The History of Fort Kearney

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THE HISTORY OF FORT KEARNEY

Early days regarding establishment of posts

D. E. Kearney to select site for post

Kearney to establish the post

Reservations declared

Establishment of post at Table Creek

Colonel Kearney at Table Creek

Recalled to Fort Leavenworth

Indians at the Fort

Major Shurtleff Recalled to Fort Leavenworth

Capt. Kearney abandoned 1846

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THE HISTORY OF FORT KEARNEY

Introduction

The scenes of this narrative lie in the valleys of the Missouri and Platte Rivers, in an area which is now the state of Nebraska. The center of the stage is a flat plain lying west and south of the Grand Island in the Platte River. A ridge of bluffs may be seen a few miles to the south and on the opposite side, the river.

When the emigrants were crossing the plains to establish new homes in Oregon and California, this came to be a strategic point. In the early part of the century the Astorian expedition was sent out by the American Fur Company. Some of the explorers on their return to St. Louis followed along the Platte River to its mouth. A few years later other expeditions were crossing the plains. One under Captain William Ashley had in 1823 discovered the South Pass. By the year 1830 pack animals were being used on the route which later came to be known as the Oregon Trail. A number of expeditions

1 Washington Irving, Astoria, pp. 331-333; 406-409
2 Harrison C. Dale, The Ashley Smith Explorations 1822-1829, pp. 30-40; 91 et seq.

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were taken over the route in 1832. In that year Captain Booneville and Nathaniel Wyeth each took a party across the plains. They were followed a few years later by Marcus Whitman who traversed practically the entire route to Oregon in a wagon.

With the growing traffic across the plains, it became necessary for the government to furnish some sort of protection to the emigrants. It was with this end in view that the United States government established Camp Kearney at Table Creek in 1846 and later Fort Kearney upon the Platte in 1848.

Camp Kearney (Old Fort Kearney) at Table Creek was located in the Otoe Country and was not far distant from the Pawnees, the Potawotomie and the Omaha. It was possible for troops located at this point to maintain friendly relations among the Indians and also to furnish a means of protection for the emigrants. Camp Kearney was abandoned in the spring of 1848 when the troops were sent to the Platte to establish a new fort which would be on the route to Oregon. It is around this fort that the main incidents of this narrative center.

3 Washington Irving, Adventures of Captain L. H. Bonneville pp. 41 et seq.
5 Col. S. W. Kearney to Brig. Genl. R. Jones, May 12, 1846
6 Byron Bells, Marcus Whitman, pp. 42-45
7 Manuscript copy of an address delivered by Mr. A. E. Sheldon at Minden, Nebr. Sept. 1, 1926
8 Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon
CHAPTER I

THE OLD FORT KEARNEY

It was with a view to protecting the frontier that Congress passed a law on July 2, 1836 in which provision was made for the surveying and opening of a military road from some point on the Mississippi, near its junction with the Des Moines River to the Red River. The act stated that the road should pass west of the state of Missouri and the territory of Arkansas. Provision was also made for such military posts along the road as should be deemed necessary.

In accordance with this act in the spring of 1836 Colonel Stephen W. Kearney and Nathan Boone were commissioned to select a site for a military post somewhere near the Missouri. After a careful examination of the country along the river, a site was selected near the mouth of Table Creek.

The place was satisfactory from a military point of view. A gradual ascent began immediately above the mouth of the creek and in about four hundred and fifty

1 United States Statutes at Large. Vol. Vp. 67
2 S. W. Kearney and Nathan Boone to Major T. Cross April 25, 1838
yards reached an open level, which was sufficiently large for any buildings beside what might be necessary for drilling any number of Infantry or Dragoons. There was a splendid view of the river for several miles below and of the country in the rear. Troops located here would be near, and would afford protection to the frontier inhabitants. At the same time they would be within easy reach of the Pawnees, the most warlike and powerful nation in that section of the country.

The situation of the site was a healthful one. There were no marshes or lowlands near subject to overflow. The country about it was fine prairie ground upon which corn and hay could be raised. The materials which would be necessary in the erection of the buildings at the post were to be found near at hand. Stone could be secured from the bluffs, one hundred yards below at the mouth of the creek, and just across the river was abundant building timber. This site was also found to be the best along the Missouri River for a ferry.

In his report for 1840 the Secretary of War recommended the construction of a fort "at the head of navigation of the Kansas river" and another northwest of

3 Idem.
4 S. W. Kearney and Nathan Boone to Maj. T. Cross, April 25, 1837
Fort Leavenworth at Table Creek on the Missouri below the mouth of the Platte.

In the spring of 1846 the government decided to establish a military post at Table Creek and instructions were sent to Colonel Kearney to see to the immediate erection of the same. Since Colonel Kearney was acquainted with the Indian affairs in that section of the country, it was left to him to decide whether the work should be of a temporary or permanent character. In a letter to General R. Jones he said, he was of the opinion that the work should be a permanent one inasmuch as the post would probably be the starting point from the Missouri River for the Oregon emigrants; besides it was located in the Otoe country near their settlements and was not far distant from the Potawotomie and the Sioux. He also said that a reserve would be needed around the post and one on the opposite side of the Missouri River, from whence he expected to get his building timber.

At that time there were some squatters on the land dealing in liquor with the Indians. They had laid claim to all the timber in the state near that point.

5 House Executive Documents, 26 Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 2, S
6 Special Orders No. 17, March 6, 1846
7 Adj. Genl. R. Jones to Col. S. W. Kearney 1st Dragoons March 6, 1846
8 Col. S. W. Kearney 1st Dragoons to Brig. Genl. R. Jones, March 15, 1846
9 Col. S. W. Kearney 1st Dragoons to Brig. Genl. R. Jones, March 17, 1846
The region about Fort Kearney, Nebraska, on the west side of the Missouri was never formally set aside by the President as a reservation. It was designated however, by the Attorney General with the approval of the Secretary of War. The reserve on the opposite side of the river from the post was declared to be such by the President's Order of April 8, 1846.

In May of 1846 Lieutenant Smith with thirty Dragoons of Captain Moore's Company was sent ahead to Table Creek. In the meantime, Colonel Kearney was waiting for a steam boat from St. Louis which was to bring the flooring, stores, etc. for the new post. On the arrival of the boat, Colonel Kearney with General Brook and Major Wharton proceeded to Table Creek, taking with them the remainder of Captain Moore's Company.

Colonel Stephen Kearney remained at Table Creek only long enough to select the site and to lay out the plans for the buildings. It was his purpose to return to Table Creek two or three times during the summer and to bring with him a company of Dragoons, who were to assist in the work at the post while they were there.

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10 Robert S. Oliver Asst. Sec'y of War to Hon. John A. Maguire. April 12, 1912
11 S. W. Kearney to Brig. Gen'l R. Jones, May 12, 1846
12 W. E. Prince First Infantry to Maj. Gen'l Thos. Jesup Q't. Mr. Gen'l U. S. Army, August 6, 1858
13 S. W. Kearney to Brig. Gen'l R. Jones, May 12, 1846
14 W. E. Prince to Thos. Jesup, August 6, 1858
15 S. W. Kearney to Brig. Gen'l R. Jones, May 12, 1846
Colonel Kearney on his return to Fort Leavenworth found an order awaiting him relative to the expedition to be sent to Santa Fe. He found it necessary to withdraw Captain Moore from Table Creek with forty-five men from the companies. This left Major Wharton, who was in charge at the post, but thirty-nine men, some of whom were on the sick report, and seven mechanics to erect the defenses, quarters, etc., and to furnish the necessary guards.

The Indians did not visit the post very frequently. During the time Major Wharton was in command the Otoes paid but one visit. This was made evidently with a view to exhibit their strength. The affairs treated of, in interviews with them, pertained to matters of general interest.

Major Wharton had been at the post but a few weeks when his services were required at Fort Leavenworth. He was ordered to take with him the Dragoons and proceed to that point. He left Lieutenant Prince in charge at Table Creek to carry on the work there.

On June 1, 1846 Brigadier General Brooke said he

16 S. W. Kearney to Brig. Gen'l R. Jones, May 20, 1846.
18 W. E. Prince Capt. 1st Infantry to Maj. Gen'l Thos. S. Jesup, August 6, 1846.
19 Idem.
hoped to receive orders to stop the work at Table Creek, so that, Colonel Kearney might take with him on the expedition to Santa Fe, the whole of Captain Moore's Company, part of which was still at the new post. The force at the post was too small, he said, to accomplish any real work and in case of Indian troubles, would be placed in an extremely delicate position.

Lieutenant Prince carried on the work at Table Creek as rapidly as possible with the small force of men at the Post. He had succeeded in erecting a two story block house, when he was ordered to abandon the place on June 22, 1846. The subsequent operations at the fort on Table Creek were incidental to the work of establishing the fort on the Platte.

The first returns of Camp Kearney on the Missouri River show that the garrison at the fort consisted of two companies. Company A of the First United States Infantry which was made up of three officers and forty men and Company C of the First United States Dragoons which consisted of two officers and twenty-four men. The latter command was at Table Creek only a very short time until it was ordered back to Fort Leavenworth to

20 Brig. Gen'l Geo. W. Brooke to Col. S. W. Kearney June 1, 1846.
become a part of the command under Colonel Stephen W. Kearney on the expedition to Santa Fe.

In the fall of 1847 a battalion of five companies was called from Missouri for the purpose of protecting the government supplies in crossing the prairies. The season was too far advanced for the troops to go farther than Grand Island that year, and it would be too late when they arrived at that point to be of any real assistance to the Oregon emigrants. Lieutenant Colonel Wharton recommended that the troops be allowed to go into winter quarters at Table Creek. A blockhouse had already been erected and it would be no difficult task for the soldiers to erect the necessary quarters from the large quantities of lumber and remains which were already at the place. With a supply of stores the company could be made very comfortable.

In a letter to Colonel Wharton, the Adjutant General stated that he rather doubted the wisdom of wintering at Table Creek. He thought the season too far advanced to erect the quarters. Under the circumstances he suggested that the battalion should winter at Fort Leavenworth where there were spacious barracks and ample stable room. The expense would be much less than at

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23 Post Returns, Camp Kearney on the Missouri.
Table Creek. Another important matter for consideration was the securing of supplies for the troops in the spring. These could be procured readily at Fort Leavenworth and would enable the troops to make arrangements for a very early start in the spring. These items he said would outweigh the advantages of the distance gained by the troops being at Table Creek.

Several weeks before Lieutenant Colonel Wharton had received this letter, he had instructed Lieutenant Colonel Powell to proceed to Table Creek with the command. On his arrival there, Powell had distributed his command to such an extent as to retard the work. He had ordered one detachment to attend the Potawotomie emigration, a second to Grand Island to act as an escort for a surveying party, and lastly a heavy detachment had been sent against the Sioux. This latter detachment returned a few weeks later without having seen an Indian.

It was finally decided that the troops were to winter at Table Creek in as much as sixty good substantial log cabins had been nearly completed by the early part of November. A report received from the Assistant Commissary showed that most of the supplies which were taken with the battalion were for one year, and none

27 Col. G. Wharton to Brig. Gen'l R. Jones, Oct. 27, 1847
28 Ibid., No. 18, 1847
29 Ibid., Nov. 6, 1847
less than nine months. All the arms and ammunition which had been provided by the government also had been sent with the command. The reason for this was the fact that, when the battalion left Fort Leavenworth, it had not expected to winter at Table Creek.

Early in the spring of 1848 the command broke camp at Table Creek and proceeded to the objective point on the Platte. Mr. English was left in charge of the government property at the post.

The winter camp was named Fort Kearney, by the commandant in charge, in compliment to Brigadier General Stephen W. Kearney of the regular army.

With the departure of the troops in 1846, Camp Kearney was no longer needed for military purposes. The frontier could be protected by mounted troops from the fort to be established on the Platte.

Little is heard about the old fort from this time on. Shortly after the passage of the Nebraska Bill, it was selected as a town site called Nebraska City. A number of citizens settled there and in 1855 the town

30 Col. G. Wharton to Brig. Gen'l R. Jones, October 27, 1847.
31 Memoranda from the files of the War Dept. Washington, D.C.
33 Memoranda from files of War Dept.
34 Capt. C. F. Ruff to Gen'l R. Jones, Feb. 26, 1849.
was the most flourish and populous in the territory.

The old blockhouse was in good repair and was being
used for the office of the Nebraska City News, a Fusion
Abolition paper.

Sometime later the old blockhouse was purchased by
Mr. Maxon of Nebraska City and was used by him as a store
keeping there supplies for the trains. In 1864 he moved
it onto some lots which he owned. Many of the logs were
so badly decayed that Mr. Maxon was able to erect only
one story. It was similar to the first story of the old
blockhouse except for the portholes. This was torn
down in 1889. Some of the original oak of the block-
house was used in the woodwork of the Public Library
building in Nebraska City, constructed in 1896.

35 Mark IZard and James Bradley to Hon. Jefferson Davis,
May 9, 1855.
36 Capt. James C. Brown to Hon. Jefferson Davis, Sec'y
of War. December 13, 1854.
37 Mr. J. M. Maxon to A. T. Richardson, St. Louis, Jan.
24, 1900.
38 MSS Statement by R. M. Rolfe, in possession of Nebr.
Hist. S.
39 MSS Statement by F. E. Bell, January 26, 1900, in
possession of the Nebraska Historical Society.
CHAPTER II

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND TREATIES

Since Fort Kearney was located on territory which belonged to the Pawnee Indians it is necessary to make some mention of the creation which were negotiated with these tribes.

The first treaties between the United States government and the Pawnee Indians were concluded at St. Louis, June 18-26, 1818, when the United States Negotiated treaties with all the tribes disturbed by the war of 1812. The Pawnee tribes agreed to maintain peace and friendly relations with the citizens of the United States.

By a second treaty at Fort Leavenworth, September 28, 1825, the Pawnees renewed their pledge of peace and friendship and acknowledged the supremacy of the United States. They also agreed to arbitrate all grievances that might arise.

The Pawnee Indians lived upon the Great Plains, laying claim to the territory from the lands of the Omahas and the Otoes on the east to the forks of the Platte on the west. The Pawnees were divided into four bands, each

1 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, pp. 171-175.
2 Ibid., pp. 279-281
of which lived in separate villages a few miles apart.
The Grand Pawnees were on the south side of the Platte
river; the other three bands on the north side along the
Loup fork.

A large portion of the territory which comprises the
present states of Nebraska and Kansas was claimed by the
Pawnees as their hunting ground. They remained in con-
trol of this land until October 9, 1833, when by a treaty
concluded at the village of the Grand Pawnees they ceded
to the United States their claim to all the territory ly-
ing south of the Platte.

For some time the United States government had been
engaged in removing the various Indian tribes resident
within the states to tracts of land beyond the verge of
white population. Some of the tribes which were removed
were so located so as to come in contact with Indian tribes
already upon the prairies. Such was the situation of the
Delawares who were given a part of the hunting ground of
the Pawnees tribes. The contact of the two tribes resulted
in a bitter feud and gave rise to incessant fighting.

The government proposed to end the conflict by purchasing
the land and effecting treaties of peace between the tribes.

4 Idem.
6 John T. Irving, Indian Sketches taken during an ex-
pedition to the Pawnee Tribes, Vol. I, p. 9-10
Accordingly Henry N. Ellsworth was appointed commissioner to effect the purchase of the contested lands of the Pawnee and to induce them to move to the north side of the Platte river. He also was given instructions to bring about if possible a treaty of peace between them and their new neighbors.

In accordance with these plans a council was held with the Pawnees in the fall of 1833. It presented an imposing spectacle. The chiefs, principal men and warriors of the various tribes came to the meeting in full dress. Many of the young men were also ornamented for the occasion. The men began to assemble in the lodge of the chief about mid-day. The presents and goods had already been brought in and carefully piled up. As the hour for the opening of the meeting drew near the warriors poured in. They moved quietly to the places which were allotted to them and seated themselves around the chief according to rank. The crowd continued coming in until the lodge was filled. By that time five or six circles had been formed one beyond the other. The inner circles were occupied by the warriors entitled to the highest rank. The passage way was completely blocked by the women and children who dared venture no nearer.

At last all was ready for the council. The chief

9 Ibid., p. 49
filled a large stone pipe, lit it and inhaled a few whiffs. He passed it to the white men who smoked the pipe and in turn passed it to the other assembled warriors. After the pipe had made the circuit of the whole assembly, Mr. Ellsworth rose and addressed the council. He stated the views of the United States and the conditions of the treaty. At the conclusion of his address the chief of the Grand Pawnees arose and spoke to the assembly for a short time. He was followed by his son, who was the second chief of the tribe, and a number of the warriors. Everyone expressed his entire acquiescence with the terms of the treaty. The following day was then designed for the signing of the same. After the pipe was again passed around the assembly broke up.

The men retired from the lodge and prepared for the slaughter of an ox which had been designated as the victim for the ratification of the treaty.

In this treaty the Pawnees ceded to the United States all their lands south of the Platte river. In exchange for this land they were promised $4,600 annually for a term of twelve years. The Grand Pawnees and Republican villages received $1300 a piece, the Pawnee Loups and Tappaye Pawnees each $1000. The Grand Pawnees, who at this time resided south of the Platte agreed to move to the north side of the river.

Under the terms of the treaty the United States agreed that the ceded territory should not be assigned to any
other tribe but should remain a common hunting ground for the Pawnees and other friendly Indians. Moreover the government promised to erect a school for the Pawnees, with an annual appropriation of $1000 for a period of ten years. At the same time provision was made for blacksmiths and farmers to be sent to them.

The latter provisions of the treaty were not carried out until some years later. A school was established in 1844. Little was accomplished, however, because the Indian students were very irregular in attendance.

Following an attack by the Sioux in the year 1846, the school was moved to Bellevue and was continued there until 1851.

The farming operations carried on by the Indians were considered a failure. The Pawnees were very short of provisions and were forced to go hunting early in the spring before they had hoed the corn much, with the result that only partial crops were raised.

Under the terms of the treaty the Pawnees, who resided on the south side of the Platte had obligated themselves to move to the other side of the river. They carried out their agreement, but found that in their new

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16 *House Executive Documents*, 30th Cong., 1st Session, No. 3 pp. 861.
homes they were the victims of constant depredations committed by the Sioux. After a time they returned to their old homes south of the Platte and were unwilling to leave when urged by the U. S. government to do so. The government desired their removal inasmuch as the Pawnees were directly on the route to Oregon and caused a great deal of trouble for the emigrants.

The treaty of 1838 was the beginning of the Pawnee land cessions. It was followed by another treaty in 1848 under the terms of which the Pawnees ceded the territory commencing on the south side of the Platte river five miles west of the post "Fort Childs" (Fort Kearney) thence due north to the crest of the bluffs north of the Platte river. Thence east and along the crest of the bluffs to the termination of Grand Island. The strip of territory was about sixty miles in length. The government also secured the privilege of using any of the hard timber along the Wood River which was directly north of the ceded land. In lieu of this the Pawnees received $3000 in goods and merchandise.

20 Ibid., pp. 348-9.
21 House Executive Documents, 30th Cong. 2nd Sess. No. 1
The remaining territory of the Pawnees, except for a tract of land thirty miles long from east to west and fifteen miles wide from north to south, (what is now Nance County), was ceded to the United States on September 24, 1857.

By this treaty there was added some 10,000,000 acres to the public domain through purchase. The land lay between the Platte and the Niobrara rivers, bounded on the east by lands which had been ceded at an earlier date by the Omaha, and on the west by a line running due north from the junction of the north with the south fork of the Platte. In exchange for this immense tract the Indians were given $40,000 per annum for five years and at the end of five years $30,000 per annum as perpetual annuity. At the same time the government promised to erect such schools as should be deemed necessary and also would furnish all necessary tools, farming utensils and stock. The United States government was granted the privilege of building forts or military posts on the Indian's land and of opening roads through the territories of it desired.

The government allowed the Pawnees to choose the location of their reservation. When pe-ta-na-shore the principal chief of the pawnees was asked where they would

23 U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. XI, pp. 729
24 Ibid, p. 731
25 Ibid, p. 730
26 U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. XI, p. 730
like to make their permanent home he replied, "As my
great father has given us the privilege to select our
new home, my heart feels big" (putting his hand on his
breast), and all we ask is that we may go to our old
home on the Loup fork from where we were driven by the
Sioux."

In the year 1858 the Pawnees moved to their new
home on the Loup as they had agreed under the terms of
the treaty. A few years later the government estab-
lished the first school, a second was completed in 1864-
65. The attendance in the schools increased slowly
each year.

The Pawnees also made some progress in agricultural
methods. The most attention was given to the cultivation
of corn, although some other crops were also raised corn
and buffalo meat were the chief items of food used by
the Pawnees.

The Pawnees remained on the reservation until the
70's. During the fall of 1873 some of the Pawnees visited
the Wichita Agency in Indian territory where they were
well received. They remained at the Agency and through
them an invitation was extended to the entire Pawnee
tribe to remove to the Indian Territory. The invitation
was very favorably received by the remaining Pawnees. In

27 Nebraska City News, Jan. 16, 1858
28 U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. XI, pp. 731
29 Report Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, p. 273
30 Ibid., 1872, p. 232
31 Ibid., 1869, p. 349
32 Senate Miscellaneous Documents, 43 Cong. 2d Sess.
No. 35, p. 2
an open council held October 10, 1874 the Pawnees re-
quested to be allowed to move and permission was
35
granted.

The Pawnee territory in Nebraska was ceded to the
36
United States on Nov. 23, 1892.

34 House Executive Documents, 43 Cong., 2d Sess. No. 140
p. 1-2

35 House Executive Documents, 44th Cong., 1st Session
No. 240, p. 1

36 U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. XXIV, p. 388
Traffic across the continent was steadily increasing in the thirties and forties and the United States government was forced to give some thought to the problem of furnishing protection to the emigrants on their journey westward. As early as 1832 a law was approved authorizing the President to raise mounted volunteers for the defense of the frontier. According to the terms of the law six hundred mounted rangers were to be armed and equipped for service. Provision was also made for an appropriation of $50,000 for the expenses thus incurred.

In his report for 1841 the Secretary of War recommended that a chain of forts be established from the Council Bluffs to the mouth of the Columbia River. By this means he hoped to command the routes by which the Indians passed from north to south and at the same time maintain communication with the territories on the

1 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. IV, p. 533
Pacific. President Tyler endorsed these recommendations in his annual message of the same year. The following year he again alluded to this subject. He said, the suggestion in reference to the establishment of the posts and communications with the western territories were entitled to the most favorable consideration.

By 1844 the Oregon emigration had marked out a permanent trail by the way of the Platte River. It was of such importance that the Secretary of War in his report for that year not only recommended the appropriation of $100,000 for erecting military posts from Missouri to the Rocky mountains but urged the organization of the territory, which the Platte River and the Oregon trail crossed under the name of Nebraska. President Polk spoke favorably of the plain in his message of 1845.

The first action relative to carrying these recommendations into effect was taken in 1845 when Colonel Stephen W. Kearney received instructions to lead a military expedition over the trail from Fort Leavenworth to the Rocky Mountains. He set out in June of that year.

3 Ibid., p. 14
with five companies of the First Regiment of Dragoons and crossed through the Indian territory to South Pass. He met with various Indian tribes and distributed some gifts among them. At the same time he told them they must not molest or trouble the emigrants crossing the plains nor was the road made by the Dragoons to be closed. While on the expedition Colonel Kearney fell in with several parties of emigrants on the Oregon trail. It was estimated that about eight hundred fifty men, four hundred seventy-five women, and a thousand children had passed over that route during the season.

Kearney returned to Fort Leavenworth by the way of the Arkansas valley. In his report Kearney suggested that military expeditions such as had just been completed be made every two or three years, rather than the establishment of military posts. These he believed would serve to keep the Indians quiet.

The government of the United States favored the construction of military posts for the protection of the emigrants rather than military expeditions and in 1846

7 House Executive Documents, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 2, pp. 196-197
8 Ibid., p. 212
passed a law which made provision for posts along the route to Oregon. The sum of $76,500 was appropriated for mounting and equipping the regiment, $3000 to defray the expense of erecting each military post and $2000 for making compensation to the Indians who owned the land upon which a station might be erected.

It was to carry out the provisions of the law that a requisition was made on March 13, 1847 on the state of Missouri for one regiment of mounted volunteers. It was intended that a part of this regiment would be employed in establishing military posts on the route to Oregon. The others were to go on to Sante Fe to fill the places vacated by the twelve month men. The order was later changed all of the regiment was ordered to Sante Fe. In May of the same year a battalion of similar troops was raised and assigned the duty of erecting the posts on the Oregon Route. By the time this battalion was raised it was too late in the season for the troops to go farther than Grand Island that year; nor would they be of any real assistance to the Oregon emigrants. Under the circumstances it was decided that

9 United States Statutes at Large, Vol. IX, p. 13-14
10 House Executive Documents, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 8, p. 59
the men should winter at Camp Kearney at Table Creek and proceed from there to the Platte as early the next spring as possible. Shortly after the battalion reached Table Creek, Colonel Powell, who was in command, ordered Lieutenant D. P. Woodbury to take with him a part of the Missouri battalion and proceed to the Platte. The object of the expedition was to locate a site for the new post on the Oregon Trail, to furnish protection for any emigrants who might be on that route and to hold the Indians at peace. Lieutenant D. P. Woodbury left Camp Kearney on September 23, 1847 with seventy or more mounted Missouri Volunteers. They set out through a new and untried region following the high dividing ridges rather than of the valleys. At a distance which Lieutenant Woodbury estimated to be about eighty-seven miles from the Missouri river, the command reached the fort of the

11 Ibid., p. 79
12 Idem.
13 Manuscript copy of an address delivered by Dr. A E. Sheldon at Minden, Nebr., Sept. 1, 1926
14 Photostat copy of the roster of Missouri mounted volunteers.
15 Idem. Address by Mr. A. E. Sheldon
16 The distance estimated by Col. S. W. Powell falls short of distance by actual measurements.
Grand Island in the Platte. They marched up the south bank of the river about forty miles from the east and of the Grand Island and struck the Oregon trail. Arriving there Woodbury examined the country thereabouts for a suitable site for the new fort. In his official report Woodbury said, "I have located the post opposite a group of wooded islands in the Platte River, seventeen miles from where the Oregon trail turns off to the south from the Platte River, three hundred seventeen miles from Independence, Missouri, one hundred ninety-seven miles from Fort Kearney on the Missouri and two or three miles from the head of the group of islands called Grand Island."

The site chosen for the structure was favorably located. It was slightly elevated and was about two thirds of a mile from the nearest bayon of the Platte. Thus there was no danger of the place ever being overflowed. A few miles to the south was a range of bluffs. Almost opposite and north east of the fort was the heaviest timber of the Grand Island group. Much of the timber which would be needed in the structures could be obtained from this source. There were several other desirable

17 Address by Mr. A. E. Sheldon
18 Idem.
features about the site also. The Platte bottom nearby was subirrigated by the spring rise of the Platte River and would provide the natural hay which would be necessary for the live stock kept at the post. Lieutenant Woodbury reported that there was a heavy growth of grass still green when he visited the place in September.

The site was also centrally located in respect to the Indian tribes, namely the Pawnees on the one hand and the Sioux and Cheyenne on the other. These tribes were hostile to one another and a military force in the vicinity selected would serve not only to secure peace for the emigrants on the Oregon trail but also between the Indian tribes. This latter reason alone gave the place a high claim to consideration for a military establishment.

Having accomplished the business of selecting the site for the fort, the expedition under Lieutenant Woodbury marched over the Oregon trail to Fort Laramie which was located at the forks of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers. There he purchased for the sum of $4000 the

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19 Idem.
20 Idem.
fortified fur trading post which had been established about fourteen years earlier by the American Fur Company.

Following his return to Table Creek in November 1847 Lieutenant Woodbury made a detailed report giving his reasons for selecting the site for the new fort near Grand Island and of the purchase of the old trading post.

In the early spring of 1848 Colonel Powell relinquished command at Table Creek and with part of the Battalion proceeded to Grand Island. He was followed about a month later by the rest of the officers and soldiers. The troops were set to work at once by Lieutenant Woodbury. Some were employed in molding adobe, others were running saw mills or working as carpenters. A number were occupied in laying the adobe or in building sod stables for the horses. In the latter part of the summer the work was hindered somewhat by heavy rains.

During the latter part of August word was brought to Colonel Powell by two officers, who had been sent to the principal chief of the Pawnee tribes, that the chief had taken the war path against the whites. In the absence of an interpreter the officers had misunderstood

21 Idem.
22 Idem.
23 Photostat copy of the Roster of the Missouri Mounted Volunteers.
24 Address by Dr. A. E. Sheldon
the signs of the chief. He had been trying to tell them that a certain warrior in the tribe had killed his wife because of family quarrels and Si-re-che-riish who was the woman's next of kin was entitled to avenge her death. On receiving the word Colonel Powell sent the battalion to the Indian village only to learn of the mistake. About two months later Captain Ruff in Command of companies I and G of the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen arrived at Fort Kearney to relieve the Volunteer Garrison. He found on his arrival at the fort that Colonel Powell had departed for Fort Leavenworth several weeks before and had taken with him all the books, papers, and orders relative to the fort. He had also ordered or permitted Surgeon Joseph Walker to go with him and thereby left the post without any medical assistance whatever. One First Lieutenant and eighteen Privates had been left at Fort Kearney as a garrison. These men were ordered back to Fort Leavenworth by Captain Ruff. The work at Fort Kearney was carried on as rapidly as possible. By the close of the season three temporary buildings for quarters of the officers and men, and a bakery and stables

26 Capt. G. F. Ruff to Gen'l R. Jones, Adj Gen'l U. S. Army, Nov. 1, 1848
for the horses, had been completed. A large adobe house had also been finished. The work was continued the following year and a number of other buildings and a magazine were erected.

Shortly after his arrival at the post Lieutenant Woodbury gave it the name of Fort Childs in honor of Brigadier General Childs, whose gallant conduct at the Battle of Cerro Gordo, Mexico had brought him into distinction. In December, 1848, by order of the War Department, the name of Kearney was given to the new post in honor of Stephen W. Kearney a Colonel of the United States Dragoons, who had performed distinguished service in the Mexican War.

In the fall of 1849, in accordance with an order from the Secretary of War and the Adjutant General Lieutenant Woodbury established a military reserve around Fort Kearney. The land had originally belonged to the Pawnee Indians but had been ceded to the United States.

27 Senate Executive Documents, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., No. 5, p. 225
28 Idem.
29 Address by A. E. Sheldon
by treaties negotiated in 1833 and 1848. A ten mile square was set aside as a reserve. It extended eight miles east of the military post and two west. The northern border extended a short distance across the Platte River. Lieutenant Woodbury thought a reserve of ten miles square at Fort Kearney sufficiently large for the use of the post. He said, if corn, wheat, and oats could be raised at all on the islands they could be raised on the reserve. He also went on to say that when a territorial government should be formed and the land thrown into the market, it would be a bad policy to reserve the whole of Grand Island from sale. If the land was open to sale he anticipated that settlers would come in and occupy the land. They would raise grain crops and would sell the same at a proper price to the persons at the fort and to emigrants. At the time of writing he said the provisions used at the fort had to be hauled in from the frontier at a high cost to the government. By 1850 no one had been found as yet willing to settle in the neighborhood as a farmer.

During the year 1851 the War Department seriously considered abandoning Fort Kearney because of the lack of military appropriations. This idea was entirely dis-

31 U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. VII, p. 448
33 Address by A. E. Sheldon
pelled, however, due to the Indian trouble which fol-
lowed shortly after.

Captain Ruff continued in command at Fort Kearney until November 28, 1849, when the command was relieved by one company of First Dragoons and two companies of Sixth Infantry under Major Robert Chilton.

Throughout the early period of the fort details of construction were completed from time to time. In 1852 beside the quarters of the officers and soldiers a hospital had been built. Workshops, warehouses, etc. were also erected. Reports for the following year show a garrison of one Company under the Command of Captain Wharton at Fort Kearney. The plans for construction of new buildings and repair of old ones was carried on under the various subsequent commandants of the fort. Many improvements were made under Colonel Charles A. May who was at the post in 1858.

At the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, feeling for the North and South was about equally divided among those stationed at Fort Kearney. A number of the officers whose sympathies were with the South left and joined the Confederate Army. Shortly after war was declared the President issued a proclamation calling for
75,000 troops. These troops were to be made up of state militia and although the territorial legislature of Nebraska had in 1855 authorized a state militia, and ther providing for two regiments, and had appointed the officers, there was as yet no organized militia and therefore there was no response made to the first call.

There was one other fort in Nebraska beside Kearney when the war broke out. Fort Randall, situated just across the present boundary of Northeast Nebraska in what is now South Dakota, had a garrison of five hundred soldiers of the Regular Army in 1858. Fort Kearney had several companies of Regulars. In response to an order from the War Department Colonel Miles with Companies E and F of his regiment arrived in Omaha from Fort Kearney on April 23, 1861 enroute for Fort Leavenworth.

The people living in Nebraska Territory were greatly dismayed when the troops were withdrawn from the forts. The Nebraska City News, whose policy opposed that of the administration, was outspoken in its denunciation of the order. The paper urged the people in Nebraska to protest and do everything in their power to have Forts Kearney and Randall reinforced as soon as possible.

41. Messages and Papers of President, Vol. VI, p. 13
45. Nebraska City News, May 4, 1861
Not long after the news reached the people that the troops had been withdrawn from the forts, a rumor spread that regiment was to be raised in Nebraska. It was not known definitely the purpose of which these troops had been raised and the people in the Nebraska Territory hoped it would be for their protection. Major General Thayer wrote to the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, tendering a sufficient number of troops to garrison Forts Randall and Kearney. He said it was absolutely necessary that some measures should be taken to keep the Indians in check.

In an editorial in the Nebraska Advertiser for October 3, 1861, the suggestion was made that the United States government equip and pay a force of about three hundred men to be stationed at Fort Kearney. A plan was suggested whereby the entire male population of the territory between the ages of sixteen and sixty was to be enrolled. All between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five were to be drilled in squads and companies. They could be drilled in two classes to alternate in service every six months. The editor stated that he feared a panic might seize the people of the territory unless something was done.

During the early sixties a good deal of Indian fighting occurred in Nebraska. Nearly all the military operations were conducted from Fort Kearney, which was the

46 Nebraska City News, May 25, 1861
47 Nebraska Advertiser, August 13, 1861
48 Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series III, Vol. 1, p. 85
48 Nebraska Advertiser, Oct. 3, 1861
main base of supplies west of Omaha and Fort Leavenworth.

The first regiment of Volunteers was ordered to Fort Kearney in 1862. In 1864 the Seventh Iowa Volunteers Cavalry was ordered to the frontier where they performed excellent service protecting the overland stage line.

It was in the same year that the first fortifications were constructed at the fort. In anticipation of trouble from the Sioux, General Livingston ordered earth works to be thrown up. During the years 1864-1866 the fort was garrisoned by two regiments of rebel soldiers. They had taken the oath of allegiance to the United States and were sent west to fight the Indians. They were known at the fort as "Galvanized" rebels or "white washed" Yanks.

Fort Kearney continued to be important as a military post up to about 1865. At that time the Indian troubles shifted farther west, north or south. A small garrison was maintained at the post principally for protection of the traffic over the California and Oregon routes.

In the fall of the following year General Sherman visited the fort. He said he was undecided as to what to say about Fort Kearney. It was not longer of military use as far as danger was concerned but would have to be retained for the sake of its houses and for the protection of wagon travel. At that time General Wessels was in

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49 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to Calif. p. 242
50 E. A. Kirkpatrick, Nebr. City News, April 15, 1928
command at Fort Kearney. He had two companies at the fort and two companies thirty-five miles farther up at Plum Creek, where it seemed there might be some danger from roving bands of Indians. All of these Companies belonged to the Fifth United States Volunteers (rebels) and were to be mustered out sometime during that fall.

The buildings at Fort Kearney, General Sherman reported, were fast rotting down. Two of the largest had already been pulled down by General Wessels.

Fort Kearney, being no longer needed as a military post, was abandoned under the authority of the War Department in the spring of 1871. Company E of the Ninth Infantry, which had been stationed at the post, was transferred to Omaha Barracks. The stores and materials at Fort Kearney which were not required by the troops were transferred to Fort McPherson, Nebraska. Second Lieutenant Edward Hoppy of the Ninth Infantry was left in charge at the post.

53 House Executive Documents, 39th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 23, p. 5
54 Idem.
55 Photostat copy of a report from H. C. Littlefield, Captain Second Artillery.
CHAPTER IV

OVERLAND TRAFFIC AND NEW ROUTES

The lure of new lands in the far west and the discovery of new gold fields caused many emigrants to cross the continent. In his report to the war department in 1845 Colonel S. W. Kearney estimated that eight hundred fifty men, four hundred seventy-five women and one thousand children had passed over the Oregon Trail that season. With the discovery of gold in California an ann added impetus was given to this traffic. The secretary of War in his report for 1849 said that "during the past eighteen months nearly 30,000 people passed Fort Kearney on their way to California, Oregon, and Salt Lake. During the following spring the wagons were counted as they passed the fort. By the first of June 4,000 wagons had been noted. It was estimated that there was an average of four people to a wagon.

1 House Executive Documents, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 2, p. 212
2 Senate Executive Documents, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., No. 5, p. 225
The total passing over that route during the season was thought to be about 35,000 persons. The largest part of the traffic followed the Oregon Trail and passed along the south bank of the Platte River.

There were some persons however who started from points on the Missouri River north of the Platte who continued along its north side. Emigrants who were in need of supplies would cross the river in order to obtain them at Fort Kearney.

A large amount of traffic passed by the fort in early days. All of the emigrant and freighting roads of any importance from the Missouri River to the mountains and the Pacific slope converged at or near Fort Kearney. The freighting trains coming from Omaha, Nebraska City, St. Joseph, Atchison, Leavenworth, or other points would unite at Fort Kearney and continue westward as one train. Fort Kearney became every important station. Several settlements of people grew up around the fort. They made their living in a large part from the great emigrant and freight traffic

3 Senate Executive Documents, 31st Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 1, p. 139
   Ibid. Vol. XVI, p. 254
passing by. The Overland Mail and later the Pony Express made Fort Kearney their chief central station.

Conspicuous among the ox trains passing the fort were those of the firm of Russel, Majors, and Waddell of Leavenworth. This firm had large wagons which would carry from 5,000 to 7,000 pounds of merchandise. When business was good this firm owned and operated 6,250 wagons with a drove of oxen numbering about 75,000 head. They carried on almost exclusively business for the government.

When the Mormon war broke out in the later fifties the firm of Russel, Majors, and Waddell was given a contract to carry a large amount of the supplies for the army in Utah. Mr. Majors desired to have his depot of supplies located at some point closer to Fort Kearney and the west, and with this end in view paid a visit to Nebraska City (formerly Old Fort Kearney) and other places along the Missouri River. Nebraska City was chosen by him as a military post for supplies because there was already at that place

5 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 240-242
6 Ibid., p. 242
7 Ibid., p. 308
a good store house and it also afforded one of the best landsings along the Missouri River. The supplies were transported to Nebraska City by steamboat on the Missouri River and thence overland to Utah to supply the army stationed there.

Nebraska City now became an important depot for supplies. The experience during the Spring of 1858 proved that it had been a wise plan to choose Nebraska City as a starting point for the trains. In that spring Mr. Majors started a train from Nebraska City twenty-six days after one from Fort Leavenworth and on the return it met the Leavenworth train still two days distant from Fort Kearney. The cattle of the Leavenworth train were nearly worn out. Besides being much shorter there were fewer streams to cross on this route. During the following years the Nebraska City, Fort Kearney freighting route became one of the principal highways to the west.

In the spring of 1860 the business men of Nebraska City sent out an exploring party to discover a shorter and better way between Nebraska City and Fort Kearney. The exploring party reported that a road could be laid out running nearly due west from Nebraska City. The discovery of the route was followed by a resolution on

8 James G. Martin, Captain and Quatermaster to Maj. Gen'l. T. S. Jesup, June 26, 1858
10 James G. Martin, Capt. & Quatermaster to Maj. Gen'l. T. S. Jesup, June 26, 1858
the part of the Nebraska City people to undertake the expense of laying out a new road and making it the traveled highway to Fort Kearney. The road was opened up in the spring of 1860. By this route emigrants saved fully fifty-six miles over the old Nebraska City road. It was at least seventy-five miles shorter than any traveled road from any other point on the Missouri River. Fort Kearney is one and a half miles south of Nebraska City.

During the sixties when the Indian troubles along the Platte were increasing many of the overland freighters were forced to abandon their business for the time being. Everything possible was done to furnish protection for the remaining trains. The wagons were bunched at Fort Kearney and sent on from there under guard. Owing to the scarcity of troops it was impossible to patrol both sides of the Platte River. All the emigrants on the north side were forced to cross the stream at Fort Kearney and continue their journey on the south side of the river.

When the railroad was built across the continent the importance of the freighting wagons ceased.

11 Peoples Press, March 30, 1860
12 Abid., March 23, April 24, 1860
13 Nebraska City News, June 16, 1860
14 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 310
CHAPTER V
GLIMPSES OF GARRISON LIFE

The history of Fort Kearney would not be complete without some mention of the garrison life of the soldiers. These glimpses into the life have been gathered from various sources, printed accounts of visitors or people who were at the post, reminiscences of soldiers, etc.

Every company at the post was supposed to have a bugler. At five o'clock the chief bugler blew a call and every company bugler stepped out in front of his quarters. At a signal from the chief bugler the reveille was sounded calling the sleeping garrison to the duties of the day. Every soldier fell into line for roll call. After the roll call the various duties of the day were read. A certain number of men, sergeants and corporals were detailed for guard duty at the fort. Others were appointed to guard duty for the stage to the next station. The usual force sent to guard the stage was from ten to fifteen men. In case of danger from attacks by the Indians a larger number of troops was ordered out. Some of the men were given the task of unloading commissary or quartermaster supplies. Still others were assigned to picket duty, if they had pickets. The sentinels were on duty two hours and off four. These men were required
to load their guns when they went on duty and fire at a target when relieved. The best shots were reported to adjutant's office. It fell to the lot of some of the men to keep the fort clean.

After the duties for the day had been read the buglers blew the breakfast call. At nine o'clock sick call was sounded. Every man who had any real or imaginary illness reported at the hospital. They were given treatment or ordered back on duty as the case might be. It was not unusual for a large number of men to report at sick call in order to escape heavy duty.

The trumpeters would also call the garrison for dress parade. Drills and maneuvers were practiced and orders were read. The commandant would call out, "By Companies right wheel into line, march." The men wheeled slowly around and when aligned the command was given. "Draw sabers, present sabers." This drill would occupy from three to twelve seconds depending upon the rigidity or laxity of the commandant in charge. Under General Livingston who was in command at the fort in 1864 the drill never took more than three seconds.

The routine tasks of the garrison varied somewhat with the seasons of the year. However, all duties had to be performed regardless of weather conditions.

1 Correspondence from A. E. Kirkpatrick
2 Idem.
3 Mr. A. E. Kirkpatrick, Sunday State Journal, April 15, 1928
4 Interview Mr. A. E. Kirkpatrick
As related in an earlier chapter many tasks occupied the garrison during the years when Fort Kearney was being built, molding and burning bricks, running sawmills, working as carpenters, hauling and laying the adobe or unburned bricks in building—all these were some of the tasks of the soldiers at the Fort. To be sent on expeditions after Indians who had committed depredations must have been far more satisfactory to them.

However, routine garrison duty and field campaigns did not occupy all the time for the soldiers at Fort Kearney. Play, too, mingled with the work. When the men were off duty they played cards and checkers or read and wrote letters. Some of the soldiers took this opportunity to wash and patch their clothes.

The routine of garrison life at the post was somewhat broken by the arrival of travelers or of emigrants on their way to Oregon or the Pikes Peak gold fields. Later the telegraph helped relieve the tedium. The daily overland stage also brought diversion into the lives of the men at the fort.

During the earliest years the fort was not an especially attractive spectacle. William Kelley, an Eng-

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5 Address by Mr. A. E. Sheldon
6 Interview Mr. E. A. Kirkpatrick, House Ex. Doc., 34th Cong., 3 Sess., No., p. 107. Correspondence from Mr. O. P. Austin
7 Correspondence from E. A. Kirkpatrick
8 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 242
lish traveler who visited the post in 1849 said, "The
states have stationed a garrison of the emigrants and a
most unsoldierly looking lot they were, unshaven, un-

The appearance of the fort had changed somewhat
for the better by 1863. The government quarters then
included the barracks and a dozen or more buildings. A
few of the buildings at the fort were sod but the houses
occupied by the officers were substantial and quite cozy
frame structures neatly painted.

The buildings inclosed a parade ground which was
not very large. In the center of it stood the flag pole
while around it were trees which had been set out some
years before. On the south side of the parade ground
a room that seemed to have been used as an officers club.
It was evidently the custom of the officers to write their
names on the white surface of the chimney breast. One
of the names inscribed there was that of Lieutenant Robert
E. Lee.

In the year 1864 General Livingston in preparation
for chance attacks from the Indians had earth works thrown

9 William Kelley, An Excursion to California, Vol. 1, p. 99-100
10 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 239
11 E. A. Kirkpatrick, Sunday State Journal, April 15, 1928
12 Eugene Ware, Indian War of 1864, p. 47
13 Ibid., p. 49
up. The remains are still clearly visible. In 1866 further improvements were made following a visit to the fort by General Pope. A steam sawmill was set up and numerous new buildings were erected.

A post office was established at Fort Kearney in the later forties or early fifties, however, for a number of years there was no regular postmaster at the fort. Mr. John Heth filled the position but he had never properly qualified for the same. In 1857 the Post Office Department said some one must properly qualify as postmaster or the office would be closed. Accordingly Colonel Charles A. May, who was in command at the fort recommended Mr. Sydenham. He was appointed and commissioned in 1868 by Honorable Joseph Halt, Postmaster General under President Buchanan. Mr. Sydenham held this office at the post until it was abandoned in 1871.

Various methods of punishment for those who disobeyed orders or violated military regulations were administered by the different commandants at Fort Kearney, confinement in the guard house, extra police duty, and curtailment of privileges were among the most common. Sometimes, however, the discipline assumed a harsher tone. Mr. Kirkpatrick who was a soldier at the fort during the years 1864-1865 relates that on one afternoon when the

14 E. A. Kirkpatrick, Sunday State Journal, April 15, 1923
15 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 243
16 F. A. Root, Overland Stage to California, p. 235
17 Ibid., p. 236
came into the fort he saw five men strung up against the stockade by their thumbs. Necessary discipline they called it. On another occasion he saw a fellow soldier handcuffed. He was shouting and cursing. The officers ordered him to shut up but he refused to do so. The men in charge forced then a stock crosswise in his mouth and fastened it around the back of his head. His mouth was bleeding badly but wasn't making any noise. This too was called necessary discipline. The man receiving this treatment had overheard an officer insult a girl at the fort. As the officer stepped from the store he was knocked down by Polk Bennett. This was a serious offense and spelled trouble for the man. Mr. Bennett was placed in the guard house that night but the doorway was poorly barred and he made his escape. The following morning when the officers learned of this a number of parties of soldiers were sent out to search for him and if he was found to bring him into the fort. The sympathy of the men was for Mr. Bennett and although he was found a few miles from the fort, they brought back the word that he had succeeded in getting away from that part of the country. His name was then entered on the roll as a deserter.

18 A. E. Kirkpatrick, Sunday State Journal, April 15, 1928
19 Interview Mr. E. A. Kirkpatrick
At Fort Kearney as at other frontier posts the presence of saloons near by added to the problems of discipline. A few miles to the west of the fort was a place known as Dobytown. Here about four out of every five buildings on main street were either saloons or gambling dens all seemed to have carried on a prosperous business. Persons who were returning from the mines in the west met old cronies here and drank with them. Sometimes enemies met here and ended their difficulties by a duel. It was not at all uncommon for from one to three men to be shot to death here each week. Mr. Ware in his books says the cemetery was larger than the town.

All the supplies for the fort were drawn up from the river. Beside the food stuff much whiskey was also brought up. On December 24, 1864 some soldiers came to Mr. Kirkpatrick, who was acting as commissionary in the quartermaster's department, while the captain was absent from the post, and told him that some supplies had been brought up from the river. Among these were several barrels of kraut. The men asked if it might be unloaded and permission was granted. The men then had kraut for their Christmas dinner.

20 E. A. Kirkpatrick, Sunday State Journal, April 15, 1928
21 Eugene Ware, Indian Wars of 1864, p. 44
22 E. A. Kirkpatrick, Sunday State Journal, April 15, 1928
23 Eugene Ware, Indian Wars of 1864, p. 44
24 Interview Mr. E. A. Kirkpatrick
Articles for the settlers store were always welcome at the fort. Everything in the way of necessary tools and frontier utensils were kept at the quartermaster's depot. There was also a vast store house of supplies at Fort Kearney. The commissary was allowed to sell provisions to emigrants at cost prices on a requisition of the Post Commander. The Post Commander also had the right to feed the Indians gratuitously. Provisions were also kept at Fort Kearney for the other frontier posts in case of need.

The life of the soldier was very much like that of any other frontier post. The coming and going of troops, menial tasks changing with the season, adventure and hardships on trips to an Indian country, the arrival of recruits, drill, inspection and dress parade. All these filled the life of the soldier at this distant post.

25 Eugene Ware, *Indian Wars of 1864*, pp. 45-47
CHAPTER VI

THE END OF MILITARY RULE

With the departure of the Regulars from Fort Kearney in the spring of 1871 the military rule at the post came to an end. All the stores and supplies at the fort which were not used by the troops were boxed by Lieutenant Edward Hoppy and made ready for shipment by wagon to Fort McPherson, Nebraska.

Many suggestions were put forth as to what use should be made of the fort site. Early in the spring of 1872 Senator P. W. Hitchcock introduced a bill into the Senate granting the Fort Kearney Reservation to the state of Nebraska for the uses and benefits of the Nebraska State deaf and dumb and insane asylums. A little later in the same year, when the question arose concerning the removal of our National Capitol from the present location, much effort was put forth by Mr. Sydenham, the editor of the Central Star at Fort Kearney, Nebraska, to have the National Capitol located on the Fort Kearney reservation. Mr. Sydenham believed many advantages would result from such a change. He said

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1 Photostat copy of report of H. C. Littlefield, Captain Second Artillery, May 22, 1871.
2 Omaha Tribune, March 24, 1872
if the National Capitol was once located at the point
settlement would spring up on the plains and real estate would
become much more valuable. With the increase in
settlement and the building up of towns a centralization
of railroads would also occur. The Union Pacific rail-
road already crossed the continent just a short distance
from the reservation and several roads were planning to
connect with this road at Fort Kearny. According to Mr.
Sydenham the location of the capitol at this point
would also cause an increase in immigration. Ambassa-
dors, business men, and visitors from European and Asia-
tic countries would have an opportunity to see the ex-
tent of our country and would carry back favorable re-
ports of the people and the government. The location
on the Fort Kearney reservation would also be advan-
ageous from a military point of view. In event of a for-
eign war the present capitol would be in great danger
and a large army of men would be required to protect it.
A capitol centrally located could never be molested.

Several other towns, principally St. Louis, Missouri,
Davenport and Council Bluffs, Iowa and Chicago, Illinois
were also anxious to have the capitol located in their
vicinity but as Mr. Sydenham pointed out Fort Kearney
reservation was more nearly centrally located than any
of the other towns. Also the Fort Kearny reservation
was ten miles square, the same size as the District of
Columbia.

3 The Central Star, April 5, 1872
4 Idem.
If given the special agency Mr. E. H. Sydenham was willing to undertake the task of disposing of the lands for the United States government. He thought it would be entirely possible to finance the removal and the construction of a new capitol by this means. Mr. Sydenham suggested that the old capitol might be used as a national university. The various public buildings might be made into museums of science and art. Needless to say, the plan did not meet with the approval of the government and the project was never carried out.

The reservation remained under the control of the United States government for several more years. During the year 1875 the buildings which were for Fort Kearney were torn down and the materials removed to North Platte and Sidney barracks. In December of the following year the reservation was relinquished to the Department of Interior for disposal under an act of Congress of July 21, 1876 which directed that it should be surveyed and offered to "actual settlers only at minimum price under and in accordance with the provisions of the homestead laws." Instructions were sent to the surveyor general to see to the survey of the reservation. When the reservation was opened up Mr. William Dungna, a pioneer and union soldier of the Civil War, filed his soldier's homestead right upon the site of the old fort and sub-

5 Idem.
   Geo. Crock, Sept. 16, 1875
sequently made his proof and obtained a patent from the United States government for the same.

Much interest has been shown within recent years in securing the fort site and making it into a state historical park. Efforts were made from time to time to purchase the piece of ground upon which Fort Kearney had been located but the price asked for the land was out of proportion to the value of other acreage in the vicinity.

Two years ago the Fort Kearney Memorial Association was formed in an effort toward furthering the plan of securing the fort site for a park. Meetings of the Association have been held from time to time to discuss plans whereby the purchase might be effected.

The Fort Kearney Memorial Association was given an opportunity to carry out its plans during the past spring. The farm upon which the fort site is located was placed on sale on May 17, 1928. At that time the entire acreage was purchased by Mr. J. C. Lower of Minden but immediately following the sale he offered to sell forty acres formerly used as the fort to the Association at the cost price to him. The offer was accepted and plans are now under way to finance the proposition.

Members of the American Legion at Minden and Kearney have

8' Interview with Mr. A. E. Sheldon
9 Kearney Hub, May 17, 1928
10 Interview with Mr. A. E. Sheldon
11 Kearney Hub, April 27, 1928
12 Ibid, May 18, 1928
agreed to aid the Association in raising the necessary funds.

It is the purpose of the Fort Kearney Memorial Association to restore in part at least the old fort as it was formerly.

13 Kearney Hub, June 12, 1928
14 Interview with Mr. A. E. Sheldon.
APPENDIX A

Roster of the troops forming the first garrison of Camp Kearney on the Missouri River.

Company A, 1st U. S. Infantry

1st Lieutenant, W. E. Prince.
2nd Lieutenant, E. C. McLean.
Bvt 2nd Lieutenant, A. S. Lincoln

3 officers and 40 men

Remarks on Returns: Left Fort Leavenworth, May 15, 1846 arrived at Camp Kearney, Missouri River May 22, and left for Fort Leavenworth, July 19, 1846.

Company C, 1st U. S. Dragoons

Captain S. D. Morre
1st Lieutenant A. J. Smith

2 officers and 24 men

Remarks on Returns: Left Fort Leavenworth, May 15 arrived at Table Creek, May 21st; left for Fort Leavenworth May 30, 1846.

This command left Fort Leavenworth June 26, 1846 as a part of the column under Colonel S. W. Kearney, enroute to Santa Fe, arrived August 16, 1846; left September 26th as a part of an escort to General Kearney to California and arrived in California December 1, 1846.
APPENDIX B

Roster of the Battalion of Missouri Mounted Volunteers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel L. W. Powell, which left Fort Leavenworth Sept. 5, 1847, to establish the first of the military posts on the Oregon route.

486 officers and men; 454 horses
Captains, D. McCouland, James Craig, Andrew W. Sublette, R. N. Steward, W. N. Rodgers.
1st Lieutenants, T. L. Mars, A. Lefaire, F. M. Impey, H. Smith.
Bvt. 2nd Lieutenants, S. Mockett, Thos. L. Young, W. Mars, J. N. Searcy.
Assistant Surgeon, J. Walker, Medical Officer.
1st Lieutenant Daniel P. Woodbury, Engineer Officer.

First return is dated Fort Kearney, Missouri River, September 30, 1847. Arrived September 15, 1847, at Table Creek, on the Missouri River.

September 23, Lieutenant D. P. Woodbury, Engineer Corporal, with an escort of 5 officers and 76 men left for Grand Island on the Platte River.

October 23rd. Escort returned from Grand Island.
March 12, 1847, Lieut. Colonel Powell relinquished command and left for Grand Island.

April 28th, Detachment 18 officers and 375 men left for Grand Island; arrived June 1st.
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