician noted that two laundress sinks (latrines) blew over in a storm and had not been put back up.[59] The domestic lives of the laundresses, like the places they lived, obviously were far removed from those of the officers.

There was another group of women at the fort too, though not so noticeable as the laundresses or officers' wives. These were the domestic servants in the homes of the officers. In 1860 domestic servants did not exist, except as officers would have soldiers as strikers and orderlies or cooks. The crying question, according to one account, was what was traditionally known as the "servant problem"—how to secure good help. In 1864 Catharine Collins reported her experience with a Native American woman who came in once a week to help; while the Indian woman won Collins' sympathy, she did not receive her confidence. Two years later Frances Carrington faced the same question bluntly and directly when she stayed at the fort temporarily, and she did so in a way that reflected her expectations of help: "In my dilemma the servant question confronted me at once. In slavery days it was no question at all, for my father was a slave owner, though an ideal one, and I had no occasion to give this subject thought. . . . During all my married life, however, the same question has from time to time arisen, ghost-like, and will not down." Ultimately she acquired the service of an Indian woman who did her washing for her; the hired woman, however, in the view of Mrs. Carrington, was not to be trusted with cooking:

> My new-found helper was in total ignorance of the use of the wash-boiler, in lieu of which she rubbed the clothing into the holes to remove refractory stains, so that I reluctantly settled down to the conviction that *chawed* clothing I was fated to wear. . . . When my squaw had completed her task, as I supposed, I sat waiting for a signal to that effect by her reappearance. Instead of that I found her just outside my quarters sitting down in the dirt, but fast asleep, by no means suggesting a "Madonna of the Tub," although she wore two pairs of earrings and chains depended

[57] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 263.
[58] Post medical report for April 30, 1881; this is located in Medical History of Posts, Fort Laramie, at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.
[59] Post medical report for February 28, 1881; this is located in Medical History of Posts, Fort Laramie, at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

> from her neck. As I confronted her for settlement the Atlantic Ocean might as well have rolled between us so far as any communication we were able to make could help the situation. Someone was needed to break the spell and bring about an understanding. Finally a soldier appeared who knew some words of her language and offered to act as interpreter, so that between his efforts and a combination of signs and grunts I was relieved of all responsibility.[60]

As the Native Americans were moved away from Fort Laramie, that answer to the need for domestic help disappeared. In its place came other people. Sometimes, the officers depended upon soldiers who, finding an opportunity to excuse themselves from drill and to supplement their income by additional compensation from the officers, hired on to help with domestic chores. In 1868, Ada Vogdes took her cook with her even when she went into the field with her husband. And when troops were ordered from Fort Laramie to Fort Fetterman, she nearly lost her soldier-cook, much to the chagrin of both: "my cook has been ordered off on ten minutes notice, to Fetterman with nearly every soldier in garrison except enough to Mount guard, after Indians. . . . My cook did not go, owing to his being late, & some one else was put in his place, much to my great delight as I saw him returning with napsack & blanket & his face full of smiles."[61]

In the 1870s, Elizabeth Burt brought an African American woman with the family, but even so she still called upon soldiers for their help in the home and justified the practice because of the inability of securing, and keeping, white women:

> The black mammy whom we brought from Omaha, Nebraska, to be my great assistant with baby, was too slow to accomplish much more than work in the laundry, where she dragged out the washing and ironing and smoked her beloved pipe. To supplant her was impossible. If a white girl were ever brought into the post, no matter how old or ugly, she soon began to yield to the blandishments of the captivating soldiers and in a wonderfully short time entered into the bonds of matrimony . . . . Happily for us there were men in the company glad to exchange company work for that of cook in an officer's family, the salary added by us to his government pay per month being quite an inducement. I was fortunate enough in finding two men in our company who became apt pupils of mine in the kitchen. When needed, one or the other would come to my assistance and both proved treasures.[62]

At the same time, it should be noted that other civilian help was available and was employed. Although Elizabeth Burt expressed dissatisfaction with the results of the labors of the African American woman she brought with her, she also expressed great disappointment when that woman chose not to accompany her farther. Perhaps the

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[60] Carrington, *My Army Life*, 55.

[61] Diary entries for July 25, 1868 and April 17, 1869, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

[62] Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," 171-172. See also Merrill Mattes, *Indians, Infants, and Infantry: Andrew and Elizabeth Burt on the Frontier* (Denver: Fred A. Rosenstock, The Old West Publishing Company, 1960), 197-198.

black woman felt a similar dissatisfaction with her employer; certainly abundant evidence from the slave and post-emancipation South—and beyond—reveals the existence of a separate culture in the black community that challenged the priorities of white assumptions and social constructs at a number of points.

There were others too. The 1870 census figures note that seven women worked as domestic servants, most likely in the homes of officers. Of these, four were Irish, one was from the German state of Baden, and two were born in Nebraska. The two women from Nebraska, however, both had an "I" recorded in the race column; they were the fourteen- and fifteen-year-old daughters of Antoine Ledeau and his Indian wife (who was not listed). Ten years later, census figures for 1880 indicate eight women were employed as domestic servants at Fort Laramie. At first appearance, the trend seems to have reversed since only two of the women were born in other countries. Upon closer examination, however, the ethnic ties seem to have been just as deep as before. In addition to the two women born in England and Ireland, three others were born in the United States of parents who had been born in Ireland, in two instances, and in Ireland and in England, in the other. And the only three women employed on the post as domestic servants who were born in the United States, and whose parents also were, were African American. In other words, the only people who could say that their grandparents were born in the United States and who found opportunities in the servant staff in the homes of officers were black. These domestic helpers did not leave records of their own experiences and perceptions of life and work at Fort Laramie, at least not that have surfaced yet, but it is possible to glean some elements of their life from other sources.

These domestic servants appeared conspicuously in Charles King's novel of Fort Laramie. King drew his African American characters in broad caricature, ascribing to them stereotypical physical and cultural features. They tended to be woolly headed and bright-eyed and to speak in an Uncle Remus dialect.[63] In obvious ways this was a grossly unfair portrait and even seemed to have a life of its own as a stereotype as it also conformed to the images and qualities found in the minstrel shows. In other words, the portrayal of African Americans at Fort Laramie by those people at the fort who attempted to describe them drew upon popular racist images instead of an actual culture. At the same time, as distorted and shallow as it is, King's description and Elizabeth Burt's lament about her pipe-smoking "mammy" who had not internalized the work ethic of either industrial capitalism or the military, indicates that there was some cultural diversity at Fort Laramie, and that not all was a matter of Yes, Ma'am and Yes, Sir.

In one revealing moment, King went beyond the standard portrayal of these people in his pages and also broached the larger question of relationships between white and black people on the post, albeit indirectly. It is especially striking, given the censure he accorded black people otherwise, that King has a woman servant that he variously identifies as a "Negress," "colored," and a "a bright, intelligent mulattress" as

[63] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 106-107: "Robert responded, his kinky wool bristling as though electrified and his eyes fairly starting from their sockets; he was trembling from head to foot." See also, p. 160: "a burst of jolly Ethiopian laughter from the distant kitchen drowned for a moment other sounds . . . ."

the extramarital paramour of one of the white soldiers. Despite the fact that he was described as "a dark, swarthy fellow, with glittering eyes and rather flat features," this man, himself a striker for an officer, was not a Buffalo Soldier and the troops were not integrated; he was, by standards of the day, "white." What is most revealing in this is that neither the author nor any of the characters in the novel offered a word of disapproval of the interracial aspect of the sexual relationship of the two. That situation, however, raises more questions than it answers—the role of gender, since this was a white man and a black woman, being a central unspoken variable.[64]

Black people, moreover, were, contrary to the depiction provided by Captain King, not the norm in domestic help. The immigrants were the norm. Of them, we again have a little information from Lois Parker's novel about the immigrant couple Karen and Haakan Nilsson who worked at the fort. Much of the story of the couple at Fort Laramie focuses on the frustrations of the officer's wife, but there are glimpses into the lives of other people at the fort. The clearest observation on social structure and relationships at the post probably is that of the social hierarchy and its rigidity, and perhaps the confusion generated for someone unaccustomed to such divisions and rankings:

> Fort Laramie, Army post! What a strange place it was. So many distinct tiers of society—the officers' families living in a world to themselves, the noncommissioned officers likewise, and the enlisted men and their families again in a different life. . . . Karen could not see the difference, and soon she had the post confused about her status. She was officially only a maid, but how did one treat such a maid? She respectfully kept her place, and as respectfully expected courtesy from her superiors, and furthermore, received it.[65]

While Parker's brief fictional treatment does not dwell on the immigrant culture at Fort Laramie—indeed, Haakan Nilsson soon becomes Hank Nelson—it does effectively suggest the diversity and complexity of the society at Fort Laramie in the 1870s and 1880s. And that complexity, unlike the simple stereotyping offered by some, was based on the actual lives of people who lived at the fort in 1882 and 1883. Again, Parker based this discussion on her own family history.[66]

With such divisions—by rank and ethnicity—it would appear that there is little that can be generalized about the women of Fort Laramie. There is, however, the clear impression that women were held to a different standard than men, regardless of rank or class or background. Again, Lois Parker, in her novel *Brave Heart*, spoke to the standard. When Karen Nilsson suggested that the captain's wife get out of her near-seclusion in the sun-beaten house on the side of the parade ground and rest among the willows by the river, the lady declined the offer: "Child, ladies do not do such things. It would be disgraceful for the captain's wife to be seen lying in the shade in public view. And it is not becoming for you to spend much time there! After all, you are a married woman." When the young woman, who did not understand the protocols of the dominant

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[64] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 263, 107, 52, 85, 86, 264-267.
[65] Parker, *Brave Heart,* 70.
[66] See the Fort Laramie Library database of names and also, in the photograph collection, Photo LL, d-17.

culture at Fort Laramie, sought an explanation, the captain's wife was direct: "Karen, my dear, a woman's reputation is her most precious possession. Many of the messengers from the fort use the ford, and the wagon trains come in that way at times. Men may see you there unattended, and think you are a shameless creature who would accept their attentions."[67] The burdens of womanhood were many and they fell on the entire gender, but the burdens also varied according to class and ethnicity.

The lives of the enlisted men and their families, and the lives of the officers and their families, appear seldom to have intersected in the years after the Civil War. The only time enlisted men appear in the letters and journals of the officer corps is in an official capacity. Even in the fiction describing the post, the boundaries between the two communities are seemingly impenetrable from either side, a function of specific prohibitions of fraternization, but also a reflection of class and ethnic divisions—and distances. Impossible for enlisted men to breach the barrier, officers themselves kept their distance from the rest of the post's residents. Charles King's novel about Fort Laramie focused explicitly on life in the officers' quarters, with incidental and inferior roles ascribed to civilians and soldiers not part of the elite as the officers lived in social and cultural isolation from their neighbors at the fort. In Lois Parker's novel about an immigrant couple at Fort Laramie in the 1880s, she notes astutely,

> There were evenings of entertainment at the various dwellings about the parade ground. The soldiers' barracks at the north end of the square were scenes of dances, to which the few women of the fort whose husbands were of less than commissioned officers rank were invited. The officers and their wives looked in on the parties, but kept the restraint of their presence to a minimum.[68]

The society that flourished at Fort Laramie was a social order based on either the fear or the acceptance of authority, keeping one's place, and adhering to expectations and discipline. It was not a social environment that encouraged wild exuberance or individuality; such expressions, rather, were submerged and hidden inside a complex web of social relationships that stressed order and restraint, or they were pushed beyond that web and outside the fort. Any freedom and individuality would be left to the citizens of the area, but even then with severe restrictions and suspicions.

*iv. Sovereign Citizens and the Issue of Class*

The responsibilities and burdens of military service—restraint, discipline, and other features associated with the uniform—were such that one might conclude that those outside the chain of command might possess great license. Civilian status conferred some freedom, but not universally, and citizenship itself proved to be an ambiguous condition at Fort Laramie. Civilians often found themselves neither fish nor

[67] Parker, *Brave Heart*, 64-65.
[68] Parker, *Brave Heart*, 68-69.

fowl, neither officer nor enlisted, in a society divided assiduously into ranks, and, moreover, were themselves separated by rigid class barriers. Karen and Haakan Nilsson found themselves relegated to the lower echelons, on a par with soldiers of "less than commissioned rank" and their families. Oliver Unthank, a telegraph operator, sometimes socialized with non-commissioned officers, as in the time that he recorded in his diary that he visited a sergeant and his family, "played chess & checkers until Bed time—they were very kind & invited me to come again."[69] This, however, came a few days after Unthank felt rejected by not being invited to a military dance: "there was a Ball in Post Last night but the citizens were to Low to invite to the Dance, they consider that we are menials & are not worthy to grace the floor in their Presence."[70] If soldiers walked a rigid line, it was nonetheless a clear line that separated one from the other and that determined protocols and courtesies. Civilians had to discover that line for themselves on a daily basis.

Some civilians had distinct opportunities, and distinct restrictions too. Maria Inez Corlett Riter, who served one year as a teacher at the post in the early 1880s, found herself in almost a singular isolation. While at Fort Laramie, she said, "I lived and boarded with the head of the Commissary Department. During good weather, I slept in a halfway boarded-up, tent-covered place beside the house where I lived . . . ." Shortly after her arrival, she met a young man from Boston and went horseback riding with him. For this she was rebuked: "That evening my landlady—wife of the Commissary officer—told me my escort was an enlisted man. I must not go out with him again. No one in an officer or government official standing ever went out with an enlisted man. It just was not done."[71] She clearly received the limitations placed on women of the officer class, but she had to discover those limits the hard way.

And then there was the post trader, one of the most powerful and highest ranking people at the fort, certainly outside the officer corps. Catharine Wever Collins, the wife of the commanding officer, visited the post trader's house in 1863 and she acknowledged its status as "a very pretty house and the parlor is a beautiful though not large room with handsome curtains to the 3 windows, a beautiful Brussels carpet, a few pictures and other nice furniture."[72] The son of Post Surgeon Louis Brechemin recalled the house that replaced this one, at a later period, more sumptuously: "The Post Traders House which was right next to the Cavalry Barracks was large and beautifully furnished. Quite a Show Place. They had imported colored servants. The butler young Gaston was well known around the Post." Of the traders themselves, Brechemin noted their position in the social world of Fort Laramie: "Mr. London and Mr. Hall and Mrs. London

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[69] Diary entry for January 10, 1870, Diary of Oliver N. Unthank, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file UON-1.

[70] Diary entry for January 7, 1870, Diary of Oliver N. Unthank, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file UON-1.

[71] Maria Inez Corlett Riter, "Teaching School at Old Fort Laramie," *Annals of Wyoming*, 51 (Fall 1979), 24-25.

[72] Catharine Wever Collins letter to Josie, Christmas, 1863, in Agnes Wright Spring, ed., "An Army Wife Comes West: Letters of Catharine Wever Collins (1863-1864)," *Colorado Magazine*, XXXI (October 1954), 13. Page references to this article are to the reprint in a separate booklet of the same title in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

were popular in the Post [and] took part in all the theatricals at the hall; they were all splendid amateur actors and they entertained lavishly."[73]

Life at Fort Laramie tended to be compartmentalized by rank, and often by gender, possibly by ethnicity, and, when civilians were concerned, by class. The opportunities for coming together appear to have diminished while inducements to separate and fragment increased over the years following the Civil War, certainly in any institutional framework. Even the safe harbors, places where individuals could customarily congregate free of social division, declined. The store and post office was one such institution. In 1866 Margaret Carrington, along with some other women, visited the store and observed the social democracy of the market's clientele, as all kinds of people gathered there:

> The long counter of Messrs. Bullock and Ward 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 in the same degree of completeness as their noble lords; papooses, absolutely nude, slightly nude, or wrapped in calico, buckskin, or furs, mingled with soldiers of the garrison, teamsters, emigrants, speculators, half-breeds, and interpreters. *Here* cups of rice, sugar, or flour were being emptied into the looped up skirts or blanket of a squaw; and *there* some tall warrior was grimacing delightfully as he grasped and sucked his long sticks of peppermint candy. Bright shawls, red squaw-cloth, brilliant calicoes, and flashing ribbons passed over the same counters with knives and tobacco, brass nails and glass beads, and that endless catalogue of articles which belong to the legitimate border traffic. The room was redolent of cheese and herring and '*heap of smoke*;' while the *debris* of mounched crackers lying loose underfoot furnished both nutriment and employment for little bits of Indians too big to ride on mamma's back, and too little to reach the things on the counter or shelves.[74]

She then added: "To all, however, whether white man, half-breed, or Indian, Mr. Bullock, a Virginia gentleman of the old school, to whose hospitality and delicate courtesy we were even more indebted in 1867, gave kind and patient attention, and his clerks seemed equally ready and capable, talking Sioux, Cheyenne, or English just as each case came to hand."

The broad array of people gathered within its walls may have changed in subtle ways over the years. For one thing, in 1869 the post commander ordered the sutler to stop selling alcohol to officers for their consumption at the bar in the officers' room section of the store; they could still purchase alcohol, but this order was meant "simply to

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[73] Louis Brechemin, Jr., Recollections, typescript, 1948, and David L. Hieb, Memorandum for the files, August 12, 1948, both items located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, BCL-1, and a letter from Brechemin to Hieb, January 6, 1951, in file LJ-3.

[74] Henry B. Carrington, *Ab-Sa-Ra-Ka Land of Massacre: Being the Experience of an Officer's Wife on the Plains* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1878; this is also commonly and more exactly indicated as "Fourth Edition of Mrs. Carrington's Narrative"), 77.

discontinue the objectionable practice of Officers drinking at the Sutlers Store."[75] In a way, this represented an effort to preserve the elitism of the officer corps by turning over the store to the *hoi polloi*. In 1876, when Eben Swift reached Fort Laramie at night, he said "I did not go to the post but stopped at the sutler's store, sleeping on the floor with others. The place was filled with a half-drunken crowd. No soldiers, a lot of cattle men, and one fight."[76] By 1883, when Lois Parker's ancestors were at Fort Laramie, she lamented about the officer's wife, "what a lot Mrs. Maynard missed. She never went to the store or post office (which were the same)."[77] Even in Captain King's novel of Fort Laramie set toward the end of the decade of the 1880s, the post office and store appeared to be more the gathering place of common people rather than the elite; to King, it represented the victory of the customs of the frontier over the social conventions of established society:

> And so teamsters, laundresses, scouts, "Indian-bound" Black Hillers, and one or two sauntering soldiers were swarming about the porch and hall-way and jamming in a compact mass in front of the little window whereat the postmistress behind her vitreous barrier was still at work. It was a good-natured, chaffing, laughing crowd, but still one very independent and self-satisfied, after the manner of the frontier, where every man in a mixed gathering is as good as his neighbor, and every woman is as good as she chooses to hold herself. …But this was the United States post-office, these were sovereign citizens, and every man or woman of them, except the half-dozen enlisted men whose mail was always taken to barracks, had just as much right there as the capitalist from Chicago,--and knew it.[78]

Notably, King did not identify any actual officers or their wives or Chicago capitalists who also may have been tempted to loiter about this social center. Those people, it seems, congregated elsewhere. A class division was evident even at the place of social interaction most known for its inclusiveness. The obvious comparison is the similar descriptions of congregations at Fort William and Fort John in the fur trade era. The difference was that the people who once prevailed at this location, and the social order of which they were a part, were now outsiders, people disregarded by and estranged from the established organization of society. The post office was a rare sanctuary for them, not the community center.

A similar pattern seems to have existed with the schools at Fort Laramie. The documents revealing the pattern of institutional education at Fort Laramie are scarce and the surviving materials reveal only a sketchy pattern. In 1866 a female teacher arrived at Fort Laramie to direct a school, evidently under the direction of Chaplain Alpha Wright,

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[75] Typescript of letter from Geo. O. Webster, Post Adjutant, to "the Post Trader," June 29, 1869, in Letters Sent volumes, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.
[76] Paul L. Hedren, ed., "Eben Swift's Army Service on the Plains, 1876-1879," *Annals of Wyoming*, 50 (Spring 1978), 143.
[77] Parker, *Brave Heart*, 65.
[78] King, *"Laramie;" or, The Queen of Bedlam*, 130-131.

for "the white, half breed, and native children."[79] Frances Carrington evidently encountered this teacher when she passed through the fort; only after some time had passed in her stay at the fort did she discover this woman, the only other woman at the fort, she said, except for the Native American woman who did her cleaning. "The other was a school teacher sent out to teach the young Indian idea 'how to shoot.' They could shoot well enough in other directions, if opportunity offered, and this was an innovation surely, though it absorbed so much of her time as to leave scant leisure for social visiting; but her very presence was a pleasant thought."[80] The progress of that school is unknown, but in 1868 the post surgeon reported, "A school is kept by the Post Chaplain for the children of the Post and in the winter also a night school for such enlisted men as wish to attend it."[81] At some unknown date this chaplain-sponsored school faded, and it is possible that in 1870, when Chaplain Wright removed to Fort D. A. Russell at Cheyenne, that the school he had operated ceased to function, if in fact, it still operated by that time. The 1870 census includes no mention of a person, such as the woman who previously taught there, who listed a profession of teacher. In 1871, however, official correspondence indicates that the fort's council of administration appropriated "an amount sufficient to remunerate the school mistress for month of June."[82] It is likely that intermittent efforts to provide education for the children, if not always for the adults, continued at the post, but the records do not always reveal such activity.

The next record of a school being provided, in fact, does not come until 1876-1877 in a recollection by a student who attended. Isabell McGinnis Snow remembered that the school that year was "Attended by children of officers, enlisted men, and civilians, taught by a young cavalry man the school was decidedly elementary."[83] This may well be, although it diverges from the record of the post for the following year. In 1878, the commanding officer wrote his superiors that "a Post School was established here in September 1877, and—except an interval of three months in the following winter—has been in successful operation ever since."[84] This time the school was under the direction of the post's assistant surgeon, but when he left the post shortly after launching the school, the teaching was interrupted by a hiatus of several months in which time the fort sought to try to find a new "Master" and also attempted,

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[79] Hervey Johnson letter to Folks at home, May 30, 1866, in William E. Unrau, ed., *Tending the Talking Wire: A Buck Soldier's View of Indian Country, 1863-1866* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1979), 342.

[80] Frances Carrington, *My Army Life*, 57-58. There are many questions about what Carrington (then Grummond) meant by her expression of "teach the young Indian idea 'how to shoot,'" except that perhaps it had something to do with conjugation of verbs. Equally mysterious is how she missed the presence of a significant population of laundresses at the fort, unless she was willing to include the teacher in her universe and not the wives of the enlisted men—a distinct possibility.

[81] H. S. Schell, Assistant Surgeon, "Description of Post," 1868, typescript report, in bound volume of Medical History of Posts, Fort Laramie, at Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[82] Typescript of letter from W. McCammon, Post Adjutant, to Eugene W. Crittenden, June 29, 1871, in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[83] David L. Hieb, Memorandum to the files, August 1, 1950, Re: interview with Mrs. Elizabeth McGinnis Snow, located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file SEMc-1.

[84] Typescript of letter from Major A. W. Evans, Commanding Officer, to the Adjutant General, Washington, November 30, 1878, located in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

unsuccessfully, to integrate the school into the public education system of the county and territory. After that, the school resumed with soldiers as teachers. At the time of the 1878 report, the "Master" was "an enlisted man (Pvt. David Lindsay, Co. F, 3rd Cavalry), the third I think in the position." The composition of the student body is especially revealing:

> Children only are under instruction. No attempt having been made to induce or compel enlisted men to attend. The Scholars are now 20 in number viz. 6 boys and 14 girls. Twelve are children of soldiers; seven of Citizens living at the Post, and one of a Civilian nine miles distant, ages vary from 5 to 14 years. I believe that all the children at the Post attend except those of Officers, to whom, of course, the school is open if they desire its advantages.[85]

Clearly, no children of officers attended school at the fort at that time. Those officers appear to have sent their children away for education. In 1876, Elizabeth Burt and her husband sent their son Andrew to Cincinnati to school: "Our parting with the boy was heart-rending but to educate him was our first duty. Few and simple were the schools that he had been able to attend."[86] About the same time, Cynthia Capron wrote schools back east inquiring about opportunities for her son Hazen; she heard back from Mount Morris School, "but he is too young to go there."[87] She finally wrote her sister and asked, "if I succeed in finding such a school as I want, how would it do to let Ha[z]en stay with you and attend public school a while and then whenever it seems best send him to boarding school."[88] Sending the children to school at the fort was an option for the officers, but does not appear to have been one commonly exercised in the 1870s. Better schools in other places were their preference.

In the 1880s, the school appeared to be more permanent, but the attendance of children of the officers is not certain. One teacher, Maria Inez Corlett Riter, who taught at Fort Laramie one term in the middle part of the decade, says bluntly, "Every child in the Fort came to my school"—a significant achievement if accurate, and one that represents a dramatic departure from the recent performance of the school.[89] She also recalled that "Kindly fort officers and wives came to meet Teacher—and all during my year were most thoughtful and kindly, though there were few social graces when winter winds blew and snow piled high." Johnny O'Brien, a student who went to school, briefly, at the beginning of the decade remarked that when he attended, there were separate schools for the officers' children and for the children of enlisted men and civilians.[90] Louis Brechemin, Jr., recalled that he went to school with the children of the Londons—

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[85] Letter from Major A. W. Evans, Commanding Officer, to the Adjutant General, Washington, November 30, 1878, located in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.
[86] Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," 181.
[87] Cynthia Capron, letter to "Ma," July 22, 1877, Capron Family Papers. At that time, Hazen would have been about nine years old.
[88] Cynthia Capron to Mary, August 4, 1877, Capron Family Papers.
[89] Maria Inez Corlett Riter, "Teaching School at Old Fort Laramie," *Annals of Wyoming*, 51 (Fall 1979), 24-25.
[90] Interview with Johnny O'Brien, April 4, 1961, transcript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, oral history files, OH 6a-6b.

the family of the post trader.[91] Reynolds Burt, son of Andrew and Elizabeth Burt, recalled that in 1889 a Miss Rockwell taught school at the post, and that she maintained effective discipline, but he appears not to have been a student at the school.[92] Even when the children of officers went to school, and even when the children of the affluent civilians attended school, social boundaries seem to have kept them apart from students whose parents were enlisted or less affluent civilians.

The recruitment of teachers was perhaps not a priority of the fort. One former student at Fort Laramie from the early 1880s, recalled that "Well….the soldiers done the teaching here."[93] After Ms. Riter's stint at teaching, soldiers again performed the duties of instruction. In 1887, the commanding officer sought approval to upgrade the school teacher appointment, "it having been necessary for want of a competent *private* to detail Corporal Benjamin F. Ballenger, Company B, 7th Infantry on extra duty as Schoolteacher at this post."[94] Two students, G. O. Reid, the son of the train master at the fort (trains referring to wagon / supply trains), and Jacob Tomamichael, the son of the hospital steward, had perhaps the most vivid recollections of school of any recorded participant. In 1950 Fort Laramie Superintendent David L. Hieb interviewed the two and then summarized a part of that conversation: "Both left school at an early age to avoid rough treatment by soldier teachers who often got drunk to avoid teaching duty."[95]

Whatever the merits of the education system at Fort Laramie, and one can only assume that some merit existed at different points in time, one aspect of that education was also the perpetuation of a system of class and rank separation, the promulgation of discipline, and the suppression of any kind of a cross-class, cross-rank social mingling. And in that regard the system of education resembled the larger system of life at the fort—for people in uniform and for civilians alike. And that was a system that followed the contours of modern industrial society in the United States, far removed from the social interaction at Fort Laramie four decades earlier.

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[91] Louis Brechemin, Jr., Recollections, typescript, 1948, located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, BCL-2.

[92] Reynolds J. Burt, "Memoirs of Reynolds J. Burt, Brig. Gen. Retired." Typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library, page 38.

[93] Interview with Johnny O'Brien, April 4, 1961; typed transcript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, oral history files, OH 6a and 6b, page 11.

[94] Typescript of letter from Merriam to the Adjutant General, USA, Sept. 22, 1887, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. Emphasis added.

[95] Memo from David L. Hieb to files, October 5, 1950, re: "Interview of Old Timers George O. Reid and Jacob J. Tomamichael," in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, TJJ-1.

# Chapter 8

# Civilization, Social Struggle, and Resistance 1867-1890

Just as Fort Laramie itself changed over time, so also did the context in which it operated transform. Much of that change, of course, came as a direct result of the activities, and even the sheer presence, of the military at Fort Laramie. If Fort Laramie was less and less a remote outpost and more and more a military installation like its counterparts in the East, so too was the area around the fort less and less remote and, in the language of some, less and less "uncivilized." In this regard several developments are especially important. First, the infrastructure of a modern, industrial society emerged in the region. Roads and railroads, communication systems, and transportation facilities became increasingly common and available. But this was not just a matter of convenience; it was instead a matter of necessity for the expansion of established white civil society into the area. With these integral links to the outside world, the contours of American civilization took firm hold and the institutions of civil government, especially after the organization of Wyoming Territory in 1869 (or even after it had been authorized in 1868), spawned additional social, economic, and cultural expansion.

That does not mean those changes were inevitable, for they were not, nor does it mean that they represented progress and advancement for all concerned, for they did not. Nor were they ubiquitous and uniform and cheerfully accepted. Indeed, it was precisely this expansion that was resisted by those who found alternate forms of social relationships, other goals of organized society, preferable. The Native American inhabitants, the self-same people who scored such a dramatic victory against the military forces of the United States in 1865-1868, found the larger process overwhelming; they were forced not only to remove from the Fort Laramie vicinity, but they also encountered powerful pressures to abandon their own culture and priorities. Likewise, the white civilians who made this area their home often found themselves in serious conflict with the army, but more importantly, with the values and discipline the army sought to impose. And those were the values and institutions of modern American society. What was at stake, in other words, was not just whether the military would be able to defeat the native inhabitants of the region, but whether the military at Fort Laramie would be able to establish a cultural hegemony for the ascendant society. Assuring the safety of institutions proliferating in the area was one thing; changing the values and behavior of people unsupportive of those institutions would be an even greater challenge. Yet the broader mission of this fort included both.

*i. An Evolving Social Landscape*

The larger pattern of change of which Fort Laramie formed a part swiftly altered the physical and cultural landscape of the area in the years following the Civil War. The network of roads that connected Fort Laramie with other places was soon augmented by additional connections, such as the ill-fated Bozeman Trail carrying miners and merchants through Lakota lands protected by treaty to the gold fields of Montana, and even more significantly by the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad to the south, in 1867 and 1868. The construction of railroads, the extension of roads, the building of bridges, the establishment of stage stations and freighting systems, all had consequences that dramatically changed both the land and social relationships of southeastern Wyoming. Communities emerged along the railroad line and tendrils of settlement reached into the valleys and across the plains. Mineral development in the area of South Pass generated the rise of a town and transportation facilities there and coal mining along the Union Pacific multiplied the impact of the railroad's national connection. Ranching began to take off as well and by 1870 Wyoming had over 11,000 head of cattle on farms and another 25,000 on its ranges, which meant that the territory had more cattle than people. By the end of the decade of the 1870s, Wyoming had more than 750,000 cattle.[1] Growth was in the air and it began to spread outward, north and west, from the southeast corner of the territory. Moreover, in line with the historic axiom that growth leads to more growth, and that transportation development leads to more transportation development, all this spawned further ventures. In 1873 business people from Cheyenne proposed the construction of an iron bridge across the North Platte at Fort Laramie to facilitate transportation between that town and the Black Hills. That bridge, with federal funds, was completed in 1875 and provided a basis for even more transportation, with the Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage operating from 1876 to 1887.[2] With the rise of an extractive economy, a transportation network to connect the area with outside points, and the existence of a small but stable and officially sanctioned permanent population, the area became less and less a place to travel through, and more and more a place to develop along the lines of other U.S. territories.

In 1868, Wyoming Territory was authorized and the federal government sent civil officers to the new territory's capital in Cheyenne, about eighty miles from Fort Laramie, in 1869—the first step in the process of securing statehood. While Fort Laramie may at one have time have represented an isolated outpost and the opening wedge of the institutions and dynamics and culture of established white society in the region, its role quickly shifted to one of protecting and expanding that society in the face of those who increasingly resisted the changes it brought. Thus Fort Laramie continued to symbolize the war for civilization—in reality, for the dominance of a particular form of social organization—a war against a multitude of detractors, including Native Americans, civilians, and even some of its own family on post.

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[1] See the discussion of the growth of the range cattle industry in Michael Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home: Ranching, Farming, and Homesteading in Wyoming, 1860-1960* (Cheyenne: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, 2011), 36.

[2] John Dishon McDermott, "Fort Laramie's Iron Bridge," *Annals of Wyoming*, 34 (October 1962), 138, 141, 142.

The institutions of this civilization were spreading, gradually and haltingly, and supplanting the military as possessors of the territory, just as the army had supplanted the Native Americans who once dominated it. Wyoming would become known, upon statehood, as the "Equality State" but Wyoming Territory was not exactly being made a bastion for social equality. Wyoming Territory was, however, being made secure for commerce, agriculture, and markets. In 1867 when John Hunton entered this area, he reported that there were only a few cattle ranches in existence. One was operated near Fort Laramie by James Bordeaux, two were located on the Bitter Cottonwood, and two were situated where the town of Chugwater would later appear.[3] There may have been others that Hunton did not know about, for in 1870 Silas Reed, the first surveyor general of Wyoming Territory, enumerated the cattle being grazed in the general area between the North Platte and the Union Pacific Railroad and he listed the following cattle herds around Fort Laramie:

W. G. Bullock, Fort Laramie, grazing cattle at Horse Creek; 4,000 head
Ed. Creighton (of Omaha) 3,500 head
Texas Owner, 1500 head
Milner & Davis, 200 head
---- Farrel, Laramie River, 300 head
---- Tracy, Muddy Creek, 500 head
Ecoffey & co., Sabylle creek, 350 head
Benjamin mills, Chugwater, 400 head
R. Whalen, Chugwater, 250 head
John Phillips, 250 head Chugwater
--Simpson, Chugwater, 100 head
H. B. Kelley, Chugwater, 750 head
John [Hunton] 125 head, Chugwater
w. g. Bullock, 125 head Chugwater
F. M. Phillips Chugwater, 2100 head
Adolph Cuny, North Platte, 1000 head
Dickey & Sloan, Muddy Creek 80 head[4]

Reed listed others a little more distant, but more than 15,000 head of cattle as early as 1870 grazed where the bison once roamed in the broad area that had Fort Laramie as its center. Some of these operations had their beginnings as enterprises to furnish cattle to the fort. Some of them attracted soldiers and others at the fort who decided to go an independent direction upon discharge from the service or upon closing their contracts with the quartermaster or his contracted agents. Others followed. In

[3] Typed recollection by John Hunton, dated March 1926. Hunton stated further, "I was acquainted with more than ten men who had lived in the Laramie River valley since before Fort Laramie was made a military post to that date, and had discussed the customs and conditions of the people and the country with them repeatedly and none ever mentioned any building, except one that was started but never completed by a man named Blunt in the early sixties, about five miles up the river from the Fort on what locally known as The Blunt's Bottom for many years by people who were familiar with the neighborhood." Hunton Collection, Wyoming State Archives; folder 5. See also Hunton, "Early Settlement of the Laramie River Valley," located in the Wyoming State Archives and in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

[4] Silas Reed, "Stock Raising on the Plains, 1870-1871," *Annals of Wyoming*, 17 (January 1945), 55-58.

1874 Joseph Hauphoff, who had emigrated from Germany, started a hotel at Fort Laramie; four years later he left that business and established himself as a stock raiser on the Platte.[5] One after another, people who had been associated with the fort moved onto land they could claim as their own and began to develop their own businesses in the region or they went to work for others already established.

This may have been welcome in the eyes of the military, but it also changed the circumstances of the military and increased the burdens for the fort. In January 1876, the Cheyenne newspaper reported that as settlement increased in the area, "A general demand for the reduction of this little principality [Fort Laramie] has arisen during the past 3 or 4 years, as many desirable locations for settlement and stock ranches are included within the boundaries of this reservation. Delegate Steele has taken the matter in hand this winter and has introduced the following bill . . . ."[6] The mobilization of the army against the Indians in 1876 probably saved the fort from reduction, but the pressure to settle its land increased. There were, for example, people like Richard Whalon. Whalon, in 1868, had been a freighter, but that year he began to ranch on Chugwater Creek. In 1877 Whalon "brought his stock to his present ranch, which lies about ten miles northwest of Fort Laramie . . . . Being the first actual settler in the valley, Mr. Whalon had the 'pick and choice' of locations . . . . He made temporary improvements on the place long before settlers were permitted to locate in this part of the territory or the land opened to settlers, and was several times warned by the commandant at Fort Laramie to remove his belongings and vacate the ranch."[7] Others followed suit and not only did settlement increase, but the fort began to be hemmed in by civilians.

Where already had been a legal and transportation and communication infrastructure, now the social reality of settlement was taking hold and the settlements and the cattle ranches brought more changes. In the 1870s prospectors created a small town of Hartville to the northwest of Fort Laramie. In 1880 the town of Guernsey emerged west of Fort Laramie on the North Platte near where a trading post had been at Register Cliff. To the east, Gering, Nebraska, sprang up in 1885. In 1884 William P. Carlin wrote H. H. Bancroft, "After 1858 I never entered the territory to stay till 1882, when I was for two months at Fort D. A. Russell near Cheyenne. In the meantime everything had changed. The railroad had been built, Denver was a great city. Cheyenne had grown up. The buffalo had disappeared and tame cattle had taken their places. The Indians had been limited to narrow reservations. Civil government was being established. The country in short had become the home of civilized and refined people with all the arts, comforts, and appliances of civilized life."[8] Likewise, Elizabeth

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[5] See, in part, John Hunton's diary entry for February 15, 1877, and editorial comments by L. G. Pat Flannery, in *John Hunton's Diary, Volume 2, 1876-'77* (Lingle, Wyoming: Guide-Review, 1958), 182-183 and also undated newsclippings regarding Hauphoff and also information in the Names Database in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files.

[6] Cheyenne *Daily Leader*, January 30, 1876.

[7] "Richard Whalon" in *Progressive Men of the State of Wyoming* (Chicago: A. W. Bowen, & Co., 1903).

[8] Typed copy of handwritten letter, William P. Carlin to H. H. Bancroft, November 14, 1884, Fort Laramie Vertical File, Wyoming State Archives.

Burt returned to Fort Laramie in 1887. Her first trip to the area a decade earlier had been fraught with hardship and apprehension; now it was otherwise: "The journey was but a day's trip, made first on the cars, and ending in an ambulance ride of several hours during which we had the unusual experience of seeing an immense herd of several thousand range cattle."[9] No longer did Fort Laramie serve as an outpost on the plains, a rose in the wilderness, or even a frontier army post. It was a modern institution surrounded by the signs of growing economic and social development. Perhaps the forces of civilization were no longer just creeping and gradually entering the region; by this time they were expanding and multiplying; they were changing not just the speed at which society operated but the direction in which it moved.

*ii. Outlaws, Outcasts, and Misfits*

The United States' war with the Sioux may be appropriately regarded as not just an effort to remove native people from particular parts of the map, but a war to establish the dominance of a particular civilization. Afterwards, the army at Fort Laramie sought to assure that specific values, institutions, customs, and relationships prevailed in the area that it served. These were the values and goals of the expanding system of transportation, communication, and political authority, the kind of society being promoted by the new Wyoming Territory. Of course, the native inhabitants were not the only ones who shared different values and the military sought to overwhelm the others also. Whether viewed in terms of law and order, development of settlements, or prohibition of activities that were either illegal or not respectable in the East, the effect was the same: to subjugate the West and establish there a modern American civilization.

While the Native Americans represented a persistence of traditional cultures in the area, they were not the only people to do so. In 1867 the military launched a major initiative to clean up the area served by Fort Laramie and to impose standards thereto never exacted, except on the post itself and sometimes in the regulation of the trade with the Indians. But now it was extended to the whites. One detachment accompanying a mail party went out with these orders:

> Should any of the Ranch Keepers on the road sell liquor to your men you will destroy their liquor and Ranches. You will also notify them that in [the] future if any of the Soldiers of this Post or belonging to the mail parties from above, get liquor at their ranches, and the fact they are drunk in the vicinity of the ranches or after leaving it, will be considered good evidence that they have procured liquor of them, their ranches will be burned, their goods destroyed, and they will be arrested and confined at this Post.[10]

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[9] Elizabeth Burt, "Elizabeth Burt's Story," copy of typed transcript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library, original located in Library of Congress, 198.

[10] Post Adjutant (Bates) to Lt. Thomas I. Gregg, April 30, 1867, typescript copy in Orders volumes, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

Another detachment about the same time went the opposite direction with orders to travel the road to Bridger's Ferry as far as Little Bitter Cottonwood Creek and arrest a citizen ranch keeper "who will be tried for buying rations from soldiers and selling Whiskey to them."[11] They were to search the premises of the ranch and destroy all liquor there, and, in fact, on the way they were to inspect all other ranches and spill any liquor they found.

The problem was that, among the civilians whom the army sought to protect, some resented the regulations and control of the military, indeed, the values of the society the military sought to establish. The civilians in the area included a range of people associated with the ranches and with the commercial establishments and transportation facilities emerging in the gradually enlarging white presence in Wyoming. Lieutenant Colonel Palmer described the situation that especially caused him such consternation:

> at Horse Shoe Dillon [a private contractor] got under the influence of liquor and proclaimed in the presence and hearing of Soldiers and citizens teamsters, that he would be God damned if he did not intend to run that outfit to Suit himself, that he would not have any damned doughboy order him around, and that he could then and there whip any two of them; Major Van Voast enquired if this language was intended for his hearing, and Dillon replied that it was for him or any other God Damned man or words to that effect. . . . If the enlisted men come without (or even with) one officer they become perfectly demoralized at the Ranches on the route, and probably many of them will desert if they come here. If I remain here so long I shall send the next mail for the upper Posts under charge of an officer to Bridger's Ferry on the 15th inst. and again on the 29th, and I shall not consider myself authorized to deliver any more mails to irresponsible citizens.[12]

The problem was, in other words, that "irresponsible citizens" were demoralizing and corrupting the soldiers. Moreover, the problem was not just personal, for by their actions they were even undermining the social and cultural foundations of the new order.

These were trying times for the commander as he tried to impose some sense of discipline on the area. When Native Americans gathered at Fort Laramie for the 1867 treaty conference, Brigadier General Slemmer wanted no sales of alcohol to the Indians to mar this activity, and issued an order directed not at the post but at civilian traders—the road ranches—in the general area. Moreover, in 1867 the commander was still reeling from highly publicized allegations that riotous behavior was common on post, that when the news came of the defeat of Fetterman's force near Fort Phil Kearny at Christmas, the post was filled with drunkenness, and also a report by a chaplain that the post was "a perfect Whore House" and which "represented the moral condition of the

[11] Post Adjutant to Lt. Cahill, March 31, 1867, typescript copy in Orders volumes, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.
[12] LTC Palmer to Wessels at Ft. Phil Kearney, May 1, 1867, typescript in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library, Letters Sent.

Post in the most deplorable state."[13] Step-by-step, charge-by-charge, the post commander attempted to refute these allegations and to assure that the Indians would not have alcohol, but this also involved reaching farther and farther outward, into the surrounding territory. In 1867 Lieutenant Colonel Palmer also proclaimed an expansion of the military reservation itself, extending the boundaries of Fort Laramie twenty-five miles in every direction, and warning citizens that they would be subject to the rule of the commander.[14] In this way, he hoped, he would be able to exert a stronger influence on the region.

There was also a specific incident that caused even greater embarrassment for the fort since it involved the loss of life. To understand that incident, it is well to remember that one of the ironies of history is that any action can lead to an unexpected, unintended, opposite result. Moreover, the exercise of authority that suppresses specific activities can do so by driving a more robust form of that same behavior to a safe harbor elsewhere. Something between these two dynamics occurred at Fort Laramie as the fort tightened its discipline and enforced a more stringent moral code. While that code was probably successfully applied within the confines of the group of buildings at the core of Fort Laramie, it is also clear that new, even more objectionable, institutions emerged just beyond reach of the enforcement mechanism of the military.

The road ranches in some respects were but a continuation of the trading activity that had originally accompanied the growth of Fort Laramie with the myriad other "forts" located nearby. But they also emerged in distinct form as a direct result of the imposition of the standards of eastern civilization at Fort Laramie. These ranches at first sold various goods, and increasingly they sold alcohol and served as centers of congregation for a variety of people. Ultimately they would become the "hog ranches"—brothels and dens of a range of activities that were far from the standard of "respectable" behavior on post. It was at one of these institutions, the ranch operated by Adolph Cuny and Jules Ecoffey about five miles east of Fort Laramie near the North Platte, that one incident occurred in 1867. In July around a dozen soldiers had gone to the establishment and in the course of the drinking a fight occurred and a citizen shot a soldier. When a detachment of soldiers investigated the murder, they learned that their suspects were not far away so they went in pursuit. After capturing two men the detachment then returned to the ranch where the murder took place, and which they "shamefully pillaged and then burned."[15] Palmer indicated that the soldiers were to be court-martialed for their behavior, but the incident ignited a flurry of controversy. A letter signed "citizen" in

[13]See, for example, Brigadier General (Bvt.) Slemner's notice to ranch men citing a $500 penalty and two years imprisonment for selling liquor to Indians who were camped for the peace conference. Slemner, Notice, August 15, 1867, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library. Also LTC Palmer to General Wessels, July 19, 1867, also in Letters Sent.

[14] LTC Palmer, Order No. 17, July 2, 1867, typescript in Orders volumes, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[15] Palmer himself condemned the action of his soldiers: "There was not a particle of excuse for this proceeding for it did not appear that the owner of the ranch who was absent at the time or any one connected with it, had anything to do with the shooting of the Soldier, as soon as the party returned every soldier in any way connected with the pillaging, and arson, was placed in confinement and as there is a General Court Martial now in Session here I propose to bring them immediately to trial…." Palmer to LTC H. G. Litchfield, July 7, 1867, typescript copy in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

a Denver newspaper detailed the viciousness of the soldiers' arson and theft, but then another letter signed "A Soldier" from Fort Laramie defended the soldiers, pointing out that, nearby, Ecoffey and Cuny had another establishment and that it was "the resort of all the gamblers, horse thieves, and cut throats in the territory, where a man's life was not safe if he were known to be the possessor of fifty dollars, and where to my own knowledge six or seven atrocious murders have been committed since last December."[16] On the one hand this was just another case of attempting to secure order and justice in the Fort Laramie area; on the other hand, though, it was clear that the issue was much greater, that it had to do with standards of behavior and sources of authority.

It was not just a problem of individuals in violation of the law being prosecuted, or, in this case, being attacked by extralegal thuggery. And it was not just individual ranchers and commercial establishments that represented a challenge to military authority and the civilization it represented. It was a widespread and pervasive culture that did not accept the precepts of the new social order. Several different elements constituted this culture that presented such a challenge to the new order. One part included the genuine outlaws, people who mainly robbed and stole from others. There were even people who murdered others, like the two men who murdered Baptiste Ledeau, son of fort interpreter Antoine Ledeau, in 1867. These men, John Hunton later reported, were never arrested "as there was no civil government in the country at that time."[17] And there were Duncan Blackburn and Clark Pelton who killed Adolph Cuny in 1877, and who then wound up in the Wyoming Territorial Penitentiary.[18]

But the problem of illegal activity was broader than that and included not just hardened outlaws, but many others somehow on the outside of established authority. In 1869 when Lewis Wood requested to operate a trading business in the area, the post adjutant wrote back, "I am instructed [to] inform you that [the Commanding Officer] has no Sympathy for horse thieves and murderers or their friends and associates. Your reputation is of such a character that he declines to comply with your request. You will be allowed to [remove] any or all your property, through an authorized agent."[19] Also in 1869, Brigadier General Flint wrote the U.S. Marshall that he had captured two outlaws, Jesus Romero and Juan Jose Quinos, and was sending them under guard to the civil authorities. "This Country," he wrote, "seems infested with horse thieves and murderers and when once caught they should never again be allowed the opportunity of repeating their crimes."[20]

Outlaws, it would seem, roamed the area with impunity. For that matter, relationships between civilians and some of those outlaws fostered that impunity and

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[16] Letter signed by "Citizen" and dated Fort Laramie July 5, 1867, to editor of *Daily Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), July 12, 1867, in Ecoffey file, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file CCOR-21.

[17] Hunton, "Early Day Happenings in the Vicinity of Fort Laramie," 6.

[18] See the information in the Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file CIN-17.

[19] Typescript letters from Geo. O. Webster, Post Adjutant, to Bvt. Major W. L. Collier, directing him to close Wood's ranch, and also the letter from Webster to Lewis E. Wood, August 6, 1869, both letters located in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MCOR-63.

[20] Typescript copy of letter from Flint to U.S. Marshal, Cheyenne, August 31, 1869 in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MCOR-63.

were even cordial and mutually supportive. Bill Hooker, who drove a freight wagon in the area of Forts Fetterman and Laramie and west to Medicine Bow, recalled a time when he encountered the notorious murderer and horse thief "Persimmon Bill" riding a horse branded "U.S." from Fort Laramie. He talked with the outlaw, slipped him some food from his camp, gave him directions to town, and promised his silence. In return "Persimmon Bill" found Hooker's lost bull for him. Hooker pondered the ethics of the situation.

> I believed at that time of my life that Bill's quarrel with society was none of my affair anyway, and I was doing what many others had done. In fact, there probably wasn't another man in the Clay outfit, except the one who did report the case, who would have done differently. Men of our calling had a habit of attending strictly to their own affairs, and a squealer was looked upon as worse than a criminal.[21]

In this way the line between outlaw and citizen blurs enormously. This camaraderie or live-and-let-live philosophy among the citizenry even made that many more people outside the pale of military authority suspect as outlaws, and regarded widely as outcasts by proper authorities. The identities of the outcasts, the people who committed these transgressions and those who abided them, were many. There were, first of all, people at the fort, people under contract with the military, and people employed by the quartermaster. In 1867 Lieutenant Colonel Palmer wrote his superiors that he would no longer employ civilians to carry the mail since they corrupted his soldiers. Instead he would have his soldiers travel to the mail pick up point.[22] Moreover, Palmer saw a general problem in it all:

> In addition to the Indian troubles the parties of horse thieves—white men—who have been loitering around the country all winter have commenced their spring depredations. Three parties of those have lately carried off animals of the Quartermaster's Department and in one case we know that the Quarter Master's employees are the thieves and without any desire to censure any officer in the Quartermaster's Department for reasons which will be given in my monthly Inspection report I would if I were going to remain here strongly urge that no regular Quartermaster should be stationed here, and furthermore I should advise that at least two thirds of all Quartermaster's employees be discharged and sent out of the country.[23]

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[21] William Francis Hooker, *The Bullwhacker: Adventures of a Frontier Freighter* (Chicago: World Book Company, 1924), 29-34. Hooker also notes that the man in the camp who reported the incident "found no friends that I can remember, and before we pulled out for the north he had departed." Moreover, he says explicitly, "I cannot say that I acted as I did from any fear of the consequences had I reported him to the authorities. I did what I did, because that was the best judgment I had at that stage of my life."

[22] Typescript copy of letter from LTC Palmer to Gen. Wessels, May, 1, 1867, Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

[23] Palmer to LTC H. G. Litchfield, May 11, 1867, typescript copy in Letters Sent, Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the civilians were the problem. The people that Palmer proposed to discharge were exactly the people that Assistant Surgeon Johns identified eight years earlier as the ones with some breath of independence and freedom flowing through them. But there were particular pockets of them that proved problematic, and John Hunton (for whom Bill Hooker worked some of the time) identified some of them. ". . . In the fall of 1867, after winter had forced the cessation of all work, many of the small teaming outfits and individual freight, wood and hay haulers, congregated on Sybil creek, where the Two Bar ranch now stands. It was a very promiscuous gathering of whites, Mexicans and Indians, and as usual for such crowd there was much drinking and gambling indulged in, and consequently much fighting and several killings."[24] The disruptive element turned out to be rather predictable: cowboys, teamsters, bullwhackers, people whose skin was darker than that of the newly arrived citizens of the area, people who were Indian or Mexican in heritage, and often mixed. Hunton also noted several years later that the group continued to camp there in the winter. They now included people who were small-time operators, people with limited resources, people who even worked elsewhere but were idled during the winter. "Many of them had one team of oxen or mules, and some, one span of horses, with which they did a little work during the summer and fall. Some of them only had a few ponies but the most of them [had] Indian wives, which caused some Indians to visit the camp."[25] The people who wintered at this camp, it appears, resembled the people who used to take up residence at Fort Laramie before it became a military post.

Plainly these were not all bandits and outlaws. They were simply people with different values, values that made them outcasts in the eyes of the military authorities, people whom the yoke of military discipline and order and drill and punctuality and impersonal relationships and rank and obedience did not fit. And, sometimes the color of their skin seemed to be a defining factor. One group traveled to Fort Laramie and described the undesirable keepers of the road house where they stayed with these words: "The next night was still worse, having to stay with Mexicans and squaws taking our supper of coffee, buscuits and venison and propping our bedroom door with a large Saratoga trunk and sleeping with one eye open we passed the night. The next night was better—there were white men, but squaws to do the cooking."[26]

Discipline and order was the army way, not the way of the civilians who lived around and served the fort. Bill Hooker later recalled of his bullwhacker colleagues that "these hardy, unshaven wielders of the bullwhip did not get along very smoothly with the trim army officers. The fault probably was on both sides, though I must say in fairness that the army officer who was responsible for discipline had much to put up with in dealing with men used to having their own free, wild way."[27] At Fort Fetterman, a white

[24] Hunton, "Early Day Happenings in the Vicinity of Fort Laramie," 2.
[25] Hunton, "Early Day Happenings in the Vicinity of Fort Laramie," 3.
[26] Emmaroy Snoke recollections, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file CIN-6. Emmaroy and Cosmos Snoke moved to Fort Laramie in 1874 and remained there 2 ½ years. He worked as a clerk in the sutler's store and, according to documents in her file, "his wife Emmaroy sewed and cooked for the officers in the bachelor quarters at Fort Laramie while they resided there." This story is supposedly taken from her diary and was included in a newsclipping identified as from the Humboldt [Nebraska] *Standard*, 1930, in the file.
[27] Hooker, *The Bullwhacker,* 48.

line divided the bar into two separate enclaves, one for officers and for the other white civilians and buck soldiers; "to get across it meant a trip to the guardhouse." Hooker himself, later a prominent businessman and writer, spent some time in the guardhouse for his infractions. It is not clear if such a dividing line existed at Fort Laramie, or if one was necessary given the larger size of the post, but clearly the relationship between the groups appears to have been the same.

The task of the military in imposing the new order was huge, and ultimately it was unwinnable. At best, the army could provide for the security of the defining institutions of the new order—commerce and property—but victory in the conflict over values, over the sentiments, over the cultures of the people in the area, could not be garnered nearly so easily. This was a culture, after all, within that shadowy conceptual borderland of the frontier, a culture that lingered and even persisted in the face of efforts to discipline it. Ultimately the military had to settle for its institutional power and permit people, even its own soldiers, to follow their own "free, wild way" off post, as more of the road ranches emerged and as the brothels took their place at those ranches. John G. Bourke wrote of his disgust at some of these institutions in 1877 when he wrote

> . . . Several times on mild afternoons, *Lieut. Schuyler* and myself, went riding, taking the best road out from the post. Three miles and there was a nest of ranches, *Conneys and Ecoffey's and Wrights*, tenanted by as hardened and depraved a set of witches as could be found on the face of the globe. Each of these establishments was equipped with a rum-mill of the worse kind and each contained from three to half a dozen *Cyprians*, virgins *whose* lamps were always burning brightly in expectancy of the coming bridegroom, and who lured to destruction the soldiers of the garrison. In all my experience I have never seen a lower, more beastly set of people of both sexes.[28]

And it was not always off the post either. Many years later, G. O. Reid, who was a boy at the fort in the 1870s and 1880s, wrote,

> There was all kinds of tough characters who used to come into the Fort and get drunk then on pay days the soldiers and cowboys used to get in all kinds of fights, which we used to watch with glee I remember on one occasion in 1881, a tough bunch of cowboys came in to the Fort, got drunk head by a man called Reo Jack Burnett, The cowboys got on their horses and started galloping around the parade ground in front of the officers quarters the Officer of the Day ran out and tried to stop them but the cowboys run over him and commenced to shoot things up. The adjutant called out the guard and the cowboys took to the road north of the Fort on the way to the Laramie River bridge west of the Fort, the guards ran to the N.W. corner of the Fort and started shooting at the cowboys on the run, the old Springfields sure raised dust behind them

[28] Diary of John G. Bourke, 1877, copy in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file MDIA-2.

and they were hollering back, Shoot, you B.B. Shoot (Censored)[29]

Sometimes it seemed as if the military was not just thwarted in its ability to impose a new order on the social landscape around Fort Laramie; it was even on the defensive on its own ground, quite literally. Not only did the people of the area survive with values that conflicted with the order and discipline of the military, and in fact with the industrial world it increasingly represented, but they played an important role as cowboys, drivers, and others providing the labor for the new ranching and freighting and commercial enterprises in Wyoming Territory. What had been a regional division was quickly becoming a class and cultural division. And these people would remain in one form or another, but usually as an underclass in the new social order. So it was that the warfare of Native Americans, the elusiveness of outlaws, and the pervasiveness of a fugitive culture of outcasts who sought to live their own "free, wild way," marked the limits of the hegemony of the dominant culture in this region.

[29] Letter from G. O. Reid, to Merrill Mattes, December 20, 1945, in Fort Laramie National Historic Site Library files, file RGO-3.

# PART THREE

# Fort Laramie and Wyoming—and Beyond

A letter from Fort Laramie to the *Army & Navy Register* in 1889 described the social events of the previous week and then observed, "The past week has been so full of gayety it is a question if we can settle down willingly to the usual quiet of our garrison."[1] Life indeed was quiet at Fort Laramie and, aside from the picnics, the parades, the card games, and the various entertainments offered at the fort, there was little that was newsworthy. Fort Laramie was a conspicuously quiet military post by 1889. Gone were the challenges that had kept it focused and active and growing in earlier years. So it should not have been a surprise that the residents of the fort pondered the main issue before them: "'Is Laramie to be abandoned?' is the question we are all asking now."

Of course, Fort Laramie was abandoned, the last troops left the following spring, the buildings were sold, and the fort melted back into the Wyoming landscape. In multiple ways an era came to an end. The meaning of that era, however, requires some consideration for it was not just that the military occupied and used the fort since 1849; rather it is what that occupation signified, what difference it made, that is especially important.

[1] Typescript copy of letter published in *Army & Navy Register*: April 18, 1889.

# Chapter 9

# A World Transformed, A World Lost

One day in 1887, Second Lieutenant George W. McIver walked into the post library at Fort Laramie and pulled a book from its shelves. McIver had recently arrived at the post and had heard about the history of the place, so he opened the book, Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail*, and read it, as he said "with much interest." He studied particularly the section relating Parkman's visit to the fort in 1846, and "without any difficulty, I could identify many of the localities near Fort Laramie named by the author."[1] One can imagine McIver surveying the site of the old adobe fort that was no more, then riding along the North Platte and the Laramie Rivers and the various tributary creeks, visiting abandoned trading posts, stopping to gaze at vistas described by Parkman, placing his feet where the Bostonian wrote that others had trod, and mourned, and traded, speculating on places where the book described Indian villages, riding to the many scenes Parkman mentioned, and pondering the events that Parkman described. The remains of some of the places would have been visible and the place names would still have been fresh. If he did undertake such a physical reconnaissance, he would have quickly concluded that a world had passed by in the intervening years.

The changes that had taken place since Parkman wrote just four decades earlier were enormous. Fort Laramie by 1887 was anything but "an outpost of civilization," as McIver described the early post. Physically, the fort had evolved through several stages. It had its origins in the privately operated wooden stockade and then adobe fur trade fort that was sold to the government in 1849 and which many emigrants described in their journals and diaries, and then it became likened to a New England village with its industrious spirit and neat organization of white frame buildings. But then, industrious became industrial and modern as the fort "looked like a large city as we approached it," in Ada Vogdes' words,[2] with its crowded barracks, many shops, trading post packed with all manner of people, bustling activity throughout the parade ground and peripheral buildings and corrals, and specialization of function within a small space. After the military campaigns of the 1870s it no longer held such an active, purposeful aura; the post was in 1887, when McIver arrived, "useful only as a place for quartering troops."[3]

That fort described so vividly by Parkman had been replaced, transformed, and modernized and was recently equipped with gas lamps, boardwalks, and new sanitary facilities and was in every way a neat and orderly garrison. By the end of the 1880s, Fort Laramie had become a settlement among settlements, a town among towns, although always with a distinct military flavor. Increasingly Fort Laramie had become

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[1] McIver, "Service at Old Fort Laramie, Wyoming, June, 1887, till April, 1890," typescript in Fort Laramie vertical file, folder 1, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

[2] Diary entry for July 31, 1868, Diary of Ada A. Vogdes, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.

[3] McIver, "Service at Old Fort Laramie, Wyoming," 4.

engulfed by the civilization that it sponsored and undermined by the changes it generated. Just as Fort Laramie fostered the rise of a modern society on the high plains, and did so from its beginnings as a remote outpost, the political and economic infrastructure of that society now was becoming established at other nearby, but scattered, points. The Territory of Wyoming would become the State of Wyoming in 1890, with a population of sixty-two thousand and its capital lay to the south of the fort in Cheyenne on the Union Pacific Railroad, which itself had replaced the Oregon – California Trail as the main passage across the area. A new university was being built in Laramie. The town of Douglas was rising to the northwest, a dozen miles from Fort Fetterman, joining other communities in the region like Guernsey and Lusk and Gering and, a little farther away, Casper. A railroad reached to Bordeaux, a point south of Wheatland, twenty-some miles from the fort, where John Hunton operated a hotel beginning in 1887. Ranches emerged all around the fort; the Lucerne, a major irrigation ditch, soon supplied water to assist in the farming efforts; and a daily stage passed through Fort Laramie on its way from Cheyenne to the Black Hills. Civil government served the area with schools, a county commission oversaw the development of roads and bridges, and the towns developed commercial operations to serve the predominantly agricultural economy of the region. Fort Laramie had been transformed already and the broader region was beginning to be transformed, at least in the physical manifestations.

Those changes represented only part of the process however. Fort Laramie's larger changes, the fundamental shifts in history, were those that transformed social relationships at Fort Laramie and that were thus heralded for a broader area. In its early days, Fort Laramie represented a society where races and peoples mixed on a basis unmarked by the rigid stratification of military life, where French, Mexican, Indian, and Anglo people lived with each other with forbearance and even some respect, where families commonly had people of three different colors in them and cheerfully flouted the structures and roles prescribed in white society. It was a place where authority was famously decentralized (in Parkman's words, "in this democratic community, the chief never assumes superior state"[4]), where isolation was often a blessing and independence a reality, where relationships tended to the personal and negotiable rather than the fixed and mandated, and where nature's cycles shaped the work to be performed. It was at the same time a world that carried much hardship, a world that saw privation and suffering, and a world that lacked and did not particularly value modern conveniences. But this world declined as another took its place along the same rivers, in sight of the same mountains, beneath the same sky. As Parkman wrote in 1846, "Great changes are at hand in that region."[5]

The changes came slowly once the military established a base that represented an outpost for civilization. In the early years, the fort often accommodated itself to the circumstances of life in an area where other cultures prevailed. The commanding officer could father a child with an Indian mother; the missionary impulses of the post chaplain (who would use his powers as a shaman to aid the Indians by bringing rain or fair weather as was needed) did not extend to converting the Indians; and conflicts tended to be avoided by keeping the focus on actual issues instead of trying to impose military authority and power to establish a broader principle of order and behavior. As the conflict

[4] Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: Books, Inc., n.d.), 89.
[5] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 151.

with Indians became less flexible, especially in the years following the Grattan fight, as the fort became larger and more structured and formal, the civilizing impulse became stronger and the effort to impose order on the area rose to central importance.

By the end of the 1850s the transformation had proceeded far enough that the post assistant surgeon was able to identify different categories of people at Fort Laramie according to the independence and freedom they had in their lives, with the mountain men at the top of the list, followed by the civilian contractors to the quartermaster, and at the opposite end, the most regimented, monotonous, and depressing work was that performed by the enlisted ranks doing garrison duty. The otherwise observant and astute surgeon, however, neglected to include women in his discussion of the fort's demographics and sociology, an omission that itself indicated the social position and role of women there. The truth was that Fort Laramie was becoming more highly structured and disciplined and organized, much like a factory and factory town in the East, with different classes and ranks and privileges and expectations. Even the population of the fort changed so that it became a polyglot society, at least in the enlisted ranks, and the officer corps assumed the responsibility of a social elite, and usually held the background to match. The formal, ritualized life of the post especially applied to the lives of the women at the post in the post-Civil War years, where gender and rank restricted their activities and aspirations at every turn, where the sisterhood essential in this isolated, male-dominated environment was itself riven by limits of class. In this fragmentation of life by rank, gender, class, and ethnicity, Fort Laramie came to resemble even more the new social order of industrial America.

Lieutenant McIver soon traveled to Fort Robinson and offered up comments on what had happened to the military in general. Without combat against the Indians, he said, military commanders became focused on "post administration" instead of tactics and strategy. Officers were now rated, he said, not on tactical ability, but "upon their ability to display to inspectors a smartly conducted review of the troops of the garrison and a well administered, clean looking post." "Post administration," he said, "had become the important thing and to that extent military standards had become perverted."[6] Fort Laramie in 1887 was certainly a well-administered, clean-looking post. Even the military had been transformed and a new order prevailed in uniform. Indeed, another dimension of the transformation is evident when one considers McIver's station prior to Fort Laramie. He had been assigned to Rock Springs with two companies posted there to quell the political and economic and ethnic violence associated with the anti-Chinese riot in and around the coal mines. Two companies from Fort Laramie replaced those in Rock Springs that McIver brought to the fort now. The army, including the army at Fort Laramie, was dealing with industrial America's issues now and doing so by suppressing disruptions in the system of production.

The most powerful and symbolic alteration, though, came when this new order extended to the Native Americans of the area. The map of the new social order presented at the treaty council of 1851 included contour lines and landmarks not immediately evident beneath the veneer of talk about peace and harmony and reciprocity. The military helped impose those features in the area in part by the armed force concentrated at Fort Laramie, but the greater role was for the military's sheer

[6] McIver, "Service at Old Fort Laramie," 6.

presence to serve as a reminder of the commitment of the government to the expansion of a social, business, and political infrastructure in the area that would facilitate transportation and commerce. When those roads and when that commerce generated armed resistance, the military reached out from Fort Laramie to suppress the threat. Even when the army failed to protect the new system, it managed to bring the Indians into a new treaty cycle that, in turn, ratcheted up the process so that with each victory on the field of battle, the Indians somehow lost more and more on the map and in their position as the dominant cultural force on the Great Plains. Beginning with an assumption that the land should be legally divided, the process then moved to diminish the size of the holdings, and then to require Native Americans to live and trade on particular reservations.

At the same time that the Native American presence was being whittled away by treaties, the inroads into their cultures proceeded with subtlety and force. At one point welcome on the post, and for a good while permitted to trade there when they visited, the Indians found themselves increasingly dependent on that trade but unwelcome as residents. The challenges to their culture and social arrangements could be seen in the divisions between and within tribes over which path to follow, one of accommodation to whites or resistance to them, in the tension between leaders and people, and in the simple matter of day-to-day living where the materials of white culture reached deeper into their own habits, so that when they had to leave, the "Loafers" even had to depend on white assistance in moving to the reservation. The world of the Native Americans had gone topsy-turvy from the one described by Francis Parkman. In 1846 Parkman noted that the white people of the Fort Laramie area "seemed to aim at assimilating themselves to their savage associates."[7]

While the mountaineers that Parkman encountered lived an undisciplined life that often appeared savage to his delicate sensibilities, that life continued on in this area, even against the wishes and mandates of the military. There were those like Thomas Twiss who railed against the mountain men, complaining that "those whites who reside among the Indians of the prairies are neither the pioneers of civilization nor settlements, but emphatically fugitives from both . . . ."[8] Within a decade Twiss had joined the people he had previously sought to transform, to "civilize," married several Indian women, abandoned the institutions and restraints he had once promulgated, and lived with their tribe and evidently adopted their customs. The fugitive culture, however, could also be found in the "wild, free life" of the bullwhacker and the "very promiscuous gathering of whites, Mexicans and Indians" that John Hunton derided as outcasts, but who were just small operators and out-of-work individuals and civilians previously employed at the fort who moved in a world different from that of the affluent businesspeople and military commanders. In the haunts, homes, and culture of the "outcasts" the legacy of earlier social arrangements and values lived on.

There was another way, too, in which that legacy endured, even within the dominant culture. At the time that McIver wrote briefly about the history of Fort Laramie,

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[7] Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 58.

[8] Thomas Twiss to Commissioner Manypenny, September 12, 1856, quoted by Hoopes, "Thomas Twiss, Indian Agent on the Upper Platte," 364 and Eugene Ware, *The Indian War of 1864* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960; 1994 reprint by University of Nebraska Press), 210-211.

he said, "Along with the frontier history with which Fort Laramie is associated, there is much of sentiment and romance."[9] The romance is, in fact, substantial. Images of traders and trappers, of Indians in their native culture, of soldiers in combat and in a lonely outpost, of women far removed from the comforts and supports of home, all these images abound in modern discussions of Fort Laramie. Those beckoning images were also plainly evident and were popularly circulated and promoted a century ago, yet if one looks more closely at them, they harbored something deeper than sweet memories. In 1889 John Hunton received a letter from James Buchanan, who had previously served at Fort Laramie. Buchanan offered up this retrospection and this judgment: "I always think of Laramie with great affection—three of the happiest years of my Army life having been passed there. I would like to see the old place again and to have a look at the Peak, but then the country out there—scenery included—has I imagine been ruined by the d—d railroads."[10] This was more than nostalgia and sentiment. This was an elegy for a world that had been lost. From Fort Laramie's earliest beginnings until its ultimate closure, the tension between the future that Fort Laramie ushered in and the past that it displaced was as much a part of the post's significance as the physical and social changes that it wrought. The forlorn recollection of a lost world formed a part of the legacy of Fort Laramie long before it was decommissioned and left to rot.

In the period of nearly a century and a quarter since the closing of Fort Laramie, that wistful reminiscence of times past has remained alive and has contributed to an image of the fort as an icon of the frontier, even if the fort was instrumental in transforming that "frontier" to modernity. The images often evoke a wildness foreign to the pressures and restraints of twentieth- and twenty-first century life, but in the process they reveal something of what was lost in the four decades of military use of Fort Laramie. The perception of a world that has been lost, a world that has been made over into the one that we inhabit, makes understandable much other nostalgia and mythologizing about the past, even among those who celebrate the forces that undermined and destroyed the institutions, cultures, and relationships of the past whose loss they mourn. This clearly was a loss for the American Indians who had lived on the plains; it was a loss of their land, a loss of their economy, and certainly a challenge to, if not an actual loss of, their culture. That sense of loss is one that sears the soul of anyone who reflects on it. But it was a loss for others too. It was a loss for anybody whose values and priorities do not exactly align with those of the ascendant social order and its increasingly narrow purposes. One of the important ironies in all this is that the loss and displacement that happened to the Indians happened also to the white people at Fort Laramie and beyond, and it happened in part because of the social forces unleashed at Fort Laramie.

[9] McIver, "Service at Old Fort Laramie," 3.
[10] James A. Buchanan to Hunton, February 23, 1889, in Hunton letters, Wyoming State Archives.

# Epilogue

# Beyond Fort Laramie

It is easy, perhaps too easy, to close the book, both literally and metaphorically, on Fort Laramie with the closing of the post in 1890. But while Fort Laramie's institutional history came to a definable end with its decommissioning, the forces associated with the fort and the context in which it operated and which gave its history meaning continued on. Just as the historical context, the way in which events and developments fit together, even when the connections between and among them are not always obvious, provides a broader understanding of the significance of Fort Laramie in history, so too does that historical context illuminate broader changes at work in Wyoming—and beyond.

Fort Laramie, from its earliest marks on the land and people in the 1830s to the time of the closing of the military post in 1890, was significant for reasons that go beyond the military activities associated with it. Fort Laramie may be known for its role in what is euphemistically called the "Indian wars," but the real conflict that Fort Laramie was involved in was a deeper struggle over the defining structure and purpose of society. The fundamental issue at Fort Laramie was not just that of who would possess the land but of what kind of society, what kind of culture, and what values would be dominant on that land. And that conflict proved to be enduring, visible at least into the early decades of the twentieth century, and perhaps even to today.

The pattern of change in Wyoming at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth had been foretold by the social evolution at Fort Laramie. Those changes were especially defined by the process of modernization, industrialization, centralization, and commercialization, but there was something else evident at Fort Laramie. The pattern evident at Fort Laramie also revealed an abiding opposition and resistance to exactly those processes and that conflict was never resolved. In important ways, the struggle over the hegemony of the new social order continued in the young state. While historical research remains to be conducted into how Wyoming's modern social structure emerged and how the tensions in it took shape, the results of that investigation are promising. Even a brief look at some of Wyoming's people in these years suggests real limits to the extent of, the acceptance of, and the enthusiasm for the new system—limits to its hegemony. The broad patterns associated with two significant parts of Wyoming hint at the essential continuity of the larger social war waged at Fort Laramie over the next decades.

*i. A Continuing War for Civilization—Native Americans in Wyoming into the Twentieth Century*

In some eyes it appeared upon the closing of Fort Laramie that the war against the Indians had been won and that "civilization" had prevailed. But the Native American population of Wyoming did not disappear, did not go away—except insofar as those people were forced onto lands that were but a fraction of the area where they once hunted and lived, some of them since well before there ever was a Fort Laramie. These were people who had been integral to the early history of the fort and who had then been the object of "civilization" efforts at the fort and beyond. By 1890 the Lakota and Cheyenne and others had been moved out of Wyoming, while the tribes that remained in the new state had been placed on a shrinking reservation on the Wind River. But the government was not done with the Indians after moving them onto reservations and the process of "civilization" continued in a way that made compulsory what had been stipulated as voluntary in the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868.

The reservation assigned to the Eastern Shoshonis itself shrank and then the Northern Arapahoes were placed on the same land without regard to the wishes of either tribe, and an uncomfortable and difficult relationship, abetted by material hardship and unsympathetic officials, ensued. Plus, as of 1887 the government's active program to "civilize" the Indians gained new force with the General Allotment Act, or Dawes Severalty Act. With the object of eliminating tribal, communal ownership of lands on the reservations, the law authorized the survey and division of lands among the individual Indians to make each person independent of the tribe. Senator Henry L. Dawes and others, considering themselves to be "friends of the Indian," saw this as a key instrument of "civilization."[1] On the reservation (known as Shoshone Agency until 1937 when it changed to Wind River Indian Reservation), the allotment of lands was actively resisted. When the Arapahoes agreed to accept it, it was not because they endorsed the new system; instead, the hope was that accepting allotment would at least provide them some legal title to land they occupied. And still the pressure continued. The state of Wyoming prohibited Indians from hunting outside the reservation in 1890 and federal rations were steadily reduced to make the people on the reservation more dependent on farming their land; if they did not make "productive" use of the land, that land could be leased out to others by the secretary of the interior.[2] And when land was leased, the government refused to distribute the funds received to the tribe on an individual, per capita basis.

So went the process of "civilization" beyond Fort Laramie. It was surely no surprise when the classic expression of cultural resistance and revitalization, the vision of returning to earlier times and circumstances and ways of living—the Ghost Dance—spread among the dispossessed Indian tribes and it found a receptive audience among

[1] Dawes himself explained the general problem after holding meetings in the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory in 1885: "They have got as far as they can go, because they own their land in common. It is Henry George's system, and under that there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization. Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress." Address of Senator Henry L. Dawes to Board of Indian Commissioners, in *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners for the Year 1885* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), 90.

[2] Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851 – 1978: Symbols in Crises of Authority* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 91, 88, 87.

Wyoming's Native Americans. While the Shoshonis, according to Virginia Trenholm, fell away from the new religion, the Arapahoes at Wind River "accepted it unreservedly."[3] The Ghost Dance ultimately faded, but the tension it revealed continued on. Torn between their traditional cultures and valued obligations on the one hand and the insistent pressures by the government, on the other hand, for abandonment of those same cultures through missionary education and economic compulsion, the following years were difficult for both Shoshonis and Arapahoes. Even so, against all odds, and against powerful forces of acculturation, economic restructuring, and detribalization, the tribes still managed to retain strong cultural elements like language, religion, ceremonies, and other practices that helped retain tribal identities, institutions, beliefs, and practices, even if they were sometimes practiced and perpetuated out of view of authorities. The persistence of those cultures, importantly, indicated some of the limits of the "civilizing" impulse set in motion by the social transformation pressed forward at Fort Laramie. The resistance continued.

In the ensuing decades, into the twentieth century, the size of the reservation diminished and the plight of the Indians on the reservation deteriorated further. The general anguish is achingly familiar but its depth may not be. Anthropologist Loretta Fowler summarized the situation of the Arapahoes on the reservation as of the 1920s:

> Only a minority of Arapahoes were able to farm, and Indians could obtain wage work only intermittently. In the view of Superintendent E. A. Hutchinson (1917-22), many Indians, having leased their allotments to whites "for a mere bagatelle," were "aimlessly drifting, Micawber like, waiting for something to turn up." . . . By 1920 he had reduced the number of persons receiving rations to 100. Water charges of $1 an acre were being levied against individual Indians. Most Indians lived in canvas tents and brush shelters. Despite the widespread suffering, the Indian Office allowed only minimal and occasional per capita payments to the Arapahoes: for example, $12 in 1920, $20 in 1921. To the tribe's further dismay, the Arapahoe cattle herd was sold at a loss.[4]

When one compares these circumstances of life for some of Wyoming's people to the life those people's ancestors had lived a century before, or even just two or three generations before, the notions of "progress" and "civilization" lose any remaining luster they may have had. There were quite possibly some tribal members alive in the 1920s who had even attended the Fort Laramie treaty council in 1851. In a fundamental way, they were still fighting the same battle with some of the same goals as they had a century before. In a sense, it was as if Fort Laramie had never closed.

*ii. A War for Wyoming—Homesteading Agriculture into the Twentieth Century*

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[3] Virginia Cole Trenholm, *The Arapahoes: Our People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press1970), 283.
[4] Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics*, 134.

But it was not just a conflict with Native American peoples and cultures. For that matter, there was another war going on in Wyoming at the moment that Fort Laramie closed, and that war would also continue into the future. Elsewhere I have referred to this conflict as "A War for Wyoming" and this "war" also had to do with competing visions of what Wyoming should be. In that struggle, the issues were similar to those that defined the conflict at Fort Laramie. I previously wrote that there were two Wyomings at the end of the 1880s:

> One was a Wyoming of huge ranches and innumerable cattle spread across the plains for hundreds of miles while the other was a Wyoming of homesteads and small herds. One was a Wyoming of cattle ranching where the business was operated by a gathering of directors around a mahogany table in a boardroom in a distant city, state, or country while the other was a Wyoming where the ranch family made decisions at the supper table of their cabin and on horseback on the range. One was a Wyoming where the object of the endeavor was to turn livestock into dividends and profits and the other was a Wyoming where the object and the means—where the free life they lived was as important as any money they made—were entwined, inseparable, and, in the last analysis, inviolable.[5]

Wyoming was by any measure an agricultural state, but it was a particular kind of agriculture, and the vast majority of Wyoming's farms and ranches practiced a form of agriculture that ran counter to that of the biggest ranches and opposite to the forces reshaping agriculture elsewhere in the nation. Thanks to the series of laws providing land on the public domain, land that had been taken from the various tribes and nations of Native Americans in the military campaigns and treaty negotiating efforts associated with Fort Laramie and other military outposts, people from other states migrated to and claimed homesteads in Wyoming. While that homesteading effort could be viewed as the growth of an agricultural economy, these homesteads, importantly, were not commercial operations. They were small, they were owner-operated, they were located along streams more than along railroads, they utilized simple, even archaic, technologies appropriate to small acreages and eschewed debt to acquire modern implements, and they grew what would be consumed by themselves and their neighbors, producing a variety of crops and livestock rather than specializing on single-crop or ranch production by which they could maximize returns on their investment. Farming and ranching was a way of life more than it was a business.

In this War for Wyoming at the time Fort Laramie closed, the small operators, homesteaders—and their goals and practices—were up against the big ranches that used the public domain for their herds. The big ranches, harbingers of the new system of large-scale commercial agriculture, tried to extend their own control over the state and did so successfully in the state's laws blacklisting their homesteader and small ranch neighbors from roundups, making them not just outcasts but even outlaws and rustlers for claiming their own maverick calves. While the large ranchers found ready allies in the territorial and then state government, their hegemony did not extend to the people of

[5] Michael Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home: Ranching, Farming, and Homesteading in Wyoming, 1860-1960* (Cheyenne: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, 2011), 53.

the state and they found themselves opposed by small operators and homesteaders in "rustling," in jury verdicts, in protests, and more. When all else failed, the ranchers sent a small army of gunmen to eliminate key opposing individuals. Those "invaders" as they were known were subsequently surrounded by small ranchers and homesteaders; there the "invaders" were essentially rescued by the U.S. Army; the army took them into custody and away from their dire situation and ultimately the invaders were taken to Cheyenne where they never stood trial. As with much of history, this Johnson County War is not free of ambiguities, but it was clearly a conflict between the small operators and the big ranchers and between their opposing systems and purposes. And while the "invaders" escaped death, the big ranchers failed in their main goal of suppressing, and even eliminating, the small homesteads; they failed in extending their hegemony over the state's people.

The small, owner-operated, subsistence farms and ranches successfully opposed the rising social order, the form of civilization associated with civil, military, and economic authority. But the larger point is that while Wyoming was becoming populated with homesteaders in the 1880s and 1890s, these homesteaders were not the advance guard of civilization moving to take over Wyoming for development; rather, to some degree they were like so many who figured in the history of Fort Laramie, in one way or another outcasts and refugees, or at the least outsiders, from an increasingly institutionally defined civilization, people fleeing the forces of modernization and then holding onto their values once they settled their homesteads.

While that conflict sometimes took the form of an actual war, the more subtle conflict was in the day-to-day way these people lived their lives. A critical element in that life was the economic basis of the homesteading system of agriculture that prevailed, and continued to prevail, in Wyoming. Because they owned their land and owned it without a mortgage, they could practice a generally self-sufficient form of agriculture; they could grow on their land what they needed without depending on the market. In other states farmers, unable to pay the mortgage in hard times were moving to the cities to find work—or to Wyoming where they could begin anew without a mortgage. At the time Fort Laramie closed, Wyoming's growing population was a rural population and that rural population held onto Jeffersonian values of independence and freedom as much as they held onto the land. That pattern continued and a look at a few statistics shows not just the numerical strength of that system of agriculture but illuminates its key feature as well.

In 1890 there were a total of 3,125 farms (there was no distinction between farming and ranching in census tabulations) in Wyoming, up from 457 ten years before. In 1900 that number increased to 6,095 and by 1910 Wyoming had nearly 11,000 farms and ranches, 9,779 of them operated by their owners.[6] The revealing statistic in all this, however, is that these men and women were not expanding their operations, not purchasing new technology to increase productivity, not buying additional land for

[6] Census Office, *Report on the Productions of Agriculture as Returned in the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880):* 100; and U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture of the United States at the Eleventh Census, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 196.

greater yields, not borrowing money to become more profitable businesses. They were not businesses and they were content with what they were doing. In 1890 87 per cent of Wyoming's owner-operated farms and ranches were debt free, the critical factor in determining whether their production would be for their home consumption or for sale on the market. As late as 1910 80.3 per cent of the owner-operated farms and ranches in Wyoming did not owe a dollar and they did not need to depend on the market for their livelihoods.[7] In the decade of the 1910s when the state's banks and the university's Agricultural Extension Service launched a campaign to get the state's farmers and ranchers to expand and modernize their production, to operate on a more business-like basis, to be businesses instead of homesteaders, a shift strengthened by the push-pull forces unleashed by World War I, more of them became commercial operations. Even so, by 1920 a majority, albeit a thin majority (50.9 per cent), of Wyoming's farmers and ranchers still did not have a mortgage, still did not operate commercially, and if they sold what they produced it was only the surplus left over after meeting their own needs. This was not the modernized, commercialized, industrialized system of agriculture as economics in which you leverage what you have to get more.[8]

Ultimately, of course, this would change and more of Wyoming's (and the nation's) farmers and ranchers adopted business goals, practices and organization, but it was only in the agricultural depression of the 1920s and the government policies of the 1930s that the migration to homesteads on the land reversed and became an exodus to the towns and cities, that the number of farms and ranches declined and the average size of those remaining mushroomed. When the Roosevelt administration's farm program in the 1930s encouraged the industrialization of agriculture, it represented the fulfillment not only of the vision of the "invaders" and big ranchers of the 1890s but of the promoters of "civilization" at Fort Laramie. And they did it against the protests of the small farmers and ranchers, a protest that continued among those who managed to stay on the land. Those people now found themselves outsiders in the new system, not only economically and politically, but in their values and goals as well, perhaps even in the same way that Wyoming's Indian population had been displaced. Which is to say that the processes of displacement and modernization that had been at work since the military took over Fort Laramie continued into the twentieth century.

The issues surrounding the lives of Wyoming's Native American population and

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[7] The census also noted, despite the increase between 1900 and 1910 of the percentage mortgaged, "from 1890 to 1910 the absolute number of farms free from mortgage increased much more than the number mortgaged." U.S. Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Vol. V, *Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 942.

[8] These statistics are taken from the agricultural census returns for 1900, 1910, and 1920: *Census Reports, Volume V, Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900, Agriculture, Part I, Farms, Live Stock, and Animal Products* (Washington, D.C.: United States Census Office, 1902), 495-496, 578-579; U.S. Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Vol. V, *Agriculture*, 938-968; and Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States [*1920*], State Compendium, Wyoming* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), 35-77. See also, however, my discussion of these and related issues in Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home: Ranching, Farming, and Homesteading in Wyoming, 1860-1960*.

Wyoming's farming and ranching families are more than incidental and are more than isolated inquiries into the histories of specific, separate groups. For inquiring into the lives of these people raises questions about the larger social context in which Wyoming's people lived and labored and in which they looked to the past, sometimes longingly, and to the future, often fearfully. And those questions give meaning to the broader historical events and developments that shaped much of the world we now live in. Those questions have to do with government, with economics, with gender and culture and class and ethnicity and with the way these social relations intersected. The questions reach into all areas of life and they seek to connect those areas in a coherent way. They have to do with the direction of social change. They have to do with the way people lived their lives.

Wyoming's people, like many of Fort Laramie's people, sought lives that honored different values and purposes, and the effort to live in traditional ways thereby brought them into conflict with the ascendant order. Wyoming would remain until the 1930s in many respects even a pre-industrial society with personal, familiar relationships, with a near absence of factories and factory systems of production in Wyoming even in the 1920s, with Wyoming a generally rural and agricultural state, and Wyoming agriculture, an important and sizable component of both economy and society, was not yet industrialized and most of the individual homesteads and owner-operated farms and ranches not dependent on markets as late as 1920; the organization of production was distinctly crafts and trades and small shop, and not industrial, and the prevalence of pre-industrial work processes, skills, disciplines, values, relationships, and cultures extended even into the extractive sector with tie hacks, miners, and oil-field workers working with conspicuous autonomy, at their own pace, and far from any kind of assembly-line system. One way to view this is as a broad opportunity for industrial development and growth; another way is to see the people of the state living by different values and purposes than the increasingly organized "civilization" around them.

That circumstance, very much like that which evolved at Fort Laramie once it became a military post, speaks to a fascinating dynamic in Wyoming history: the struggle between (1) those who find Wyoming attractive because they are trying to escape from the forces associated with modernization and civilization and to hold on to traditional values and relationships, and (2) those others who come to Wyoming to bring the institutions and practices of the dominant economy and society in the nation into Wyoming to transform the state into something resembling another state, like New Jersey or Ohio, or perhaps even another country. The dividing line separating these visions is sometimes in the social structure, often in class and ethnic relations, and invariably in government policy. The dividing line is also, however, in people's souls, cultures, and dreams. The dividing line ultimately lies even deeper in conflicting social visions. It is the conflict over whether society should build institutions to meet the needs of individuals who make up the community, however large or small, or whether people must change the way they live their lives to meet the needs of the institutions of their society. And that is an issue that goes well beyond Fort Laramie, goes to the needs of the people of Wyoming, to the needs of the people of the nation. That issue is the real legacy of Fort Laramie's people.

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