A history of Fort Yates, 1875-1903

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A HISTORY OF
FORT YATES
1875 - 1903

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Of the old forts established on the Upper Missouri River, Fort Yates was one of the last to be abandoned. Unlike most military establishments in the West, it was not set up initially to protect settlers or travelers but rather to provide security for the Indian agent and safeguard government property. Located in the heart of the Great Sioux Reservation, the garrison at Fort Yates provided the steadying force to restrain the wild and unruly Sioux. There were periods of peace when the personnel of the fort lived a routine and dull life of frontier hardships. There were other periods when the danger of a general uprising or Indian war absorbed the attention of all.

The cause for these periods of tension may be attributed in part to the westward expansion of the frontier. Along with the original cordon of forts established by Secretary of War Calhoun in the 1830's, additional western forts were found necessary as the settlers pushed into this area of the Louisiana Purchase. After the Sioux uprising of 1862 and the resultant Treaty of 1868, the Great Sioux Reservation was defined. Violations of this treaty by expeditions into the Black Hills for gold excited and disturbed the Indians. When the Interior Department requested the assistance of the War Department to place the Indians on the reservation, again open
conflict with the Sioux resulted. One of the most tragic incidents in American military annals followed—the Custer Massacre.

At this time Fort Yates, though it did not take part in the field operations, was a center of military government for the Indians. The military forces in the field, under the direction of General George Crook and Colonel Nelson A. Miles, waged a relentless campaign. More and more Indians, driven by hunger and desperation, returned to the reservation. The process of disarming and dismounting the hostile bands provided more than a little activity for the members of the garrison at Fort Yates headed by Colonel William P. Carlin. Due to the large numbers of hostile Indians, nine companies of infantry were sent to the post, which had formerly housed only two. It was during this period that bitter relations developed between the military commander and the Indian agent.

The administration of the Indian Bureau had been transferred from the War Department to the Interior Department in 1849. ¹ Though over a quarter of a century had elapsed, there was no unanimity of opinion on how to handle the Indian problem, either at the national or local level. Colonel Carlin

was under direct orders to disarm all the hostiles returning to the reservation. Since military forces were operating in the field, it was essential that the active hostiles not be supplied by reservation Indians. The Indian agent regarded the administration by the military as an intrusion into Indian affairs which he considered private matters of his own domain. From the time of Custer's massacre until 1881 Colonel Carlin was involved in disputes with the various agents.

In 1881 Sitting Bull, the last of the hostile leaders to surrender, went to Fort Buford and gave himself up. He and his followers were taken to Fort Randall, where they remained military prisoners for two years (see Figure 1, page 7). Upon his release in 1883, Sitting Bull returned to Fort Yates and established a residence near his birthplace on the Grand River. He remained peaceful until the fall of 1890, when dissatisfaction on the part of the Indians over the peace treaties reached an alarming stage. Neither the provisions of the past treaties nor the promises of the Commission of 1889 were being carried out. The Indians were not receiving the rations or the annuity goods prescribed. Attempts to civilize the Indians and convert them to agrarian pursuits were being hindered by the great Dakota droughts. The plight of the Indians was serious. There was little wonder that the "Ghost Dance" or "Messiah Craze" found ardent followers or disciples among this poverty-striken people.
Sitting Bull, whether to bring comfort to his people or for personal aggrandizement, subscribed to the Messiah Craze and broke the peace he had maintained for nine years. The military authorities and the Indian agent at Fort Yates cooperated to remove this malcontent and prevent him from inciting others. Fort Yates again became the focal point of a possible general Indian uprising or an all-out Sioux war.

Between the periods of active campaigns and open warfare, the people of this frontier post made the most of the few social events and pleasures which the situation afforded. During the winter, life was most confining and was little more than a battle for survival over the elements. The arrival of an occasional traveler or visitor was a most welcome event. Programs for the main holidays, such as Christmas and Fourth of July celebrations, were planned months in advance. The steamboat played a major role in the affairs of the post and the arrival of the first boat in the spring was a joyous occasion. The departure of the last boat in the fall, on the other hand, presaged the winter gloom.

A more vivid picture of life at Fort Yates may be obtained by an examination of the physical facilities. The barracks and the quarters provided were functional, not luxurious; that they accomplished their function satisfactorily was debatable. The water supply left much to be desired, while the drainage and the sewerage systems were of the most
primitive type. The garbage and waste disposal problems were best solved by having the members of the garrison absent from the post. In this way they did not contribute to an almost impossible situation caused by poor or non-existent facilities. The comfort that the barracks provided was nominal. Poor lighting, poor ventilation, and poor heating equipment made for the most unattractive living conditions.

Service on the frontier from 1865 to 1891, during which period there were thirteen different campaigns and at least 1,067 separate engagements with the Indians, was at best a dangerous and arduous assignment. Life at Fort Yates was probably representative of the good and bad features of frontier living. The tensions, the hardships, and the discomforts due to the rigors and extremes of temperature, all prevailed. Yet as Fort Yates grew from a two company to a nine company post, the character of the soldier developed apace. Through a detailed study of such a military outpost, the accomplishments as well as the failures of the Army on a frontier post during the development of the West may be better measured and understood.

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CHAPTER II

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FORT YATES

The military post of Fort Yates\(^1\) was located on the Missouri River, 60 miles south of the present city of Bismarck, North Dakota, at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation (see Figure 1, page 7). There was never a military reservation, but in 1874, as a result of an Indian disturbance, the agent requested military protection. In December the first military contingent, Company A, 6th Infantry, arrived at the post.\(^2\) At first this was a temporary duty assignment, but the following May further orders were issued assigning the unit to permanent duty at the "Military Station at Standing Rock". The official date of establishment was recorded as June 6, 1875.\(^3\) Already, in April, the Secretary of War had authorized the sum of $11,700 for the construction of log quarters for two companies.\(^4\) It was not, however,

\(^1\)Ray H. Mattison "Report on Historic Sites", South Dakota Historical Collections, XXVII, 1954, p. 127. The present town of Fort Yates is the county seat of Sioux County, North Dakota. The town has spread out over the site of the old buildings of the military fort.


\(^3\)Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Divisions of the Missouri (Chicago: Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, 1876), p. 31.

\(^4\)Report of the Secretary of War 1875, p. 195.
until December 30, 1878, pursuant to General Order 9, series 1878, Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, that the post was designated Fort Yates, named in honor of George W. Yates, 7th Cavalry, who was killed in the Battle of the Little Big Horn, June 25, 1876.®

After the Custer massacre the post was expanded to a nine company post and a corresponding increase in barracks space was necessary® (see Figure 2, page 9). The additional construction was of a temporary nature—the walls were of rough cottonwood logs chinked with mud; the roofs were primarily dirt and the floors were green cottonwood planks; the doors and windows were hurriedly placed and were fitted only for convenience and not design.7

As indicated in Figure 2 there was a total of eleven sets of officers' quarters, seven sets (original barracks of the two company post were occupied by four companies) of barracks for enlisted men, a bakery, a hospital, a library, a guard house, a quartermaster storehouse, and a commissary


®Report of the Secretary of War 1877, p. 533.

storehouse. Other miscellaneous buildings included work shops, a blacksmith shop, mess rooms, a saw mill, an ice house, the Post Trader's building and housing for the interpreter and Indian scouts. There were also sets of quarters for the laundresses. An over-all total of 46 buildings of all kinds, including sheds and temporary structures, constituted the post of the Military Station at Standing Rock in 1876.

The growth of the post and some of the changes made were revealed in a report submitted in 1882. By that time there were fifteen sets of officers' quarters, an increase of four. The infantry now had four sets of barracks while two more sets were occupied by the cavalry which had been assigned in 1878 to replace two of the infantry companies. The troop list at this time consisted of the Headquarters, the Band, four companies of the 17th Infantry, and one troop of the 7th Cavalry. The Quartermaster and the Commissary now had two warehouses each, while the Ordnance had likewise added a storehouse. This made an over-all total, exclusive of sheds and other temporary structures, of forty-four permanent buildings. By 1893, this number had been increased to a total of

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LEGEND

FIGURE 3
GROUND PLAN,
FORT YATES
1894
sixty-five assorted buildings (see Figure 3, page 11).

There were now nineteen sets of Officers' quarters, an increase of four since the last report. Quarters Number 1 and 2, both reserved for field grade officers, provided more facilities than the others. Each had been altered by adding a room 36 by 15 feet; although the other sets were single story, these two had attics which were divided into four rooms.

Likewise the only private bathtubs on the post were found in Quarters Number 1 and 2. All quarters were constructed of cottonwood logs and had shingle roofs.9

The number of troop barracks had not changed since 1882. There were still four sets of barracks for the infantry—Numbers 21, 23, 24, and 26. The cavalry barracks were Numbers 34 and 36. The infantry barracks built in 1877 were not in good condition and the cavalry barracks built three years later were but little better.10

One of the problems constantly associated with the barracks, guardhouse, and hospital was the matter of ventilation. In the winter in order to keep warm the outside bottom edges of the walls were covered with dirt. A standard ventilation device of the time was the use of floor registers connected to a central shaft capped by a cupola

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9Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1893, pp. 42, 43.
10Ibid., pp. 45-47.
in the roof. Another solution was to place registers in the chimneys and in the ceiling. The heating equipment dictated limited ventilation. On one occasion as an emergency measure, one-half of the available barracks was closed and companies consolidated to conserve fuel. The consumption had been so rapid that companies were detailed to cut wood, a service usually provided by contract. The overcrowding and the attendant lack of sufficient fresh air resulted in complaints of headaches and sleepless nights on the part of the troops of the command.  

The assistant surgeon, A. R. Chapin, described the dilapidated barracks in 1883 as follows:

I am unable to see any reason why soldiers should be required to suffer the hardships arising from poor housing in addition to that incident upon serving at an isolated station in the coldest and most disagreeable climate this country affords.

I recommend that these barracks be made habitable for human beings before next winter, or that the troops occupying them be withdrawn from this station and sent to one where they can be made more comfortable.

The post commander added his endorsement to this recommendation.

11 Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1878, p. 18; June 1878, p. 23; December 1882, p. 149; February 1884, p. 201.

12 Medical History of Fort Yates, January 1893, p. 28.

13 Ibid., p. 29.
In 1882 at a cost of $10,000, a twenty-four bed hospital, a hospital laundry, and a dead house (morgue) had been constructed on the post. The hospital, a frame building with a shingle roof, was heated by stove and furnace; one ward, however, was without any heat so it was not used during the winter months. The administration building facing north was situated in the center, one ward on each side, with a dining room and kitchen projected from the rear. This building was a two story structure with a dispensary, surgeon's office, bathroom, and steward's office on the first floor and store-rooms and two bedrooms on the second. The wards were 44 by 45 feet. There were cellars under the kitchen and east ward, both of which were dry. The hospital bathroom had a drainage pipe for waste water which extended some distance in the ground and came out farther down the slope of the hill upon which the hospital was situated. There was a urinal in the privy pit which carried the urine about six feet below the surface into the subsoil.

The guardhouse at Fort Yates, a building which was a frontier necessity, was built in 1877 of frame construction, 57 by 37 feet. It was a one story structure divided into one squad room, a non-commissioned officer's room, two confinement rooms, and a number of cells. There was no provision for ventilation or drainage.

Among the miscellaneous buildings on the post were a
post magazine, (building No. 32,) which had previously been an old two story blockhouse, and the pump house, (building No. 43,) constructed in 1889, a frame, one story building divided into a boiler room, storeroom, pump room, and workshop.

There was a barracks constructed in 1891 for an Indian Company, built of logs with a shingle roof, a one story building (100 by 20 feet), divided into seven rooms. Heat was supplied by stoves, but there was neither drainage nor ventilation.14

During this period there was no post gymnasium, though post surgeons and the post quartermaster had repeatedly made requests for such a facility. Due to the cold climate of the post, there was an urgent need for a sheltered place to conduct physical exercise during the winter. As a second best solution, baseball or kicking a football were engaged in, weather permitting.15

Quartermaster and commissary storehouses were provided for the storage of supplies. The regular issue ration was supplemented by produce from post gardens. All units had cows. Commissaries were bought from company funds. Occasionally fish were taken from the river by seining.

14 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
15 Ibid., p. 51.
Another feature of frontier living was the inconvenience of the bathing facilities. There was a common bathhouse containing eleven bath tubs. Since this bathhouse was located some distance from the quarters, men were deterred from frequent baths, especially in winter. There were only two sets of quarters which had tubs, so it would appear that the other officers' and enlisted men's quarters had no facilities for bathing. The only regulation pertinent to bathing, however, was the requirement that enlisted men bathe once a week.

The troops of this day wore the ordinary type clothing which was an item of issue. The overcoat was not warm enough for the climate; had it been blanket lined, that would have been an improvement. The undergarments were issued for both winter and summer wear. The drawers after three or four washings lost the fuzzy cotton lining and were too thin for winter wear. The undershirt was of such coarse material that many could not wear it, because of skin irritations. The dress helmet was heavy, stiff, and uncomfortable and did not afford much shade to the wearer. The dress coat was worn so tightly that movement was restricted. The forage cap was also stiff and heavy, affording the least possible protection from the elements.

The only contagious disease in the command had been diphtheria. Isolation of affected families and in some cases
quarantine and closing of the post school had been preventive measures taken. A house which had contained the disease was fumigated with sulphur, the clothing was immersed in a solution of bichloride, and mattresses and pillows were destroyed by burning. The drills, target practice, and fatigue duty aided in the betterment of the health of the command.16

One of the problems of the frontier post to which the health of the command was directly related was that of sanitation. At Fort Yates it is reported that there was no surface drainage or no system of sewerage. The subsoil water was at least thirty or forty feet below the surface. There were no wells on the post tapping the subsoil water which lay upon the clay stratum. There was no surface drainage, since the sandy nature of the soil allowed the water to be absorbed. The solid excreta was deposited in boxes of dry dirt and carried off daily by the post scavenger. It was dumped about three-quarters of a mile to the west of the post, past the post garden. There were urinal pipes which were driven directly into the topsoil at each of the barracks, the headquarters, and the guardhouse. These would freeze in winter and much of the urine was received in the earth closets and leaked on the ground beneath. There were four privy pits at the post: two at the barracks of the Indian troops, one

16 Ibid., pp. 49-51.
at the quartermaster corral, and one at a married soldier's quarters. The prevalence of diphtheria was believed to be due, at least in part, to the primitive methods of sewerage disposal. In 1892 the post commander, Lieutenant Colonel William F. Drum, 12th Infantry, indicated the official policy when he stated that if the post were to be maintained for ten years or longer, the recommendation for a system of sewerage would be entertained.

Solid wastes other than human, such as garbage, refuse, slops, and ashes, were removed by the prisoners and police parties daily in dump carts provided for the purpose. This refuse was deposited about 900 yards southeast of the post on the bank of the Missouri River.

In winter the disposal of waste water was novel. Surface pools were built by constructing walls of dirt. The waste and the slop from the kitchens were poured in and, when the contents were frozen, police details chopped it out and hauled it away. Considerable filth remained and the ground was polluted in all directions, especially during warmer weather when the ponds frequently overflowed.

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17 Ibid., p. 42.
19 Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1893, p. 43.
Because of these conditions and the lack of sanitation, the post surgeon commented: "This post has been a healthy one to the present time, but unless radical changes are made in the buildings, water supply and drainage, it will not be so in the future."21

The water supply at Fort Yates was another example of the constant struggle of man over the forces of his environment. In the summer the water supply could be obtained from drive wells located in the bottom lands near the Missouri River. The pipes were driven down about fifty feet and penetrated the stratum of clay. An engine pumped the water into wooden tanks from which it was then distributed to the post through iron pipes. This system produced a sufficient amount for daily use but not enough for an emergency. Since the water table was considerably below the river or river bottom, capped by a layer of clay, there was no pollution of the water by sewerage or other organic matter despite the fact that there was no filter or purification system. The mineral content of the water was high and there was a definite alkaline taste, though this was not noticeable in the ice taken from the river in the winter.22 This system required frequent replacement of

21 Medical History of Fort Yates, January 5, 1892, p. 351.
22 Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1893, p. 41.
parts for the pump, the engine, and the wells themselves. In 1889, when a new system was provided to replace the old worn-out one, it was found that the rust from the iron pipes and the pitch from the pine storage tank gave the water a disagreeable odor.23

The alternative to the system of drive wells was the completely primitive system of hauling water from the river. In 1878 it was reported there was only one water wagon available and, since it was impossible to provide enough water with one wagon, the supply was consumed immediately upon arrival. As the water was not even allowed time to settle, it was still muddy when used.24 In 1892 when this method of securing water was recommended, the post commander was most reluctant to sanction this solution, since it was felt that duty on the water wagon was the most arduous that could be imposed upon the soldiers in the winter climate. Therefore, the water system in winter was a compromise. When the pipes were not frozen, the drive wells were used. The rest of the time water was carried by hand from the drive wells or hauled from the river.25

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24Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1878, p. 18.
From the establishment of Fort Yates in 1875 until its abandonment in 1903 the command struggled with the spartan conditions of the frontier. Colonel Carlin had stated when the buildings were constructed in 1876 that they should last for at least five or six years.26 Many of them were in use, or at least parts of the original buildings were in use, the day of the abandonment, more than a quarter of a century later. From these humble and primitive surroundings the men of the frontier rode out to battle or to administer the Indians.

26 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter from Colonel Carlin to the Assistant Adjutant General, December 1, 1876, p. 250.
CHAPTER III
THE INDIANS RETURN TO THE RESERVATION

The original request for troops at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation was for the protection of the Indian agent and the government property under his control. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1874 estimated that there were 7,000 hostile Indians. During the year 4,000 of these came into Standing Rock and other agencies, reducing the number of hostiles to 3,000. The Commissioner in November 1875 stated that it would probably be necessary to compel the northern non-treaty Sioux, under the leadership of Sitting Bull, to stop their nomadic life, recognize the authority of the government, and settle down on the reservation. The Indians present in 1875 at the Standing Rock agency numbered as follows:

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<tr>
<td>Yanctonials</td>
<td>4,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncapapas</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackfeet</td>
<td>1,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,322</strong></td>
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2 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1875, p. 5.

Though the military reservation was activated June 6, 1875, little activity for the troops was reported in that year. The report, however, submitted by Agent John Burke for the same period recounted in detail the relations between the military commander, Captain John S. Poland, and himself. Burke stated:

I regret exceedingly to have to report that, instead of rendering me such support as by law and regulations I was entitled to receive, every pretext and quibble possible was resorted to in order to evade complying with my request, which, by so doing, greatly embarrassed me, and virtually rendered my orders and authority, and that of the Department I have the honor to represent, in many instances, nugatory and void upon the reservation.4

Further charges against Captain Poland were to the effect that when unauthorized persons were found trading on the reservation and the agent requested help to prevent this occurrence, the military commander refused. In another instance, Captain Poland had sent his forces to prevent hay cutting and had confiscated the hay and the wagons of duly authorized employees of the Indian agent. On still another occasion, after apprehending a man who had introduced whiskey illegally, the military had allowed the person to escape.

Agent Burke concluded his remarks by stating that he believed the presence of a military force necessary because of so many hostile Indians on the reservation, but officers

4Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1875, p. 248.
of judgment and experience should have command of the troops. Captain Poland and his interpreter Allison, a man considered unfit and unsafe by Burke, were carrying on unwarrantable, prejudicial intercourse with the agency Indians.  

Relations between the Indian agent and the military commander at the local level were but a reflection of the policy at the national level. The administration of the Indians was a civil problem as viewed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Military control of the Indians was needed for only the few tribes of the Sioux and Cheyenne.  

The military view, as expressed by such high commanders as General John Pope and General John Schofield, charged the Indian Bureau with not only corruption and inefficiency, but dishonesty and breach of faith as well. General Schofield indicated the frustration the army felt in these matters as follows:  

The officers are compelled to sit idly powerless for good while promises made to Indians are violated. Even common honesty is disregarded in the daily treatment of the helpless savage. When he rebels and leaves the intolerable conditions at the reservation the army must pursue him and punish him for his disobedience. Thus a

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5 Ibid., pp. 244-248.

6 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1875, p. 18.
war is inaugurated which could not have happened if the Indians had been under military control.\textsuperscript{7}

Matters of Indian administration reached a crisis when the Interior Department requested the assistance of the War Department in returning the Indians to the reservations. The Indians were notified by runners to come to the reservations on or before January 31, 1876. The Secretary of War was notified on that date that the time had expired and that he could take such action as he considered appropriate. The enforcement of this order to return to the reservation led to the Indian War of 1876. Though Standing Rock personnel were not directly implicated, the disaster at Little Big Horn, June 25, 1876, affected the lives of all the people on the frontier.\textsuperscript{8}

In his official reports of this campaign, Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan was particularly acrimonious. He had recommended many times the establishment of forts in the Yellowstone country at the mouths of the Tongue and Bighorn Rivers to serve as supply bases and prevent the Indians from assembling a large mass of troops.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{7}Report of the Secretary of War 1875, pp. 21, 33, 76, 122.

\textsuperscript{8}Report of the Secretary of War 1876, p. 28; Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1875, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{9}Report of the Secretary of War 1876, pp. 439-448.
however, as early as 1864 had stated that it was not probable that as many as five hundred warriors could ever be assembled as a fighting force in one place again. Sheridan also insisted that the hostiles were all receiving supplies of food and weapons from the agency Indians. He had requested on May 29, 1876, that the agencies be put under the control of the military. "On July 18," he wrote, "I renewed this request and on the 22nd The Honorable Secretary of the Interior authorized the military to assume control of all agencies in the Sioux country, but it was too late."

He continued:

If the posts had been established on the Yellowstone according to my recommendations there would have been no war. If the Indian Bureau had turned over the control of the agencies before the troops took to the field the war would not have assumed the magnitude it did. But it seems to have required some disaster like that which happened to Custer before good judgment or common sense could be exercised on this subject.

By this time the tension at Standing Rock, or Fort Yates as it was later named, had assumed monstrous proportions. Captain John S. Poland, who had been feuding continually with Agent Burke, now reported to the Department

10 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1874, p. 4.
12 Ibid., p. 447.
Commander that Burke was a notorious liar and added that, although in February 1876 he had called to the attention of the higher authorities the utter falsehoods perpetrated by Burke, nothing had been done. The chief point at issue seemed to have been the count of Indians at the reservations. Burke had reported over 7,000 while Poland maintained there were no more than 1,500.13

The estimate for the number of Indians present was based on the lodge count. The army, in contrast to the agent’s estimate of seven to a lodge, used the figure five. Poland had counted all the lodges in the immediate vicinity and could not find over 300, and thus concluded there were no more than 1,500 Indians on the reservations.14

The matter of the lodge counts continued to be one of concern. Poland submitted a supplementary report to the Chief Commissary Department, St. Paul, Minnesota, stating that the number of Indians could not have exceeded 4,200, an estimate based on an actual count of 300 lodges. Even by estimating seven to a lodge and assuming the accuracy of the Indian statement that only half their number were


14 Ibid.
present, the total count would not be 7,322 but 4,200. By using this latter figure, a reduction of over 40 per cent of the number of rations to be supplied could thus be effected.\textsuperscript{15}

In a telegram, August 4, 1876, Poland stated that he, not the agent, must control the issue of beef to the Indians. The business of the hostiles being supplied by the agency Indians would prevent forever the surrender of all the former hostiles, and Captain Poland wished to be able to withhold rations in order to induce compliance with the directives to disarm. Poland concluded by requesting that either he or the agent be relieved.\textsuperscript{16}

Perhaps in answer to Poland's request, Lieutenant Colonel William F. Carlin arrived at the "Military Station at Standing Rock" on August 16, 1876.\textsuperscript{17} The truth of the matter was that the Custer tragedy resulted in relentless war upon the Indians, who, driven from their hunting grounds, deprived of food, their ammunition supply depleted, began to

\textsuperscript{15}Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Commissary Department, August 5, 1876.

\textsuperscript{16}Post Records, Fort Yates, Captain Poland to Assistant Adjutant General, August 4, 1876.

\textsuperscript{17}Post Records, Fort Yates, Entry for August 16, 1876; Annual Report of Colonel Carlin, 1876.
return to the reservation. The arrival of Carlin brought about an increase in the troops of the garrison from two companies to nine. Meanwhile, the lodge count of the Indians remained the critical issue between the military and the Indian agent.

Colonel Carlin dispatched a telegram to Major Ruggles, Assistant Adjutant General, Department of the Dakota, on August 26, 1876. Another accurate count of the lodges had been taken. This time there were 230 plus 15 additional ones belonging to visitors. At five persons per lodge the estimate of 1,500 persons would be liberal indeed; no more than 1,500 rations were needed for issue. It was reported, however, that Agent Burke had issued 4,500, just three times the number present.18

In a letter dated September 12, 1876, Carlin reported that the number of Indians at the agency had increased from 2,000 to 4,000. This figure had been determined as a result of a careful count made by Captain Edward Collins and Lieutenant Roach. Since the returnees put up lodges beside the ones of the Indians who had remained on the reservation, it was difficult to determine who may have been the hostiles. Plans were then being made to visit the Blackfeet and

18 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, August 26, 1876.
Uncapa camps and arrest all that could not satisfactorily account for their prior absences. The agent was instructed to issue rations for only 3,000. Further instructions were given not to issue to Kill Eagle's people who were on the reservation, since they had harbored hostiles and sent supplies to Kill Eagle.19

The matter of Kill Eagle and his band at least indirectly caused the relief of Agent Burke. Captain Poland previously reported that on August 4 Burke had promised Kill Eagle that if the Chief reported to him, Burke would see to it that the Chief would not be punished for his part in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.20 On August 22 Kill Eagle was reported to be in a camp of 50 lodges about 60 miles from Standing Rock. Additional information indicated that Kill Eagle had been at this camp for some time since he or his relatives had drawn rations from the agency on August 2.21 Colonel Carlin had been informed on September 2 that Kill Eagle had come in to surrender, but Burke had issued food and sent him back to camp. Kill Eagle was to

19 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, September 12, 1876.

20 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Agent Burke, August 4, 1876.

21 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, August 22, 1876.
have surrendered to Carlin.\textsuperscript{22}

Under the authority previously granted by the Secretary of the Interior, Colonel Carlin relieved Agent Burke. Carlin commented as follows:

I deemed it my duty to regard him as an aider and abettor of the enemy of the government and to suspend him from the functions of his office and arrest him, [in] order that he should no longer possess power to thwart the plans and orders of the government.\textsuperscript{23}

The attempt to bring in Kill Eagle was a matter of great importance to Colonel Carlin. He sent his interpreter Allison to Kill Eagle's camp, but the Indians said that Allison must obtain permission from the Chiefs of the Blackfeet and Uncapapas for such a visit. When Allison went to the Blackfeet camp, he was interrogated by Chief John Grass, who was most defiant and haughty; Colonel Carlin determined that when the three companies of the 11th Infantry arrived, he would pay a visit to those Indian camps and impress them with the supremacy of the government. Carlin, of course, blamed Burke for all these troubles, as he maintained Burke had been too easy.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, September 2, 1876.
\item Ibid.
\item Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, September 5, 1876.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Captain R. E. Johnston, 1st United States Infantry, was installed as acting agent in place of Burke. Carlin instructed the acting agent on September 10 to arrest Chief John Grass. The charges against Grass were many: he had persistently urged the hostiles not to surrender; he had encouraged hostility by the Indians; he had caused sentinels to be posted around camp to observe the movements of troops; he had caused the arrest of the post interpreter; and he had permitted large quantities of beef and other supplies to be taken to the camp of Kill Eagle and other hostiles. If Chief Grass were captured, he was to be kept under guard at the agency until further notice. Grass was arrested on September 10 and a board was appointed to investigate the charges against him. After being in arrest for two days, Grass asked permission to go to visit Kill Eagle and to encourage him to surrender. Accordingly on September 15, Kill Eagle and others who had taken part in the Battle of the Little Big Horn surrendered their arms, their ponies and themselves.25

Also at this time Carlin announced, in order to prevent misunderstanding, he as the commanding officer would publish all directives and instructions to the hostiles.26


26 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Captain Johnston, September 15, 1876.
Two days later Carlin advised Johnston to warn all people living outside the reservation not to buy any watches or jewelry from the Indians. If Johnston were able to recover any of these items which had belonged to Custer's troops, he was to make a complete report and then advertise in the newspapers in order to locate the rightful heirs.

In a letter on the 19th to Captain Johnston, Carlin instructed him to make no more issues of subsistence stores. The reason given was that there were too many Indians who had been among the hostiles and were now being sheltered by the agency Indians. The effective date or duration of the order was until the surrender was complete.

The property turned in by Kill Eagle consisted of old rifles of British manufacture. There was only one new Henry rifle. The only items of real importance to the Indians were their ponies or their arms. It was planned to sell these at public auction, and the proceeds would be used to buy domestic supplies such as cows, sheep, and oxen. Colonel Carlin recommended that the return of the ponies or

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27. Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Captain Johnston, September 17, 1876.

the arms be in no wise considered.29

Carlin sent a letter to Major Ruggles on October 8 in which he reported another count of the Indians at the agency. Running Antelope, one of the chiefs of the Uncapaquepas, admitted frankly that the chiefs for the last seven years had been lying about the count. "Some agents," another chief reported, "want a great many Indians on their rolls, while others don't want many. They are very hard to please."30 As a result of this latter testimony, Carlin withdrew his report compiled by Captain Edward Collins on September 10.

Captain Johnston's report showed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,344</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of this total, 144 were prisoners who had returned from the hostile's camp on September 15.31

Based on this count of Indians present, Colonel

29 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, September 20, 1876.

30 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, October 8, 1876.

31 Ibid.
Carlin charged Agent Burke with fraudulent issue in the amount of $200,000 per year. In rations alone he had issued for 7,322 persons, an over-issue of 5,122 rations. The over-issue for a single day was thus calculated at $399.51. For one year the fraudulent issue totaled $145,821.15. Issue of blankets, clothing, bacon, coffee, sugar, and soap, on the basis of these false figures, would bring the combined total to $200,000.32

The exact count of Indians transferred to the new civil agent on December 29, 1876, was 2,397 persons.33

The disarming of the hostiles, such as Kill Eagle's band, included the surrendering of the persons themselves and their ponies. Both General Sherman34 and General Terry35 had mentioned in their annual reports the dismounting of the Indians. From the time of the surrender of Kill Eagle's band on September 15, 1876, until November 15, 1876, the command was busy in the pony business. In fact, Colonel Carlin's annual report dated September 27, 1877, listed the

32 Ibid.
33 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, December 29, 1876.
34 Report of the Secretary of War 1876, p. 37.
35 Ibid., p. 469.
following actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>No. of head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 31, 1870</td>
<td>sent to Fort Lincoln by Major Reno</td>
<td>1,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 11, 1870</td>
<td>sent to Fort Lincoln by Lieutenat Roach</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 6, 1877</td>
<td>sent to Saint Paul by Lieutenat Kissingbury</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 19, 1877</td>
<td>sold at post</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 16, 1877</td>
<td>sold at post</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21, 22, and 25, 1877</td>
<td>sold at auction at Bismarck</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred to the Indian Department</td>
<td></td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred to the Quartermaster Department</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half breeds and Indians as compensation, for hunting purposes</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used in mounted detachment</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died at various dates</td>
<td></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On hand to be disposed of</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total amount received for ponies sold at Standing Rock and Bismarck, $2,953.06, which was forwarded to Lieut. E. J. Gibbs, Saint Paul, Minnesota.36

Many Indians succeeded in concealing their arms and running away their horses, but these were later captured.37

During the drive of these ponies to Fort Lincoln, many were lost and had to be policed by other parties. In a letter to Ruggles, November 11, Carlin reported that he had heard of many horses being abandoned by Colonel Sturgis on his forced march to Fort Lincoln. Colonel Carlin recommended that detachments at Fort Sully and Fort Rice gather

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37 Ibid.
up these ponies:

It would be very injudicious to leave so many American Cavalry horses in the possession of the Indians while we are in the act of taking the horses belonging to the Indians.38

To help him in this round-up, Colonel Carlin had formed a mounted detachment, since at this time there were no cavalry assigned to the fort. The leader of this detachment was Lieutenant F. F. Kislingbury, 11th Infantry. On November 21 he proceeded to Oak Creek and Grand River and secured 19 ponies; six days later, proceeding toward the Cheyenne agency and Hermaphrodite Creek, he returned with 43 additional ponies. On December 2 he set forth once again to Stone Fort on the Grand River, thence to Elkhorn Butte, thence by Indian trail to Owl Creek, in search of Indian ponies. He returned December 7, having gathered 87 horses and mules. Lieutenant Kislingbury continued these operations, making repeated sorties into the field. Lieutenant George L. Rousseau, 20th Infantry, and Lieutenant Kilpatrick, 17th Infantry, also took part in these operations. On July 24, Lieutenant Kislingbury traveled to Saint Paul to bring back 195 cows intended for the Indians

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38 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, November 11, 1876.
On November 15 Carlin published new instructions to Captain Johnston, acting Indian agent. There were to be no more issues made to the hostiles. The Indians who had been with the hostiles the preceding summer were to be denied annuity goods. Those who had fled on or about October 22, taking their guns and their ponies with them would receive no goods. The only inducement to be offered those who might come in was food—they would be fed. The former practice of granting or returning one pony in four was denied; hostiles were to be promised nothing and receive nothing after November 15.

One of the facts learned at the agency justified the policy of disarming and dismounting the Indians. It was reported that soon after the fight with Custer a levy was made on all agency Indians for arms and ammunition. Sixty guns were collected at Standing Rock; this accounted in part for the scarcity and poor quality of the remaining guns at the agency. Carlin reported on November 12 that they had collected all the arms and ponies belonging to the agency.

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40 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Captain Johnston, November 15, 1876.
As to the hostiles, he hoped to have their weapons turned in by Christmas. By this time Colonel Wilson A. Miles and Lieutenant Colonel Elmer S. Otis were in the field pursuing the hostiles. Carlin had sent out two Indians of character to go to the hostile camp and inform them of the terms for surrender. These messengers had taken Sitting Bull to Colonels Miles and Otis. Many apparently intended to surrender, for they were short of food and ammunition. The messengers also brought in three watches and $12 in currency. One watch was identified as having belonged to Lieutenant R. K. Hodgson, 7th Cavalry.

The disarming of the Indians and the administration of the post and the agency had progressed so satisfactorily that Carlin felt disposed to offer a few recommendations on the management of Indians:

1. No guns or horses should be issued to the Indians until they had become domesticated and given up

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41 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, November 12, 1876.

42 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, November 6, 1876.

43 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, November 18, 1876.
their nomadic pursuits.

2. There should be no more temporary shelters, but log cabins should be provided. The approximate cost would be $50, provided the Indians supply the labor.

3. Two cows, two sheep, and two pigs should be furnished each family.

4. Subsistence and clothing and any other annuity goods should be given in proportion to the labor performed.

5. The Indians should be required to put up hay for their animals and should be furnished the necessary tools for the cutting.

6. The separate bands of the tribes should be located in villages. Ten acres of good land should be set aside for each family for gardens.

7. There must be a system of law established wherein the crime of one Indian against another would be recognized.

8. Indians should be granted reservations along the Missouri River; this was good grazing land.

Colonel Carlin also made a few predictions: one, that when the disarming was completed there would be no need for military posts except Fort Lincoln and Fort Buford. He also predicted that in the years to come the Indian would be as
happy occupied in the pursuit of grazing cattle as he had previously been roaming the hunting grounds. Carlin not only sent a copy of this report to the Department of the Dakota, but also to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. 44

The new Indian agent, W. T. Hughes, arrived on November 27, 1876, and relieved Captain Johnston on December 1. Hughes, in writing to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1877, stated that the post had cheerfully afforded assistance when required and had in no way interfered with the proper discharge of his duties. The most friendly relations existed between the officers of the garrison and himself. He even went so far as to say that Colonel Carlin had been particularly courteous to him. 45 Carlin returned this compliment by stating that the new agent appeared honorable and capable, and that he would give him his full support. 46

Two minor incidents were reported the following June. Agency mules which had been roaming the parade ground were removed to the post corral. Carlin apparently intended no insult in this connection as post standing orders required

44 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 19, 1876.

45 Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1877, pp. 71-75.

46 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, November 27, 1876.
the parade ground to be free of all animals. Second, the agent had requested that the Indians who had taken up residence on the east bank of the Missouri River off the reservation should be required to return. Colonel Carlin promised to help when his mounted detachment returned to the post. It is clear, though, that Carlin felt the Indians would return readily enough if instructed to do so and force would not be needed.

In an exchange of letters on July 7, 1877, Hughes complained that his mules had been locked up, and still more importantly, he was required to pay cash for his purchases at the subsistence store and the commissary. Colonel Carlin replied that it was customary for all the officers to pay in cash at those stores. He suggested that they should be able to work out any area of misunderstanding by mutual agreement. Carlin closed by stating that he would like to maintain harmonious relations with the agent, but he felt compelled to request cash payment.

Relations were becoming strained as evidenced by a

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47 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Agent Hughes, June 13, 1877.

48 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Ad- jutant General, June 29, 1877.

49 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Agent Hughes, July 7, 1877.
letter of August 15, 1877. Carlin reported to the Department that the agent had requested from the Secretary of the Interior full and exclusive authority for regulating wood contracts at this reservation. "There is no good reason whatever," Carlin wrote, "for granting this sole and exclusive authority to the Indian agent, and many good reasons why it should be withheld." He feared that his troops might be short of fuel in an emergency and he would not be able to rectify the deficit if all contracts were under one person.

On September 2, 1877, the Indians called on Colonel Carlin and presented their grievances. Seven specific complaints were registered, the principal one being that they were treated crossly and uncivilly by the agent. Rations were issued in an unjust and careless manner; the flour was spoiled; the agent had taken beef hides to pay the butcher, when in fact there was no butcher to prepare the beeves; three other complaints had to do with the plowing of land, the cutting of wood, and the inspection of stores arriving for the Indians by an army officer.

50 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, August 15, 1877.
51 Ibid.
52 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Agent Hughes, September 2, 1877.
Colonel Carlin transmitted the complaints to the agent, who of course denied them. Hughes said that only a minority group subscribed to these complaints, and further the chiefs had come to him saying they did not agree with the complaints presented to Colonel Carlin. The Colonel had anticipated this action and polled the Indians beforehand asking them if they were in unanimous agreement; they had replied in the affirmative. Carlin suggested that the agent would do well to listen to the Indians no matter how small their complaints appeared.53

Agent Hughes also complained to Colonel Carlin about the interpreter Allison. This rejoinder followed:

He is a military employee and therefore not subject in any way or sense, whatever, to the authority of the Indian agent. I fear you do not yet realize the fact that your authority does not touch any person or thing connected with the military post.54

Carlin continued that his troops did not occupy Standing Rock at the pleasure or favor of the agent; he also noted that when the agent came, he desired earnestly to cooperate with him, and still did, but feared Hughes had an exaggerated idea of his authority as Indian agent.55

53 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Agent Hughes, September 13, 1877.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.
The Indian band on the east bank under the leadership of Mad Bear was reintroduced on October 4. The agent wanted them moved, but Carlin could see no reason for immediate action. When the ice had frozen, they could walk across the river; more importantly, by that time the Indians would have harvested their crops. Carlin reported this matter to the department on October 17, adding that the agent had stopped the rations for Mad Bear. The Colonel also sent a copy of the letter of September 2, which listed all the Indian complaints, requesting proper action be taken so that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs would instruct Hughes to commence issue.

In a letter dated November 3rd the agent had apparently attempted to set the price for a haircut. The barber, Mr. Douglas, who operated under the authority of the Post Trader, reported that the agent had prescribed the proper price for cutting hair and shaving. "I respectfully recommend," wrote Carlin, "that he [the agent] be instructed by his superiors as to the limits of his authority, or that

56 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Agent Hughes, October 4, 1877.

57 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, October 17, 1877.
he be removed from office."58

By this time there was open conflict between Hughes and Carlin. Colonel Carlin discovered that all was not well with the stockpile of agency supplies. He collected many statements and affidavits to prove that Hughes was an embezzler. These reports he sent to the Secretary of War and asked that they be transmitted to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. On one occasion Carlin asked permission to testify before the Joint Committee of Congress investigating the transfer of the Indian Bureau to the War Department. He did not want to prove that point, but he did want to describe how poorly the agency was being run. Finally, Carlin submitted a full report of the embezzlement charges against Hughes to the Indian Inspector, General J. H. Hammond, who investigated the charges; all were sustained and more added.59

On July 12 matters had taken a most serious turn at the agency. Hughes had broken some of the chiefs and refused to issue rations to them unless they enrolled under other chiefs; this they refused to do. The agent then cut off their

58 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Secretary of War, November 3, 1877.

other supplies. At 10:00 a.m. on the 12th the Indians seized the agent and carried him to the river bank. They insisted later they only intended to throw him off the reservation. Hughes' son summoned Carlin, who rushed to the scene and barehanded rescued the agent. Carlin said Hughes did not even thank him. The Indians demanded the immediate relief of the agent. The demoted chiefs agreed to enroll under Kill Eagle and supplies were issued. The investigation by the Indian Inspector and his seizure by the Indians were enough for Hughes; he resigned unconditionally, effective September 30, 1878.60

Colonel Carlin departed the post on a long leave of absence in September of 1873. During his absence the matter of Allison, the interpreter, came to light again. Allison was discharged on the 8th. He had a reputation for dishonesty and trouble-making. Colonel Carlin wanted him kept on until the dispute with the late agent Hughes was finalized. Allison was universally disliked by the officers of the post, the agent and employees, and by most of the Indians. Had it not been for the military, he would have been killed. "When Mr. Allison was discharged there was a universal expression of

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60 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, August 6, 1878; Post Records, Fort Yates, Telegram to Assistant Adjutant General, July 12, 1878; Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, August 5, 1878; Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, July 12, 1878.
'thank God' and 'I am glad of it' and the like." This report was sent to the Department by Lieutenant Colonel Elmer S. Otis.61

Upon Carlin's return the Indians gave a ceremonial dance in his honor. This became one of the contributing sources of new friction between Carlin and agent J. A. Stephen. The new agent was apparently as adept at letter writing as Carlin, for he promptly reported that the military authorities were interfering with his business. The Colonel reported that the agent was spreading rumors that the post would be reduced to a two company post again and that the object of such rumors was to have Carlin relieved. General Sheridan had stated that if the Indian Bureau desired, the army would abandon Fort Yates. Carlin charged Stephen with using false weights to determine issues of rations, thus defrauding the Indian of his full share. The agent countered these charges by circulating rumors that Carlin was mentally deranged.62

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61 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, December 19, 1878.

In June 1880 Carlin wrote to the Assistant Adjutant General recommending that Fort Yates not be abandoned, but requested that he be assigned to Fort Lincoln if it were. Carlin gave these reasons for maintaining the post: protection of the agent and public property; protection of the settlers who were streaming in on the east of the Missouri River along the James River Valley and along the Black Hills road and Northern Pacific railroad; protection of cattle grazing from Bismarck to Fort Sully and from Jamestown to Yankton; and finally the fact that many farms had been started and the settlement of the territory would increase in the coming years, making Fort Yates a valuable post for years to come.63

The early years at the Military Station at Standing Rock, later named Fort Yates, were largely filled with the affairs of Indian administration. Whether or not the Indians were governed by civil or military officials, the problem of disarming and dismounting the hostiles after the Custer massacre was of primary importance. The tension and anxiety of these times was demonstrated by Captain Poland, who constructed blockhouses without prior approval and then asked for authorization of funds. It was to be expected that the

63 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, June 27, 1880.
military authorities and the civil agent would have different approaches to Indian administration at this time.64

It is, however, difficult to perceive the depth of the friction and enmity which existed between the military commander and the agent as the dangers of open war subsided. Since Colonel Carlin did engage in a series of disagreements with one agent after another, it must be assumed that grounds for dissatisfaction existed. When the Indian Inspector investigated both Burke and Hughes, all charges were sustained. Only in the case of Stephan was the report vague and inconclusive.65 Stephan, nonetheless, remained in the job less than three years. In his final report he wrote:

... and trust my successor will be as generally co-operated with as I have been, and meet fewer obstacles in the way of a jealous military commander who is, thanks to the Department, removed from doing any further harm to the Indian civilization.66

Thus, after a stormy era of post war activities, the military commander at Fort Yates and the Indian agent were

64 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, September 8, 1876.


66 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1881, p. 60.
both transferred. It was doubtful that the government through its representatives had completely civilized the Indians, for Sitting Bull was able to incite or foment one final Sioux war within the decade.
CHAPTER IV

THE ARREST OF SITTING BULL

The decade following the transfer of Colonel Carlin was perhaps the most significant period in the history of Fort Yates. This was a period in which new relationships were being worked out between the government on the one hand and the Indians on the other. Fort Yates was in the midst of this and the individuals most directly concerned were Colonel Charles C. Gilbert, who replaced Colonel Carlin, Major James McLaughlin, the new Indian agent, and the Indian chief, Sitting Bull.¹

Sitting Bull had been described by McLaughlin as a boastful pretender, a fraudulent leader, and a physical coward who maintained his position among his people by an acuteness of mind and a knowledge of human nature. Neither Gall, Spotted Tail, nor Red Cloud, all greater men than Sitting Bull, ever exerted the prestige and influence upon the Indian people to the degree that Sitting Bull did. He was a stocky man with an evil face and shifty eyes.²


It is interesting to note that General Sheridan held the same views as McLaughlin concerning Sitting Bull's position as a leader. Sheridan stated that there was no evidence to show that he was a great leader of the hostile Indians. In fact, he was probably quite insignificant, inasmuch as he never had more than a small following. Sheridan further stated that Sitting Bull had never done anything to acquire a reputation, but through chance and circumstances the newspapers had built him up as a great warrior.\(^3\)

When Sitting Bull was inaugurated head chief of the Sioux, Chief Four Horns, according to Stanley Vestal, praised him as follows:

Because of your bravery on the battlefield, and your reputation as the bravest warrior in all our band, we have elected you head chief of the entire Sioux nation, head war chief. It is your duty to see that the nation is fed, that we have plenty. When you say 'fight' we shall fight; when you say 'make peace', we shall make peace.\(^4\)

Chief Four Horns further stated that there was no opposition to the appointment of Sitting Bull. Vestal maintains that the Brule Sioux under Spotted Tail and the Southern Oglalas led by Red Cloud never accepted the claim of


Sitting Bull to be head chief of all the Tetons. Crazy Horse of the Oglalas, however, did come into the council and he was made second-in-command.5

This had, of course, all occurred long before the time of Agent McLaughlin, who arrived at Standing Rock on September 8, 1881. At this time Sitting Bull and one hundred and forty-six of the more hostile of his followers were being transported down the Missouri River to be held prisoners at Fort Randall. Colonel Gilbert notified McLaughlin that on an early day Sitting Bull and his party would be conducted to the steamer landing. Troops were instructed to keep the landing clear until all had boarded. The Indians who then wished to say farewell were to have free access to the boat for that purpose.6

After a confinement of two years at Fort Randall, Sitting Bull was released. In the meantime Agent McLaughlin had been instructed to select a location in the Grand River area for Sitting Bull and his people.7 On May 10, 1883, the steamer Behan arrived with Sitting Bull and his followers,

5Ibid., p. 92.
6Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter Colonel Gilbert to Indian agent, September 6, 1881.
under the guard of Lieutenant Davis, 15th Infantry. The Indians were turned over to Agent McLaughlin immediately upon debarkation.\(^8\)

One of the first verbal battles in which Sitting Bull became involved after his release was in a council held by Senators Logan, Dawes, and Cameron.\(^9\) They were members of a select committee of the Senate sent to investigate the condition of Indian tribes of Montana and Dakota. This committee treated Sitting Bull very badly, would not listen to his complaints, and were only interested in covering up the plight of the Indians and white-washing the administration. Instead of attempting to rectify any wrongs, Senator Logan threatened to have Sitting Bull locked in the guardhouse, and, unless the Indians obeyed past agreements, they were not to be fed. Sitting Bull, much to the horror of McLaughlin, proved himself a full chief and would not submit to the harangue by the white man.\(^10\)

Since the opening of the Black Hills in 1876, various commissions had attempted to treat with the Indians on the opening of the Great Sioux Reservation. In the summer of

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\(^8\) Medical History of Fort Yates, May 1883, p. 162.

\(^9\) Medical History of Fort Yates, August 1883, p. 173.

1888, Captain R. H. Pratt, U. S. Army, and the Reverend
William J. Cleveland of Madison, Dakota Territory, and Judge
Wright of Tennessee spent thirty-two days at Standing Rock
without securing any agreements from the Indians. Major
McLaughlin later claimed the credit for having saved the
Sioux on this occasion from selling their lands too cheaply.
Vestal, however, stated that McLaughlin must have been writ-
ing from memory in his book, My Friend the Indian, for the
man who really saved the Sioux in 1888 was Sitting Bull. In
fact, McLaughlin had recommended to the chiefs that they sign
and sell the land for fifty cents an acre; the price was
raised to $1.25 per acre later.11

In another attempt to open the Sioux reservation, the
commission of 1889 was appointed. This commission comprised
Charles Foster, ex-governor of Ohio, Major General George
Crook, and Senator William Warner of Kansas City, United States
Senator from Missouri. Agent McLaughlin had stated that though
he opposed selling so cheaply in 1888, he now believed he
should encourage the Indians to sell, provided a few conces-
sions were made. Consequently, he persuaded John Grass,
Gall, Mad Bear, and Big Head to sign the treaty. The conces-
sions secured were as follows: the sum of $200,000 was to be

11 McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 269; Medical History of
paid the Sioux of the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River agencies for the ponies taken from them by the military in 1876; maintenance of schools chargeable to the cession of 1868 for the full term of twenty years was to be reinstated since this provision had been neglected for ten years; hence half the period had elapsed.12

At a secret meeting held in a stable, John Grass gave his consent to the proposals by McLaughlin. Next McLaughlin had to convince Gall personally, since neither Grass nor Gall would face Sitting Bull after this betrayal. McLaughlin even made up the acceptance speech for John Grass. At the council the next day the necessary signatures were obtained, while Sitting Bull and his close followers were not admitted. The Indian police prevented any disturbance.13

Dissatisfaction soon arose and complaints concerning the treaties were voiced by the Indians. The provisions were not carried out by the white men. In a letter dated December 7, 1890, from Colonel Drum to the Assistant Adjutant General, the main causes for dissatisfaction on the part of the Indians were listed as follows:14

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14 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, December 7, 1890, pp. 183-196; Report of the Secretary of War 1892, pp. 134-135. Lieutenant Colonel W. F. Drum was now the military commander of Fort Yates.
(1) Failure of the government to establish an equitable southern boundary for the Standing Rock Agency Reservation.

(2) Failure of the government to expend a just proportion of the money received from the Chicago, Milwau-
kee and St. Paul Railroad Company for right of way priv-
ileges, for the benefit of the Indians of said agency. . . .

(3) Failure of the government to issue the certifi-
cates of title to allotments, as required by Article 6 of the Treaty of 1868.

(4) Failure of the government to provide the full allowance of seeds and agricultural implements to In-
dians engaged in farming, as required in Article 5, Treaty of 1868.

(5) Failure of the government to issue to such In-
dians the full number of cows and oxen provided in Ar-
ticle 10, Treaty of 1865.

(6) Failure of the government to provide comfortable dwelling houses for the Indians, as required in Article 6, Treaty of 1876.

(7) Failure of the government to issue to the In-
dians the full ration stipulated in Article 5, Treaty of 1876 . . . .

(8) Failure of the government to issue to the In-
dians the full amount of annuity supplies to which they are entitled under the provisions of Article 10, Treaty of 1868.

(9) Failure of the government to have the clothing and other annuity supplies ready for issue on the first day of August each year . . . .

(10) Failure of the government to appropriate money for the payment of the Indians for the ponies taken from them, by the authority of the government, in 1876.

Many of the complaints referring to food, annuity goods, and clothing were routine. There was ample justification in most cases for the complaints. The commanding officer at Fort Yates, after a full investigation concerning item 9, stated that it did not appear that more than two-thirds of the sup-
plies had ever been issued. Article 10 of the Treaty of 1868

\[15\] Ibid.
stipulated such items as a good woolen suit for each male
over 14, a flannel skirt, or the goods to make it, for each
female over 12, and a pair of hose, twelve yards of calico
and twelve yards of cotton. The boys and girls were to re-
ceive a suit or a skirt plus socks. These supplies had
never arrived any year by the first day of August and so far
for the current year, at this late date in December, the sup-
plies had not arrived at the nearest railhead. Winter would
be well advanced by the time the clothing arrived.16

As to the complaint concerning the ration, item 7, the
commanding officer commented that owing to the almost total
failure of crops at the Standing Rock reservation for the
past four years and the absence of the game, there was certainly
a necessity for issuing the full ration.17

The boundary dispute, item 1, related to the Treaty of
1889 wherein the Great Sioux Reservation had been divided into
separate reservations. Governor Foster, a member of the Com-
mmission of 1889 previously referred to, had acknowledged a com-
ment by John Grass that the Moreau River should be the south-
ern boundary between the Standing Rock agency and the Cheyenne
River agency. There were 1,300 more Indians at Standing Rock

16 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Ad-
Jutant General, December 7, 1890, p. 192.

and this division would have given more land to the larger agency.\textsuperscript{18}

The provisions of the Treaty of 1889 came in for censure again in that money had not been appropriated for the payment of ponies, item 10. General Crook had stated, as a member of the Commission of 1889, that they would recommend payment for the ponies lost and that they would exert their personal influence with Congress to have them paid as others had been paid. This was one of the concessions offered prior to the signing of this treaty.\textsuperscript{19}

The commanding officer further stated that the complaint concerning the erection of a comfortable house, item 6 above, was perhaps the one heard the most frequently at the agency. The erection of dwelling houses was considered a necessity. It is to be remembered that Colonel Carlin had likewise commented on this deficiency.\textsuperscript{20}

Colonel Drum stated in conclusion:

It, however, appears from the foregoing that the government has failed to fulfill its obligations, and in order to render the Indians law-abiding, peaceful,

\textsuperscript{18}Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, December 7, 1890, pp. 184-86.

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 184.

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 180.
contented, and prosperous it is strongly recommended that the treaties be promptly and fully carried out, that the promises made by the Commission in 1889 be faithfully kept.21

Further evidence of the growing disaffection and impending trouble with the Indians had been reported by McLaughlin in June, 1890. There was no rumor of an uprising at Standing Rock. Most of the Indians by their actions had indicated a peaceful disposition. There were, though, a few malcontents such as Sitting Bull, Circling Bear, Black Bird, and Circling Hawk, whom he felt should be removed and not allowed to sow dissension or influence the more progressive Indians.22 In October McLaughlin wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and described at some length the "Ghost Dance" and the Messiah craze. He recommended once more the removal of Sitting Bull and his followers.23

As to the "Ghost Dance" or Messiah craze at Standing Rock, Sitting Bull first learned of this new religion in the early fall of 1890. Kicking Bear, a half-crazed fanatic of the Minniconjou band from the Cheyenne River agency, came to

22 McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 197.
23 Ibid., pp. 199-200.
see Sitting Bull at Grand River, October 9, 1890. McLaughlin was convinced that Sitting Bull determined to use the new religion to restore his power among the Indians.24

Public concern regarding the dangers of a general uprising was confirmed by a message to McLaughlin from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. President Harrison had directed the Secretary of War to assume military responsibility in the event of a Sioux outbreak. McLaughlin maintained that he did not doubt the capacity of the military, but feared a military demonstration would provoke unnecessary bloodshed.25

On November 20, instructions were received by McLaughlin, stating that if leaders or fomenters of disturbances were to be arrested or confined, he should wire the names of such individuals so that assistance from the military could be requested. McLaughlin again wired the names of Sitting Bull, Black Bird, Circling Bear, Circling Hawk, and added Iron White Man and Male Bear. McLaughlin still felt, however, that the situation was under control and that the Indian police could bring in Sitting Bull at any time.26

Although McLaughlin felt he should make the arrest of

24 Ibid., pp. 183-184.
25 Ibid., p. 200.
26 Ibid., p. 209.
Sitting Bull when circumstances warranted, Colonel William F. Cody arrived at the agency on November 28 with instructions from General Miles, the Division Commander, directing the military officers to supply Colonel Cody with whatever assistance was needed to arrest and bring in Sitting Bull.27

In a letter to Colonel Drum, General Miles inquired whether Cody had been successful, and advised that if he had succeeded, Sitting Bull was not to be released or rescued.28 Colonel Drum replied that when Cody arrived and presented his credentials it was noticed he was somewhat intoxicated. Dr. D. F. Powell, who was with Colonel Cody, thought he would be all right after a little rest. It was decided to meet a little later and decide on the measures to be taken, but Colonel Cody continued to drink and was in no condition to attend to business that afternoon or evening. The next morning they took off, having been supplied with a wagon and such arms and ammunition as requested. In the meantime, a message from the President of the United States, rescinding the order for the arrest of Sitting Bull arrived; two messengers were sent out. Both failed to find Colonel Cody. As Sitting Bull had not been located by nightfall, Colonel Cody established a camp

27Ibid., pp. 210-212.
and notified Colonel Drum of his location. The order of the President was then sent to him. In the opinion of Colonel Drum, Cody could have secured Sitting Bull when he arrived had he been in any condition to do so. Drum also stated that he did not believe Cody had been discreet in his speech or prudent in his actions.29

The interpretation by Vestal of how McLaughlin prevented Cody from arresting Sitting Bull differs from the above report. Vestal states that the military at Fort Yates resented the interference by Cody. Since the military personnel all liked McLaughlin, they conspired to defeat the orders of the Division Commander. The plan was to get Colonel Cody over to the Officers' Club, "drink him under the table" and keep him there until McLaughlin could get a wire through to the President and have the orders of Cody rescinded. Vestal quoted Captain A. R. Chapin, then assistant surgeon of the post, as follows:

The officers were requested to assist. But Colonel Cody's capacity was such that it took practically all the officers in details of two or three at a time to keep him interested and busy through the day.30

Even after the order rescinded the arrest by Cody, McLaughlin still was not free to pursue his own plans. On

29Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, November 30, 1890, pp. 171-172.

December 1, he received an order that showed the military would make the arrest. Five days later he requested by telegraph authorization to make a timely arrest of Sitting Bull. The reply received stated that McLaughlin would make no arrests, except under the orders of the military, or upon an order from the Secretary of the Interior. 31

The order for the arrest of Sitting Bull was received by Colonel Drum by telegraph from Headquarters, Department of the Dakota, on December 12, 1890.

The division commander has directed that you make it your especial duty to secure the person of Sitting Bull. Call on Indian agent to cooperate and render such assistance as will best promote the purpose in view. Acknowledge receipt, and if not perfectly clear, repeat back. 32

McLaughlin still thought that the Indian police should make the arrest and that by so doing there would be less danger of bloodshed. The plan arrived at by Colonel Drum and Major McLaughlin contemplated the use of forty-two policemen under the direction of Lieutenant Bull Head and Sergeant Shave Head. These policemen were to arrive at the camp of Sitting Bull at daybreak on the morning of December 15. The military, comprising two troops of the Eighth Cavalry under the command

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31 McLaughlin, op. cit., pp. 210-212.

32 Report of the Secretary of War 1892, p. 194; McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 214.
of Captain E. G. Fochet, would leave Fort Yates at midnight in order to arrive at the Oak Creek crossing of the Sitting Bull road by 6:30 a.m. on the 15th to support the police if necessary.  

The report by Colonel Drum to the Assistant Adjutant General stated that it was his personal preference to make the arrest with troops, but since there were always some of the men of Sitting Bull around the agency, supposedly to have their wagons repaired or for some such reason, these Indians would undoubtedly inform Sitting Bull of any troop activities. The fact that the camp of Sitting Bull was forty miles away would provide an Indian on a fleet horse the opportunity to reach the camp before a troop of cavalry. Colonel Drum also felt that the Indian police should be able to do the job without bloodshed or causing much excitement among the Indians.  

The accounts of the actual arrest by the police vary. McLaughlin stated in his report that all progressed according to plan until the son of Sitting Bull, Crow Foot, berated his father for surrendering to the Indian blue-coats. Sitting Bull, who had been peaceable up to this moment,

33 McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 217.

34 Report of the Secretary of War 1892, loc. cit.
ordered his followers to attack the police. McLaughlin thus observed, "The last moment of Sitting Bull's life showed him in a better light, so far as physical courage goes, than all the rest of it." 35

Another account stated that Crow Foot did not taunt the old chief. The policemen shoved and hurried Sitting Bull to get him dressed. Once outside his house they had to wait for his horse to be saddled. All of this time an angry crowd of his followers was gathering. When Catch-the-Bear, commander of the bodyguard for Sitting Bull and chief soldier of the camp arrived, he immediately singled out his mortal enemy, Bull Head. At this time Sitting Bull finally announced: "I am not going. Do with me what you like. I am not going. Come on! Come on! Take action! Let's go!" 36 Immediately Catch-the-Bear threw up his rifle and shot Bull Head, who, as he fell to the ground, turned and shot Sitting Bull. Sergeant Red Tomahawk, who had been attempting to hold the Chief, shot him from behind. Either shot would have been fatal and Sitting Bull dropped to the ground, instantly dead. Strikes-the-Kettle shot down Shave Head and from there on, a bloody fight ensued. 37 Second Sergeant Red Tomahawk took command and drove

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35 McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 218.
36 Vestal, op. cit., p. 300.
37 Ibid.
the Indians to the timber. Hawk Man No. 1 ran through a 
hail of bullets to get the cavalry.38

Captain Fachet stated in his report that after consult-
tation with Colonel Drum before moving out, they had decided he should get as close to the camp of Sitting Bull as pos-
sible. A short time after dawn a mounted man was discovered approaching rapidly. This later proved to be Hawk Man. He stated that all the police had been killed. The command was 
put into condition for immediate action and moved up to a 
position overlooking the valley of the Grand River, directly 
opposite the house of Sitting Bull and the camp of the ghost 
dancers, at a distance of some 1,500 yards. Lieutenant Slo-
cum, Troop F, 8th Cavalry, dismounted his men and advanced on 
the house. Lieutenant Crowder with G Troop, mounted, moved 
rapidly to the right flank and protected the dismounted line. 
Lieutenant Crowder and his men cleared the immediate area and 
then returned to the house.39

Upon arrival at the lodge of Sitting Bull, there was 
found evidence of a most desperate struggle. In the vicinity 
of the house there were found the bodies of eight hostiles, 
including that of Sitting Bull. Two horses were also killed.

Inside the house were four dead and three wounded policemen. It was learned through an interpreter that the hostile Indians had carried away with them one of their dead and five or six wounded, making an approximate total of fifteen casualties in the band of Sitting Bull. All of the dead Indian police, together with their wounded and the body of Sitting Bull, were brought in by Captain Fechet.40

The post surgeon reported that at approximately 1:30 p.m., December 16, the acting hospital steward arrived at the post with the Red Cross ambulance bearing the wounded policemen, Shave Head and Bull Head. They were both taken to the Indian hospital where Shave Head shortly thereafter died. The command arrived in a short time with the bodies of the dead policemen and that of Sitting Bull. The funeral for the five Indian policemen took place at 2:00 p.m., December 17. They were buried with military honors; the entire garrison headed by Colonel Drum and all the officers attended. Sitting Bull was buried immediately afterwards in the northwest corner of the Post Cemetery, without ceremony, by a detail from the Post Quartermaster.41 McLaughlin reported that he, A. R. Chapin, assistant surgeon, H. M. Deebie, acting assistant surgeon, and

40 Ibid.
41 Medical History of Fort Yates, December 15, 1890, p. 337.
Lieutenant P. G. Wood, Post Quartermaster, watched the body of Sitting Bull, wrapped in a canvass and placed in a coffin, lowered into the grave. 42

The immediate consequence of the death of Sitting Bull for the military of Fort Yates was the danger of a general uprising. The Army had been investigating the causes of disaffection, and now that the Sioux had lost a great leader, would they revolt against the white man? The Headquarters of the Army in Washington had been alerted by the President when he charged the military with the responsibility of maintaining peace. General Schofield, the Commanding General of the Army, in his annual report of the activities for 1890 made mention of the urgency of the situation in December of that year. He reported that the disturbance of the Sioux had been formidable indeed and threatened to be far more serious than any of the Indian wars in recent years. The orders of the President were designed to suppress the disturbance promptly and effectively, having mainly in view the protection of the extended settlements surrounding the Sioux reservation. In order to execute the order, it had been necessary to bring troops from nearly all parts of the country west of the Mississippi River. Over one-half of the Infantry and Cavalry, plus some Artillery, were ordered into the Sioux

42McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 222.
Vestal's account of this entire operation minimizes the seriousness of the affair. He has stated that the "Ghost Dance" would have died of itself within a few months. He asserted that McLaughlin knew that the "Ghost Dance" was harmless and would be short-lived. Troops were requested by the agent at Pine Ridge, and as the troops arrived, the Indians fled west and the settlers fled east. The "Ghost Dance" became front page news and the Army had to conceal the ridiculous nature of its mission. McLaughlin had lost control. Vestal continued his account by saying that the fear of the "Ghost Dance" was only a propaganda story, ". . . to save the face of a corrupt Indian Bureau, to camouflage an unnecessary Indian campaign."44

Nonetheless, the troops at Fort Yates were most active the last two weeks of December in 1890. Captain D. J. Craigie, Twelfth Infantry, was ordered to proceed on December 24 to Grand River and report to Captain Fechet for duty. Captain Fechet had already taken to the field on the 21st with Troops F and G of the Eighth Cavalry. Later orders required the furnishing of supplies to a Major Carroll, part of whose command.

43 Report of the Secretary of War 1892, p. 55.
44 Vestal, op. cit., p. 277.
operated 200 miles from Fort Yates. From January 3 to 17 small detachments under Lieuten ant Baker and Captain Miner were busy ferrying supplies to the command of Major Carroll. On January 24 telegraphic instructions were received for the withdrawal of troops from the field.\textsuperscript{45}

Though the danger of an uprising was over, the next phase entered into by the troops at Fort Yates was the disarming of the Indians. A survey or a count of weapons and ponies owned by the Indians was made. There were 260 guns of all descriptions, about 35 of these being shot guns. The greater portion of the remainder were Winchester rifles and carbines of Winchester and Sharp. There were over 2,432 ponies owned by the Indians living north and south of the agency. The bands of Weasel Bear, Gray Eagle, One Bull, and others were largely composed of Indians who surrendered as prisoners of war in 1880 and 1881. They owned 740 ponies and 73 guns of the total given above. In these bands were some of the staunchest friends of the government. During the recent troubles, the arms were taken by the Indian police from all Indians who had participated in the Ghost dances, nearly all of whom were enrolled in the bands residing on

\textsuperscript{45} Report of the Secretary of War 1892, p. 196.
the Grand River. 46

Only two Indians objected to giving information. The agent had assured the Indians that in case the rifles were to be turned in, he would place a tag on each one with the name of the owner; pending instructions from Washington, the rifle would either be returned to the Indian or paid for. The Indians were uneasy over the count of the ponies. They had been assured that if the horses were to be taken, it would be only with the consent of the owner and for a fair evaluation, providing the Indians remained loyal to the government. 47

The leading Sitting Bull Indians were quiet and caused no trouble. Had they attempted to incite the hostiles, they would have been arrested and permission would have been requested to send them to Fort Snelling. It was felt that the loyal Indians should be rewarded or recognized for the position they took in the recent disturbance. The recommendation was made that John Grass, Gall, and two other chiefs each receive a two-horse spring wagon and double harness. 48

46 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to Assistant Adjutant General, March 12, 1891, pp. 131-133.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
By the end of March, talk of disarming the Indians was on the decline. It was reported to headquarters that as far back as 1878 the agent, the authorized Indian trader, and the employees at the agency had sold no arms to the Indians except to a few authorized Indians employed as scouts. It was charged that those which had been received by the Indians were obtained from agencies at Fort Peck, Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and from whites around the reservation. It was further stated that the efforts to disarm the Indians in 1876-77 amounted to nothing and that the arms in their possession at that time so remained. It was estimated that of the arms now in their possession, 92 per cent were of the latter category. The guns were of all kinds from old flintlocks to a very few new or modern ones. Nine-tenths of them must have been twenty years old, and a greater part of them were unserviceable.49

Further evidence that the fear of a general uprising had subsided was furnished by the report of Charles Whitebull, an Indian scout at Standing Rock. While on furlough he had visited Rosebud, Pine Ridge, and Cheyenne River agencies. Many Indians wanted to come back to Standing Rock but were prevented by others. There were a few malcontents, but

49 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letters to Assistant Adjutant General, March 24, 1891, pp. 139-140.
in general the Indians he had talked to seemed favorably disposed to live like the white man and adopt his ways. 50

After the death of Sitting Bull, McLaughlin had reported: "The last menace of an Indian uprising disappeared when Sitting Bull died." 51

50 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letters to Assistant Adjutant General, April 29, 1891, pp. 175-176.

51 McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 261.
CHAPTER V

LIFE ON THE FRONTIER POST

The routine of garrison life prevailed at Fort Yates whether there were relative periods of peace or war. During the latter conditions a struggle was waged for mere existence. Providing food, shelter, and clothing during the extremes of the seasonal changes, attended by the over-all fear of an Indian uprising, kept the soldier preoccupied. On the other hand, as the dangers of the uprisings subsided, the normal routine of garrison life developed more fully. There was time for schooling of officers and men. Practice marches and maneuvers were substituted for combat operations. Under both conditions, the limited social events and visits by travelers were welcome respite from the anxiety or monotony of frontier living.

One of these visits which was warmly received occurred in the summer of 1886. Chief Justice Waite and daughter; Colonel W. F. Clough, counselor of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, and daughter; the Honorable William Francis, Associate Justice of Dakota, and wife; and Counselor F. V. Barnes of Bismarck, and wife arrived at the post as guests of Major and Mrs. McLaughlin of the Indian agency. Approximately 2,000 Indians assembled and gave several of their famous Sioux
dances.¹

Another diversion of yearly frequency was the Fourth of July celebration. Athletic contests were the principal events. In 1879 the festivities for the day were inaugurated with a rifle match at 10:00 a.m. which was won by the officers. At 1:00 p.m. there was a baseball game which was won by the enlisted men; at 5:00 p.m. there were several contests open to all: a foot race, a pony race, and a wheelbarrow race, 100 yards blindfolded. Company D, 17th Infantry, won the greased pig chase while the American horse race was won by Company D, 7th Cavalry. At 9:00 p.m. there was a grand display of fireworks and music by the 17th Infantry band, followed by the grand ball for the officers of the post at 10:00 p.m.²

Also in July, but in the year 1886, the tribute paid to the departing officers and men of the 17th Infantry Regiment provided a testimonial of the warmth and respect held by the citizenry for these troops. It was reported that the people had looked upon the men of the 17th Infantry as their guardian angels and now that they were to depart, a great loss


was felt. As the troops embarked on the Steamer General Terry, good-byes were sadly said, and Auld Lang Syne was played by the band as the steamer moved away.  

The river steamers played a large part in the life of the post both as to furnishing the necessities of life and providing for social occasions. For instance, the Steamers Helena and General Terry arrived on June 1, 1888, with the 5th United States Infantry on board enroute to the Department of Texas. The officers and families were entertained during their brief stopover with a supper and a ball at the Post Hall, given by the officers and ladies of Fort Yates.  

Entries in the ledger maintained by the Post Surgeon provide a record of the arrival and departures of the many river steamers. A typical entry ran as follows: "Steamer Rosebud first boat of the season which arrived in the evening of April 16, 1892." In April and May of 1883 the names of the following steamers were listed: Josephine, Behan, General Auer, Black Hills, North Pacific Transfer, Rosebud.

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3 Medical History of Fort Yates, July 1888, p. 270.
4 Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1888, p. 298.
5 Medical History of Fort Yates, March 29, 1892, p. 4.
and Big Horn. In addition to providing a break in the monotony, the boats brought in supplies for the post. In one instance, a large flat boat 35 feet long was brought in on the Steamer Behan. This boat was to be used as a ferry on the Missouri River.

The river as an artery of communications was of vital importance to the community during the entire year. So long as the river was frozen, people were able to cross on foot or with teams. On March 22, 1888, the last wagon was able to cross the river on the ice. Water then began to rise. On the 28th the ice looked fair, but there were about four feet of water on the edges. For the next two days no mail arrived. On April 1, the mail got across, but Private Cushman, Company H, 12th Infantry, broke through while crossing the river and was saved from drowning by the use of a board and long pole thrown to him by another soldier. Mail was again delivered on April 4. By this time, the ice opposite the post had broken and moved down the river slightly, while the ice above and below the post generally remained solid. From April 10 to the 14th ice ran in the river and there was no mail. On April 22 the Steamer Missouri arrived at the landing from

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7 Medical History of Fort Yates, May 1883, p. 163.
The river was now open for the summer traffic.\(^8\)

The extremes of temperature were recorded frequently. As a part of the social life mentioned earlier, Captain and Mrs. Read gave a reception in the Post Hall on January 2, 1887, celebrating their fifteenth anniversary; the thermometer registered fifty degrees below zero.\(^9\) This may have been a little more severe than usual, as a minus forty-one degrees was the lowest recording for the winter of 1882-1883. Due to the intense cold and the severe penetrating wind, the surgeon recommended that a buffalo coat be issued to each man in addition to the wool cloth coat.\(^10\)

On the other hand, the heat was intense in summer. One of the highest temperatures recorded was 102 degrees on July 12, 1888.\(^11\) Due to this intense heat in the summers, a recommendation was transmitted to higher headquarters requesting that the command be allowed to wear white uniforms.\(^12\)

\(^8\) Medical History of Fort Yates, March and April 1888, pp. 294-296.

\(^9\) Medical History of Fort Yates, January 2, 1887, p. 275.

\(^10\) Medical History of Fort Yates, August 27, 1883, p. 175.

\(^11\) Medical History of Fort Yates, July 12, 1888, p. 269.

\(^12\) Medical History of Fort Yates, April 1890, p. 328.
The following year, in 1891, a request to wear straw hats was likewise forwarded. The pattern was to be brown, \( \frac{3}{4} \) inches high, brim 2 to \( \frac{3}{4} \) inches wide. Around the hat there was to be a black band \( \frac{3}{4} \) inches wide. No action was recorded on either request.  

In June 1883 three men were excused from duty in the garden because of heat prostration. A high of 33 degrees was recorded on July 1st, 10th and 19th. Company gardens were popular since the produce supplemented the ration. In 1883, however, there was a drought which resulted in partial failure of these gardens.

The Post Surgeon, in the monthly sanitary report for September, 1889, complained of the firing of the morning and evening gun. Its close proximity to the hospital, especially the west ward, caused much distress to seriously ill patients. The post commander concurred heartily in finding another location from which to fire the customary reveille and retreat.

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13 Medical History of Fort Yates, April 30, 1891, p. 175.
14 Medical History of Fort Yates, June 1883, p. 166.
15 Medical History of Fort Yates, September 1885, p. 252; September 1884, p. 234.
16 Medical History of Fort Yates, September 1883, p. 179.
17 Medical History of Fort Yates, September 1889, p. 320.
One example of frontier efficiency and necessity was the granting of a power of attorney to August von Glosman, hospital steward, granting authority to dispose of the estate of Max Cahlon. Witnesses to the will were Samuel C. Davidson and Hans Hansen.\(^{18}\)

Another form of diversion or an escape from the reality of crude living on the frontier was found in the consumption of alcoholic beverages. In May of 1878 the surgeon reported that the men who could not get liquor were drinking extracts of lemon, vanilla, cinnamon, peppermint, bay rum, and cologne. Anything which had a large alcoholic content was used as a substitute. The surgeon recommended the selling of light wines and malt liquors which would cut down on the smuggling as well as help those who were temporarily impairing themselves by drinking the extracts.\(^{19}\) In the report for August 31, 1878, the habits of the men were stated as good, especially since beer was being sold on the post.\(^{20}\)

Since the barracks were miserable structures poorly lighted and dismal, the dance halls and saloons of the new

\(^{18}\) Medical History of Fort Yates, May 7, 1892, p. 5.


\(^{20}\) Medical History of Fort Yates, August 31, 1878.
town of Winona, which had been founded in 1834, appeared extremely inviting.\textsuperscript{21} In May of that year a complaint of excessive drunkenness on the part of soldiers was made, owing to the ease with which whiskey could be obtained in Winona. In December 1885 the comment was made that excluding the fact that a great percentage of the command got drunk each pay day, the habits of the troops were considered good.\textsuperscript{22} Two men were found frozen to death, one in 1885 and the other in 1892, as the result of drinking sprees in Winona.\textsuperscript{23} In 1885 Private Thomas Stallard, Company B, 17th Infantry, shot a woman named Ida Woods in Winona. He was held by civil authorities for three months; the jury found him not guilty.\textsuperscript{24} In 1897 the Indian agent likewise complained of the liquor saloon running wide open and being frequented by prostitutes of the lowest order.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{21} Medical History of Fort Yates, November 1894, p. 76; Medical History of Fort Yates, April 1884, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{22} Medical History of Fort Yates, December 1, 1885, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{23} Medical History of Fort Yates, October 1896, p. 275; Medical History of Fort Yates, February 1892, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{24} Medical History of Fort Yates, December 1885, pp. 258, 264.
Life on the post in the later years, the 1890's, found the Army experimenting with different post schools. During the winter months there was little to do, and now that the danger of Indian wars had subsided, energy could be diverted to other channels. The first post lyceum at Fort Yates was set up by Post Order #206 dated October 23, 1892; recitations were ordered to take place beginning November 1, 1892. The original assignments were primarily military in nature and all officers were to be prepared to discuss these lessons. The Infantry studied United States Drill Regulations, Manual of Guard Duty, Manual of Field Engineering, Holmes' Precis of Modern Tactics, and Winthrop's Abridgement of Military Law. The list of subjects for the Cavalry was similar; it included United States Drill Regulations for Cavalry, Manual of Guard Duty, Manual of Field Engineering, Buyer's Bit and Bitting, Holmes' Modern Tactics, and Winthrop's Military Law. These recitations were held at one o'clock on Monday of each week for the Infantry and at the same hour on Thursdays for the Cavalry.26

In addition to the recitations described above, each officer was assigned a special topic and required to prepare a 2,500 word paper to be presented to the assembled officers. Some of the subjects assigned were "Smokeless Powder and its

26 Medical History of Fort Yates, August 18, 1893, pp. 1, 2.

Not all the officers had to attend these sessions; in 1895, a request was written to excuse Lieutenant Waterman since he was already deemed proficient in the subjects assigned and held a certificate excusing him for five years. The request was approved by the Post Commander and forwarded to the Department Commander recommending a special subject be assigned. The Department Commander approved this recommendation. An example of the subjects studied in 1895 showed the Civil War Battles were given high priority. Such battles as Shiloh, Bull Run, and Chancellorsville were studied. The report of completions of this year's course noted that all work had been carried out, all participated well, and the instruction had been informative. 28

In 1896 the Inspector General of the Army circulated a plan for the education of the enlisted men, and Major Whelan, then commander of Fort Yates, was most specific in his answers to the questions posed. One comment to which he took exception was to the effect that the enlisted men of this day were a better educated group. Whelan indicated that this was

27 Medical History of Fort Yates, August 18, 1893, p. 6.

completely untrue and that the man who had made such a statement apparently had not served with troops for a long time. Actually the soldiers enlisting at that time were much inferior physically and but little better mentally.

The Inspector General also noted that the relationship between enlisted men and officers on the frontier was prejudicial to good discipline. Here again Whelan protested that this was not so. He maintained that in the Cavalry, where the officers and men did serve intimately together, they held the greatest respect for one another.

Major Whelan felt the problem of schooling for the enlisted men should be handled by the company commander: "I consider that the regiments amount to nothing or very little so far as organization goes. The strength of our army lies in the excellence of the troop, company, and battery." Here is the oft repeated praise for the small unit commander.

In regard to the schooling, Whelan felt that the captain was the "Father of the Company" and what he said went. The men in previous times had been selected by the first sergeant for school, not as a reward but as a punishment. If the standard of training or education was set and established, Major Whelan believed that the company commander could then examine his

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unit and bring his men to that work. He understood that there would be unit commanders who would not appreciate this extra work, but they must stand aside for progress.30

One of the hazards associated with early life on the frontier was the danger of fire, especially in winter. On Christmas evening, 1892, the building used for a chapel, school rooms, quartermaster storehouses, and a telegraph office was destroyed by fire. The alarm was given at 11:30 p.m. The chapel had been used for the Christmas tree festivities and attendant activities, and at eight o'clock the hall had been closed and all the lights and the fire extinguished. The fire was confined to the school room initially, and had not the water supply failed, the fire could have been checked. The men never worked harder to salvage government equipment and keep the fire from spreading to the other buildings. The temperature was nineteen degrees below zero and many persons' clothing was frozen stiff. There were no accidents and all personnel knew their places and duties as a result of previous drills.31

The Acting Inspector General made an inspection of Fort Yates on August 23, 1896. In his report, one of the

30Ibid.
31Fort Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, December 27, 1892.
first deficiencies noted was the failure of the Assistant Surgeon to attend the review and inspection. The Inspector also noticed that two cooks were absent from each of the companies at the time of the inspection. In the matter of drill, the cavalry squadron walked too long after forming the attacking line; then they trotted too long, thereby making the gallop too short before the charge; finally, when the charge was made, the troopers failed to cheer.

The cavalry horses were stabled in an old wagon shed which had one side open to the weather and a roof that leaked. The former stables had been destroyed by fire in January, 1896. The Inspector recommended that the shed be repaired or the stables be rebuilt. Since Troop A, 8th Cavalry, had been ordered away from the post, however, no action was contemplated.

The hazard of fire was noted again since the supply of water was reported as insufficient for fire purposes. Also the system of sewerage, drainage, and water supply was deemed unsatisfactory. Surface drainage was insufficient and the water plant inadequate.

At the time of this inspection a simulated tactical problem was given to the troops, an exercise somewhat similar to the drill exercise. The Inspector reported that the troops were not in proper field dress; the infantry were wearing white gloves. The cavalry squadron was in position but had no advance guard.
Since the founding of the post there had been no gymnasium, though numerous reports by the surgeon had pointed out the need. The Inspector General likewise commented on this deficiency. As a result, a vacant set of quarters was set aside for the purpose, and instruction in gymnastics was to be given.\(^{32}\)

In these days the troops of Fort Yates, in addition to simulated maneuvers, also participated in practice marches. A march recorded in 1896 was limited in transportation since Company A, 8th Cavalry, had moved to Fort Keogh and had taken most of the wagons for this move. Because of this each troop and company were allotted one six-mule team for the purpose of carrying rations, tentage, bedding, and other impediments. Rations for twelve days were sent to Rock Creek, under the guard of one officer and one enlisted man. This ration dump would serve as the central supply point.

The command marched out at 8:00 a.m., September 25, 1896. There was one field grade officer, Major Whelan, one assistant surgeon, Dr. Newgarden, one hospital steward, and two privates of the Hospital Corps with the Red Cross ambulance. Troop C, 8th Cavalry, commanded by Captain Hickey, comprised forty enlisted men and one Hotchkiss gun with a

\(^{32}\)Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, September 12, 1896.
detachment from the cavalry. Also present was Company B, 2nd Infantry, consisting of forty men and commanded by Lieutenant F. S. Hutton. Company C, 2nd Infantry, consisting of forty men and commanded by Lieutenant Wilson completed the force taking part in the exercise. Captain Charles Keller, 2nd Infantry, commanded the battalion of Infantry.

The cavalry and the Hotchkiss gun made up the advance guard. On the first day the camp was eleven and a half miles to the head of the Blackfoot Creek. One company of infantry served as escort for the wagon train and as rear guard. Companies were permitted to practice minor tactics as long as they did not interfere with the progress of the march. The second day and the third day the distance marched was eleven and fifteen miles respectively. On September 28 a temporary camp was established for five days in order that various instructions could be conducted. There was a practice maneuver by the infantry and the cavalry. The cavalry played the part of the enemy and tested the time it would take to throw up emplacements; the infantry using only the bayonet were ready for action in twenty minutes. Transportation was sent back to Rock Creek to bring up the rations previously left there. Rations for three days were left for the return trip. The command was absent from the post for a total of sixteen days and marched 168 miles. There was not a man on sick report or in confinement. "When I left Fort Yates I had a command
largely composed of recruits and when I returned the improvement was as manifest as it was satisfactory. 433

Another of the institutions which developed on the frontier was the post exchange. At first there were post traders, a privileged class exempt from taxation because they were located on a government reservation.34

They supplied all items except the ration which came through the subsistence stores of the commissary. As towns were founded around the frontier posts, there was less need for the post trader. The post exchange came into existence to replace the trader.35 Items were sold at a small profit. In the restaurant, food and fruits were sold at cost. Twenty per cent of the profits from the sales were returned to the organizations in the way of dividends.36 Since the canteen of the post exchange sold only malt liquors, many of the men went absent without leave to such places as Winona, where a

33 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, October 13, 1896.


35 Ibid., p. 76.

36 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, October 21, 1897.
stronger drink could be obtained. An exchange with a canteen feature was, nonetheless, considered a necessity since drinking of lemon extract and other harmful substitutes was reduced. 37

In the report of operations of the post exchange for 1895, the receipts totalled $11,718.83. The expenditures for supplies amounted to $4,915.00; the amount paid for services was $428.08. During the period, three companies of the 12th Infantry who left the post received the sum of $3,520.24 for their share of the exchange business due them on the date of their departure. There was on hand December 31 a balance of $1,555.03 and stocks and fixtures valued at $1,550.00. Dividends had been declared during the year to the companies of the garrison amounting to the sum of $4,187.02. 38

When Company A, 22nd Infantry transferred from Fort Keogh and Company D, 22nd Infantry from Fort Assinniboine, they were permitted to join the post exchange corporation at Fort Yates without first having paid their cash entry fee. In a series of letters to the Major General commanding the

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37 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Assistant Adjutant General, September 6, 1901.

38 Post Records, Fort Yates, Letter to the Adjutant General, United States Army, January 5, 1896.
Army, this deficiency was explained. Corrective action was taken requiring the companies to pay their proper share. 39

The action above of replying by endorsement to explain deficiencies was illustrative of the emphasis placed on administration of post activities in the decade that followed the death of Sitting Bull. As the army shifted from a war time footing to a peace time status, emphasis was placed on administration, on practice marches, and maneuvers. Thus, as the frontier was closing, the need for the frontier army was likewise diminishing.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

During the period that Fort Yates was in existence, from its origin as a "Military Station" in 1875 and its subsequent transformation to a Military Fort in 1878, until its abandonment in 1903, the activities of the Indians determined in a large measure the role of the military forces of the garrison. Unfortunately for the Indian, this period was one of expansion and development of the West. The Indian was initially deprived of his lands, then transferred to new lands or reservations. Each encroachment by the white man reduced the domain of the Indian to insignificance. The Custer tragedy in 1876 and the final Sioux uprising in 1890 can be more clearly understood when described in terms of Indian frustration, disappointment, and dissatisfaction. During these epic battles the military forces of Fort Yates attempted to protect the Indian agent, to administer Indian affairs, and to bring a measure of civilization to the frontier.

The period from 1876 to 1881 when the fort was commanded by Colonel W. P. Carlin was a period of cold war. The Army and the Indian service, never in agreement on how to handle the Indian, now faced the problem of administration after a great tragedy. Many of the hostiles from the Battle of the Little Big Horn never surrendered officially. They
infiltrated into the camp of the reservation Indians, thus making it ever difficult to determine the numbers and loyalties of the supposedly peaceful Indian. The military, as they sought to subdue the hostile bands around and about the vicinity of Fort Yates, could not afford to have the agency Indians supplying these hostiles.

In his first conflict with the agent, Colonel Carlin charged Agent Burke with permitting the agency Indians to feed and harbor fugitives of the hostile band. It is little wonder that Carlin relieved Burke. The other agents, particularly Hughes and to a lesser degree Stephan, apparently were guilty of some wrongdoing. Carlin was not a benevolent dictator either. He was a salty, testy old soldier who stood for no foolishness, and anyone who sought to exercise or usurp his power of command was immediately challenged. Carlin was a fighter! The end evaluation must be that Carlin carried out his duties relentlessly, overpowering anyone who stood in his way; he did, it is true, succeed in demobilizing the Indian.

The important events of the 1890's which culminated in the death of Sitting Bull and which led to the Wounded Knee massacre are perhaps reminiscent of the Chivington massacre. Whether the expected uprising should have been taken so seriously is debatable. The fact that over half the Army was ordered into the area of the Great Sioux Reservation certainly
adds strength to the claim that the Sioux were the most unruly, the most rebellious, and the most recalcitrant of the tribes. Both the agency and the military at Yates were needed to civilize the Sioux.

The charge that the agent and the military connived in the death plot of Sitting Bull is speculative. The President of the United States had directed the military to make the arrest of Sitting Bull. It is true that the military and the agent were, in an almost unprecedented fashion, friends and eager to cooperate with each other. Major McLaughlin undoubtedly was ambitious and undeniably he disliked Sitting Bull. The plan for the arrest of the chief by the Indian police was primarily the handicraft of McLaughlin. Yet if judgment is to be made, it must be that McLaughlin was guilty of indiscretion but not of murder. The Indian police could have conveniently done away with the old chief at almost any time without exposure to themselves. In the final analysis, it does appear that any spirit of rebellion died with Sitting Bull.

Through periods of adversity as well as good fortune, the army at Fort Yates had served its country and its people. From statehood for the Dakota Territory in 1889 until 1903, Fort Yates continued to serve as a refuge for settlers, a haven in the heart of a once hostile Sioux nation. From the death of Sitting Bull until 1903, the fort served as a
watchdog. As the training of the Indian police progressed, as they learned to handle their own disciplinary and legal problems, and as the process of civilization was gradually and continually extended to the Indians at Standing Rock, the need for a military contingent declined.

The last sanitary report by the Surgeon at Fort Yates was not completed, but written over the face of the report was this entry: "Post of Fort Yates abandoned September 11, 1903."¹

A. BOOKS


Schell, Herbert B. *Dakota Territory During the Eighteen Sixties*. Governmental Research Bureau, University of South Dakota, 1954.


B. PUBLICATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT


Microfilm Material from General Services Administration, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Copies are available at the office of the National Park Service, Region Two, Omaha, Nebraska.

*Medical History of Fort Yates, February 1878-September 1903.*


C. PERIODICALS

