

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

FORT HALL (MILITARY)

Number 353

March 1979

The Hudson's Bay Company posts of Fort Hall and Fort Boise provided small havens for early travelers along the Oregon Trail. Here immigrants could rest and stock up on supplies with no fear of Indian trouble, as the British of Hudson's Bay Company were on friendly terms with the Indians in the area. With the outbreak of the Umatilla War in 1855, Fort Walla Walla was ordered abandoned, and the supplies fell into the hands of the Indians. Messengers were sent to Fort Boise with this story, and the post was soon abandoned. Fort Hall followed suit the next year. After the loss of the Hudson's Bay Company posts, there was an increase in the number of Indian attacks on immigrant traffic. A particularly disastrous attack in September 1860 led eventually to the establishment of the military Fort Boise in 1863. In the spring of 1865, three camps were established to the east of Fort Boise, at Camp Reed, Camp Wallace, and Camp Lander, this latter one situated near the site of old Fort Hall, at the Salt Lake-Virginia City and Boise roads. This camp was ordered abandoned the following spring as the site was deemed unsuitable for a permanent military post for two reasons: the flood which had ruined the Hudson's Bay Company post had left the bottomland marshy, and the main line of travel between Utah and the Montana mines had moved to the east.

In order to better protect the roads, Fort Hall was established May 27, 1870, in compliance with an order of March 15, 1870, and it was proclaimed a military reservation on October 12 of that same year. Lieutenant Clinton B. Sears located the site in Lincoln Valley where Lincoln Creek flows out of the canyon, about twelve miles east of Snake River and fifteen miles from the Fort Hall Indian Agency. The buildings on the post were erected in May of 1870, with Captain J. E. Putnam in command during the construction. The presence of United States soldiers not only provided safety for travelers but also seemed to attract settlers, especially to the Blackfoot area. The resident physician at the fort provided medical care for the settlers and the fort offered protection in times of trouble. As times gradually changed, the soldiers were no longer needed and Fort Hall was abandoned on May 1, 1883. During its time, however, Fort Hall was the major military installation in that important region, succeeding several temporary posts in the area, including Cantonment Loring (1849-50), Howe's Camp (1860), and Camp Lander (1865).

Originally the post consisted of the officer's quarters, company barracks, married soldiers quarters, kitchen and mess hall, guard house, quartermaster and commissary building, post hospital, bakery, blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, post trader, ice house, stables, granaries, wagon shed, harness shop, and saddler's room. After February 27, 1883, when the post was

ordered abandoned, most of the buildings were moved to Ross Fork and used for the Fort Hall Indian School. The parade ground (750 feet by 250 feet), with a row of cottonwoods planted in a horseshoe fashion around it, occupied the central reference point on the post, with the buildings situated around it.

These were listed in the 1871 report of the acting assistant surgeon as:

Officers Quarters: two frame buildings, 29 feet by 34 feet each, ceilinged, plastered, and painted, located on the east side of the parade grounds. Appurtenant to each was a kitchen and dining room. In the rear of each was a root cellar for storage.

Company Barrack: a single story dormitory building, 20 feet by 90 feet with shingle-roof, ceilinged, plastered, and painted, located on the south side of the parade grounds. Under average occupancy, the barrack allowed 616 cubic feet of air per man.

Married Soldier's Quarters: a semi-framed, log building, 26 feet by 64 feet, divided into four sets of quarters of two rooms each. The "ceilinged, plastered and painted" building was located 60 feet west of the guard house on the south side of the parade grounds.

Kitchen and Mess Hall: a shingle-roofed building, 20 feet by 30 feet, located 12 feet behind the company barrack on the south side of the parade grounds.

Guard House: a one-story log cabin with shingle-roof and board floor, containing a guard room (16 feet by 16 feet), prison room (9 feet by 12 feet), and cell (4 feet by 9 feet). The building was situated on the south side of the parade grounds, 50 feet west of the company barrack.

Quartermaster and Commissary Building: this 30 feet by 100 feet frame building with shingle-roof was divided into two rooms, and had a capacity to store six months supply of rations. The building was located on the north side of the parade grounds.

Post Hospital: an A-frame, one-story, shingled, plastered, and painted building, constructed in accordance with the "Plan of a Provisionary Hospital" (Surgeon General Office, July 27, 1871). It was located 50 feet west of the quartermaster and commissary building, on the north side of the parade grounds.

Bakery: a 16 foot by 26 foot building located 40 feet west of the hospital on the north side of the parade grounds.

Blacksmith's Shop: a log structure with a shingle-roof, measuring 16 feet by 26 feet, located on the northeast side of the parade grounds outside of the enclosure.

Post Trader: an 18 foot by 24 foot structure located 30 yards north of the blacksmith's and carpenter's workshops, outside of the enclosure and on the northeast side of the parade grounds.

Carpenter Shop: a 16 foot by 26 foot building located 100 feet west of the blacksmith's shop at the northeast side of the parade grounds, outside of the enclosure.

Ice House: a 14 foot by 17 foot building located 200 yards southeast of the parade grounds on a hillside. The building had the capacity to hold 40 tons of ice, which was supplied by the Blackfoot River.

Stables, two Granaries, Wagon Shed, Harness Shop, and Saddler's Rooms: all were log construction, except the granary and saddler's shop, which were constructed of lumber.

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