



Photographs courtesy of National Archives.

HISTORY

Fort Fred Steele was established on June 20, 1868, and occupied until August 7, 1886, by soldiers who were sent by the U.S. Government to guard the railroad against attack from Indians. The construction of the transcontinental Union Pacific Railroad across southern Wyoming in 1867-1869, in turn, brought the cattlemen, shepherders, loggers, tie hacks, miners and merchants who changed a wasteland into the Wyoming Territory.

Colonel Richard I Dodge, who selected this site on the west bank of the North Platte River, named the fort for Major General Frederick Steele, 20th U.S. Infantry, a Civil War hero.

Although the fort at first resembled a tent city, Colonel Dodge's military quartermaster quickly built the fort according to Army specifications by using local materials and labor. In fact, many of the 300 troops here at the time received extra pay for their help with this effort. Key civilians who were also employed at the post included a sawmill engineer, blacksmith, saddler and wheelwright. Like many other frontier outposts, the military relied, too, upon a licensed trader or sutler to supply fresh produce and mercantile goods for its personnel and dependents.

After the major Indian threat had passed, the War

Department deactivated the post and transferred its troops to other military facilities throughout the United States. Only a guard was left to oversee this federal property.

INDUSTRY

After the fort was abandoned, a sparse population of civilians remained at what would be known only as Fort Steele. Prospering briefly as a logging center, millions of felled trees were floated down the North Platte River from the Medicine Bow and Sierra Madre Mountains to this small community, where they were turned into railroad ties and fence posts.

Later, a major sheep sheering plant was established to remove the animals' wool made thick and rich by the harsh Wyoming winters. The railway that passed through the community facilitated shipment of those bales to the east where the raw goods were processed and woven into material for fashionable garments for men and women.

AMERICA'S FIRST TRANSCONTINENTAL HIGHWAY

In 1912, the mighty Lincoln Highway was conceived as a transcontinental highway to parallel the original railroad that crossed this country. That dream became a reality in 1922 as the concrete ribbon was completed and linked the east and west coast. A brief economic revival for Fort Steele followed that achievement. The rerouting of the highway in 1939, plus the demise of the tie industry a year later, was the village's death knell.



A VIEW OF THE PAST

Many of the remaining foundations are visible but very few structures are intact.

Fort Steele State Historic Site offers an excellent opportunity to preserve and interpret a portion of Wyoming's diverse cultural heritage.

Although the number of structures has declined over the years what remains standing is mute testimony to the flourishing and subsequent passing of several frontiers.

SITE RULES

- Keep vehicles on existing road.
- Obey posted signs and traffic barriers.
- No firearms or fireworks.
- Pets must be under control at all times.
- Please dispose of trash in containers provided.
- No overnight camping.
- Digging is prohibited.
- Use of metal detectors is not allowed.
- For a complete listing of State Park rules and regulations, visit Park Headquarters at Seminoe State Park.

Fort Fred Steele

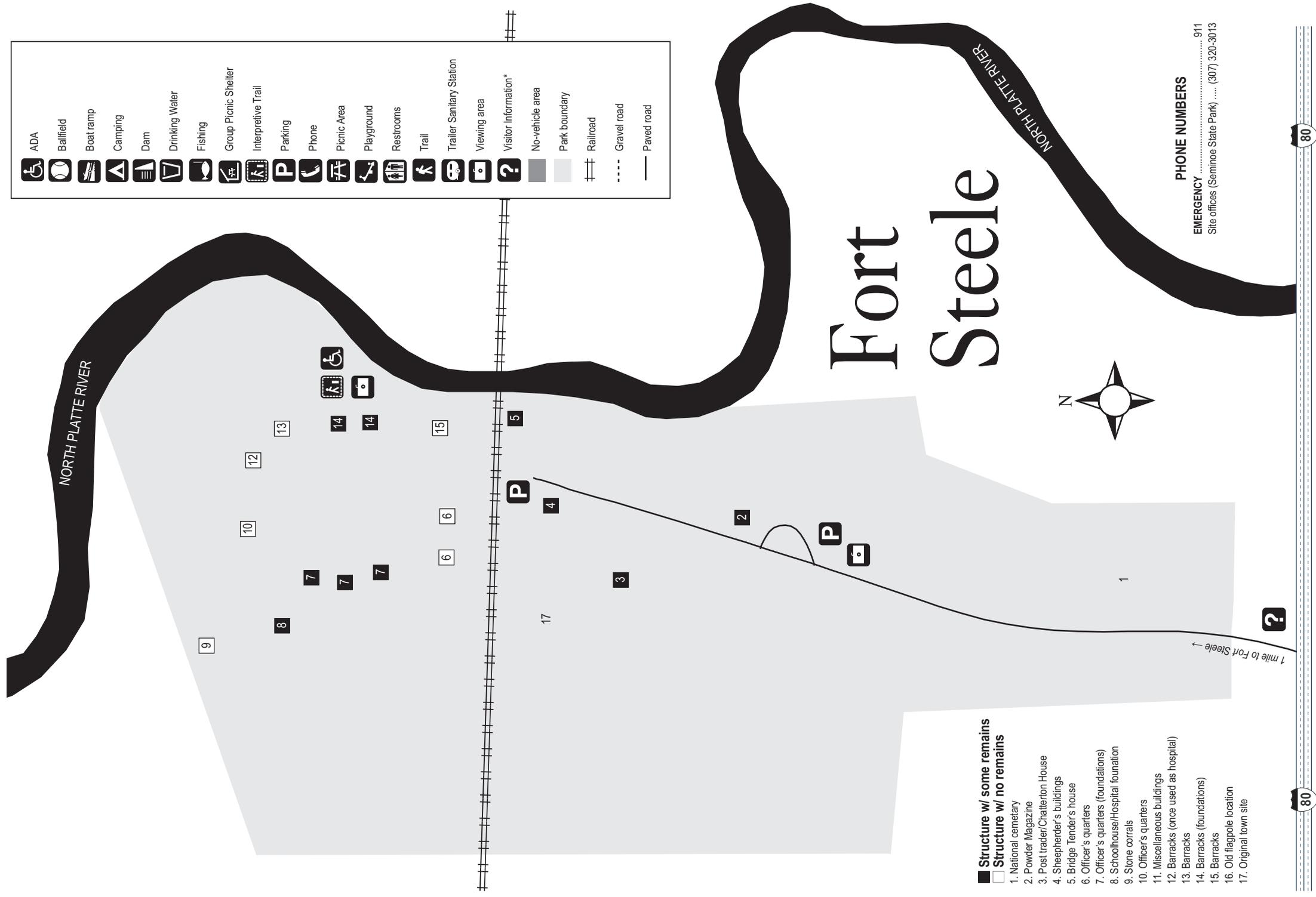


This frontier Army post has a fascinating history interlacing transportation with the military and the growth of the lumber and livestock industries in Wyoming.

ARTS. PARKS. HISTORY.

Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources

Fort Fred Steele State Historic Site is administered
by the Division of State Parks and Historic Sites, Wyoming
Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.
<http://wyospcr.state.wy.us/>



1. The cemetery served as a graveyard for soldiers, their dependents and civilians during army occupation. When the post was decommissioned, the Secretary of the Interior declared the cemetery exempt from sale or transfer to the public because soldiers were buried there. In 1892, the graves of the soldiers and their dependents were moved to Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Nebraska.

2. The Powder Magazine housed the fort's ammunition and therefore was located away from the main military complex. Ironically, it is one of the few fort structures remaining. The structure was built in 1881 from locally quarried stone and from materials fabricated in Omaha and shipped by rail to Fort Steele.

5. The Bridger Tender's House was constructed by the Union Pacific Railroad to serve as an employee surveillance point. The bridge tender could respond quickly to locomotive-caused fires and could remove flood debris that might damage the bridge, causing interruptions to railroad traffic.

14. Two stone foundations and chimneys remains of the five enlisted men's barracks. The walls were constructed of logs, boards and battens, while a shingled roof protected pine-board floors. Tar paper covered interior walls. Kitchens doubled as mess and washrooms, while iron bedsteads took up most of the floor space.