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Two Posts, Two Pasts

Preserving Forts Sisseton and Totten

Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten are considered two of the most well-preserved frontier forts in the former Dakota Territory. Located in South Dakota and North Dakota respectively, both were built on the eastern edge of the territory to support the United States Army's punitive campaigns against the Dakotas, or eastern Sioux, in the wake of the United States-Dakota War of 1862 in neighboring Minnesota. These posts were two of close to 150 forts established between the 1860s and 1890s in the military Division of the Missouri as the United States War Department sought to protect the white settlers who made their way west in ever-increasing numbers after the mid-nineteenth century. The names of towns large and small across western and northern plains states, like Fort Collins, Colorado, and Fort Shaw, Montana, evoke their history, but few physical structures remain in these places.[1]

Neither Fort Sisseton nor Fort Totten were particularly famous, nor were they built near large population centers. Fort Totten, with sixteen original structures erected primarily between 1868 and 1871, and Fort Sisseton, with fifteen original buildings constructed between 1864 and 1868, stand as significant sites of historic preservation on the Northern Great Plains. While both have been designated as state historical sites since the mid-twentieth century, that result was far from inevitable.

1. Mary Kate Ryan and Thomas Linn, "Fort Totten State Historic Site" in *Fort Totten: Military Post and Indian School, 1867–1959*, 2d ed., ed. Kathleen Davison (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2010), p. 97; John Whiteclay Chambers, *Oxford Companion to American Military History* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 75; Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West: Military Forts and Presidios and Posts Commonly Called Forts West of the Mississippi River to 1898* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); [J. W. Barlow and George L. Gillespie], *Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Division of the Missouri, Commanded by Lieutenant General P. H. Sheridan* (Chicago: Headquarters, Military Division of the Missouri, 1876).

The forts' long-term use as military bases and their later repurposing to serve other interests were major factors in their preservation.[2]

Three key circumstances contributed to the longevity of the two stations. First, the army deemed these posts as strategically significant, constructing them for permanence and using them for military exercises from the mid-1860s into the 1890s. Second, the buildings were frequently if not continually occupied after their decommissioning and before their designations as state historical sites. Finally, both locations' standings as sites of historical importance led to state and local investment in their preservation, which has helped maintain the structures into the present.

The two forts share another similarity in their connection to the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands of the Dakotas. Both were established as part of a line of forts the army constructed in its attempt to capture and punish those deemed responsible for the bloodshed of the United States-Dakota War.[3] As federal policy changed from one of war and containment to assimilation of American Indians, Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten had roles in overseeing the reservations that were established nearby. Fort Totten, which became a government-run boarding school once it no longer served a military purpose, is a particularly illustrative example of the policy change.

While the posts were built in Dakota Territory, events closely linked to the taking of traditional Dakota lands and the subsequent settlement of Minnesota led to their construction. Until the 1850s, several different bands of the Dakota people, sometimes referred to as the Santee, collectively held much of the land in present-day Minnesota.[4] As the

2. Ryan and Linn, "Fort Totten State Historic Site," p. 97; Paul Schmucker, *Historical Review and Plan for Preservation and Restoration: Fort Sisseton, Dakota Territory, 1888* (Mitchell, S.Dak.: Nohr & Associates, 1974), p. 1; South Dakota, Department of Game, Fish and Parks, "Fort Sisseton State Park Site Map," gfp.sd.gov/userdocs/ft_sisseton-campground-map.pdf, accessed 27 Dec. 2018; Harold H. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1996), pp. 61–65.

3. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, pp. 222, 229; Mary Lethert Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 22.

4. The Santees consisted of four bands: the Mdewankantons, "spiritual people who lived by the water"; Sissetons, "medicine people who lived by the water"; Wahpekutes, "people who shoot among the leaves"; and Wahpetons, "people who live in the forests."

Fort Sisseton, then known as Fort Wadsworth, forms the backdrop for this group of Dakota women displaced after the United States-Dakota War.

American frontier pushed westward, politicians and Office of Indian Affairs agents sought to end their communal ownership to create farmland for white settlers. In 1851, federal authorities and Dakota leaders negotiated the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and the Treaty of Mendota, under which the United States government pressured the Sissetons, Wahpetons, and Mdewakantons into signing away much of what would become the southern half of the state of Minnesota. The terms forced the bands onto a reservation made up of a twenty-mile-wide strip of land that ran for 150 miles along both banks of the Minnesota River. In exchange, the federal government was to supply annuities through two agencies: the Redwood (or Lower) Agency and the Yellow Medicine (or Upper) Agency. Seven years later, the United States once again took half of the Dakotas' reserved lands for a minimal price and no increase in annuities. Little Crow, a spokesman for the Red-

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Gwen Westerman, Bruce White, and Glenn Wasicuna, *Mni Sota Makoce: Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), p. 14.

wood Agency's Mdewankantons and the eventual leader of the attacks against settlers in 1862, observed the negotiations in 1851 and took part in them in 1858, the year Minnesota gained statehood.[5]

During Minnesota's early years as a state, a small military presence and regular federal annuities maintained an uneasy peace between the Dakotas and the growing white population. After the Civil War broke out in 1861, the United States increasingly struggled to pay for the annuities required by treaty and frequently made late payments or skipped them completely. Facing starvation in addition to the loss of their traditional ways, the Dakotas became increasingly desperate. On 17 August 1862, four young Santee men killed five white settlers. Fearing retribution and spurred on by young warriors who hoped they could win a war against an army stretched thin by the Civil War, several bands of Dakotas under Little Crow raided throughout southern Minnesota, destroying property and killing between four hundred and one thousand settlers and soldiers. Ultimately, the assaults involved fewer than one thousand Mdewakanton warriors and perhaps three hundred Sissetons and Wahpetons out of a total population of more than seven thousand Dakotas. The remainder either refused to participate or actively protected their non-Indian neighbors.[6]

The response from the United States military, however, had a sweeping effect on Dakotas throughout the region. In the wake of the violence, the army waged a campaign of vengeance against all Dakota people, not just the leaders and individuals directly involved. With the first attacks that August, the war department re-routed sixteen hundred troops to Minnesota under the command of Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley, who had served as a delegate to the 1851 treaty negotiations and later as the state's first governor. American troops quickly

5. Wingerd, *North Country*, pp. 272–79; Gary Clayton Anderson, *Little Crow: Spokeman for the Sioux* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), pp. 58–61, 94–112.

6. Gary Clayton Anderson, *Gabriel Renville: From the Dakota War to the Creation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation, 1825–1892* (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2018), pp. 30–35; Good Star Woman, "Good Star Woman's Recollection," Big Eagle, "Big Eagle's Account," and Little Crow, "Little Crow's Speech," all in *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862*, ed. Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), pp. 35–42; Anderson, *Little Crow*, p. 135; Wingerd, *North Country*, pp. 299–303, 306–7.

outnumbered the Dakotas, and in the decisive Battle of Wood Lake on 23 September 1862, Sibley's men completely overwhelmed the remaining three hundred warriors.[7]

With the end of the fighting, several bands of Dakotas fled Minnesota. Approximately two hundred warriors followed Little Crow west onto the plains of present-day North Dakota and into Canada. Those who remained behind believed the federal government would pardon them and gathered at a site in southeastern Minnesota waiting to surrender. Known as Camp Release because the Dakota peace faction there demanded the release of captured white settlers to the army, the settlement swelled to one hundred fifty lodges (over two thousand people) as many of the warring faction came in to surrender.[8]

When military authorities arrived, they gave the impression that they would accept the Dakotas' surrender with leniency, but Sibley soon sprang a trap. In an elaborate scheme, local Indian agent Thomas J. Galbraith and several soldiers posing as clerks separated the men from their families under the guise of distributing annuities, then swiftly arrested nearly four hundred. In the hasty trials that followed, some lasting under five minutes, a military tribunal sentenced 303 Dakota men to death. Sibley planned to carry out the executions swiftly, but the process required approval from President Abraham Lincoln. After investigating the way the tribunals had been run, Lincoln commuted all but thirty-eight of the original sentences. The mass hanging of the thirty-eight Dakotas, the event that is considered the official end of the United States-Dakota War, took place on 26 December 1862. Meanwhile, the army marched between sixteen and seventeen hundred Dakota women, children, and elderly to Fort Snelling, south of present-day Saint Paul, Minnesota. Throughout the winter of 1862–1863, they suffered from starvation and disease that ran rampant through the internment camp.[9]

Not all of the Dakotas were interned at Fort Snelling. Little Crow's

7. Anderson, *Little Crow*, pp. 158–61.

8. Wingerd, *North Country*, pp. 311–13.

9. Linda M. Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile: The Untold Stories of Captives in the Aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019), pp. 24, 35; Wingerd, *North Country*, pp. 313, 334; Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, p. 37.

followers continued to evade the army as two columns, one under Sibley and one under Brigadier General Alfred H. Sully, pursued them. Others, largely mixed-race Dakotas who had ties to missionary communities in Minnesota, worked as army scouts, joining Sibley's and Sully's forces to help track down the remaining fugitives. Led by Gabriel Renville, the son of a French and Dakota fur trader, the Dakota scouts served a key role in the army's punitive expeditions of 1863 and 1864. A dangerous endeavor, scouting also required the men to make difficult compromises. They worked on the front lines against those still considered "hostile," many of them relatives or acquaintances, whom they were often instructed to kill on sight. As the operations in Dakota Territory escalated, army commanders often coerced captured Dakota men into becoming scouts while others joined to support their families or buy their release from military camps.[10]

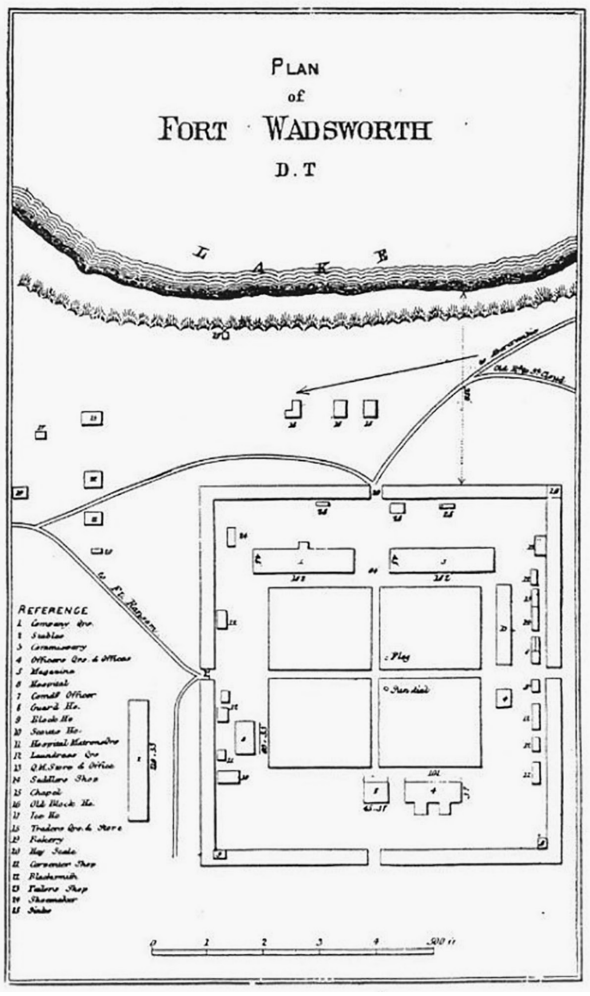
After 1862, the Dakotas were scattered across Dakota Territory. The thirteen hundred people who survived their imprisonment at Fort Snelling were initially removed to the Crow Creek Indian Reservation along the Missouri River and eventually resettled at the Niobrara Indian Reservation, later named the Santee Indian Reservation, in northern Nebraska. Approximately one hundred fifty Mdewakanton warriors, along with twenty-eight hundred Sissetons and Wahpetons who had not participated in the fighting had fled to regions north and west of Minnesota. Some three hundred Dakota men marched through the territory while serving as army scouts.[11] The early 1860s also marked the expansion of wars against other American Indians as white settlers, with the support of the federal government, continued to push west. From 1863 through the late 1880s, military forts sprang up across the West. Most were intended for temporary use and existed for only a few years. Others, like Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten, were built for permanence due to their strategic importance.

Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten bear many similarities in their formal design and the political context of their creation. Major General

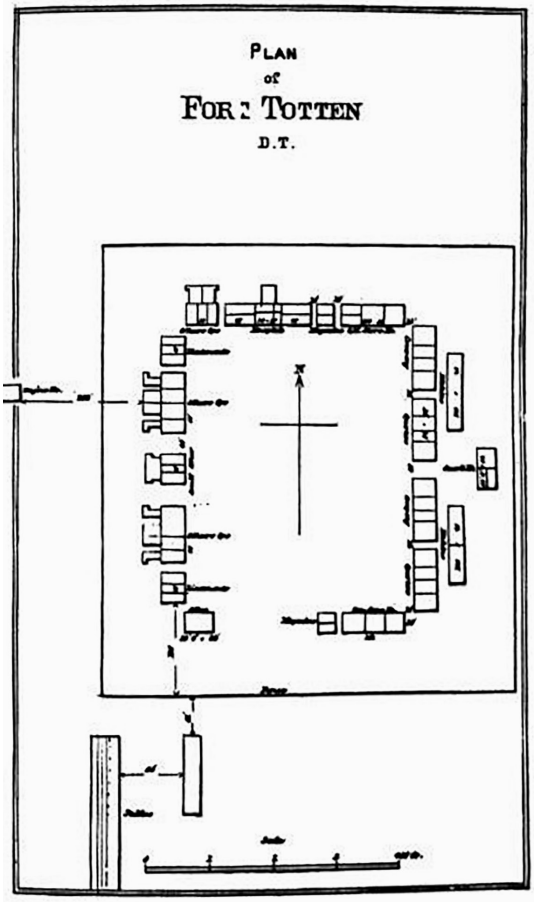
10. Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile*, pp. 132, 144–46.

11. Wingerd, *North Country*, p. 334; Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile*, p. 132; Robert W. Sebesta, "Early Churches in South Dakota: A Lasting Legacy," *South Dakota History* 48 (Winter 2018): 303.

John Pope, commander of the army's Department of the Northwest between 1862 and 1865, called for a chain of outposts in Dakota Territory to provide bases of operation for his troops in a series of campaigns in 1864. He proposed creating three in northern Dakota—one at Devils Lake, one near Fort Clark trading post, and one on the Yellowstone River—along with one on the James River in southern Dakota. All four would be constructed between 1864 and 1867. Initially called Fort Wadsworth, the post meant for the James River position



During a survey of frontier outposts, army engineers sketched the layout of Fort Wadsworth, which became Fort Sisseton in 1876.



Like its counterpart in southern Dakota Territory, Fort Totten featured the parade ground at its center.

was soon relocated eastward and would be renamed Fort Sisseton in 1876.[12] Although Pope's men never built the proposed fort on Devils Lake during their operations in 1864 and 1865, the site became the location for Fort Totten in 1867.[13]

12. Originally named for Civil War general James W. Wadsworth, the post was renamed to avoid confusion with the fort on Staten Island, New York. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 16. For the purposes of this article, the name Fort Sisseton is used throughout.

13. Todd Kapler, *Fort Sisseton: Report on the 1992 Archaeological Excavations at a 19th Century Frontier Military Post in Marshall County, South Dakota* (Vermillion: Historic Preservation Information Service, University of South Dakota, 1993), p. 1; William E.

In August 1864, Major John Clowney of the Thirtieth Wisconsin Infantry Regiment along with 11 officers and 311 enlisted men from three regiments, including the thirtieth, began construction on Fort Sisseton. They selected a site twenty-five miles south of an encampment of Gabriel Renville's scouts. Renville established his camp, consisting of Sisseton and Wahpeton scouts, their dependents, and a band of Mdewakantons who had surrendered to him in March 1864, at the northern end of the Coteau des Prairies in late 1863 and early 1864. Although Pope initially called for placing the post along the James River, Sibley convinced him to position it on the coteau, arguing that this location would provide troops with easier access to clean drinking water and timber for building materials.[14]

Fort Sisseton's locale also placed the regiments in an area where the situation was still quite volatile. The units at the fort worked closely with Renville's scouts, who frequently served as the primary point of contact between the army and displaced Indians and who initiated most of the confrontations with hostile groups. The camps under Renville grew as he recruited new scouts and as more bands surrendered or fled their reservation on the Missouri River. By late January 1865, one thousand Dakotas resided in Renville's camps, where they increasingly depended on the army for protection and food. In addition to serving as a place of refuge, the scout camps also acted as a buffer between American Indians and white settlers arriving in the region.[15] As a result, Fort Sisseton's service as a hub for military operations on the eastern Dakota prairies included pursuing fugitive Dakotas, aiding those who surrendered, and protecting the white newcomers who sought to establish permanent settlements in the area.

Soldiers first erected the structures at Fort Sisseton from local timber in the summer of 1864, hurriedly putting up shelters before winter arrived. A twenty-horsepower sawmill aided the early construction.

Stark, *National Historic Landmark Evaluation: Fort Sisseton* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Stark Preservation Planning, LLC, 2015), p. 10; Kapler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 9.

14. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 61; Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, pp. 49, 52; Kapler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 9. Formed by glaciers, the prairie couteau is a lake-dotted plateau that rises above the prairies of eastern South Dakota.

15. Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, pp. 53–56.

Troops also built two blockhouses of hand-hewn oak on the northwest and southeast corners of the fort. Major Robert Rose of the Second Minnesota Cavalry wanted to construct a traditional stockade for defense but realized the region lacked the timber needed and ordered the construction of an earthen rampart with a six-foot-deep trench at its base instead. Work on the fort halted over the winter but resumed in the spring of 1865. At that time, troops used cut fieldstone for many of the new buildings due to the area's abundance of glacial till, or stone left behind from glaciation during the Ice Age. Fort Sisseton saw a flurry of construction in that year. With the aid of a steam-powered sawmill and shingle machine, soldiers created and used 221,000 feet of lumber and 214,00 feet of shingles. The men also hauled approximately 13,800 yards of stone and manufactured 215,000 bricks.[16]

By 9 December 1865, soldiers and contractors had completed sixteen buildings: two cut fieldstone barracks, one cut fieldstone stable, two log

16. Norma Johnson, *Chilson's History of Fort Sisseton* (N.p.: ESCO Publishing, 1996), p. 49; Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, pp. 63–65.

Soldiers and an unidentified woman pose near some of the original structures at Fort Sisseton in the 1870s.

bastions, a log warehouse, a log magazine, and log shops for carpenters, wheelwrights, and blacksmiths. The following May, the commander of the Military Division of the Missouri, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, recommended that the army designate the facility as a permanent post.[17] When army engineers described Fort Sisseton in 1876, they noted that the fort possessed two stone buildings "in good condition" to serve as "quarters for four companies." The army purposed two brick buildings as officers' quarters. The adjutant's office, one-and-a-half-story hospital, one-story guardhouse, magazine, and stable consisted of either stone, brick, or a combination. Most of the other buildings meant for storage or work, such as the storehouse and laundresses' quarters, were built of logs.[18] Even with stone and brick construction, the buildings required regular upkeep, and soldiers continued making repairs until 1888, a year before the army abandoned Fort Sisseton.[19]

In northern Dakota Territory, Pope had canceled his initial orders to construct a fort at Devils Lake in the fall of 1864, but over the next three years the army strengthened its presence in Dakota Territory and determined it needed an outpost in the region. In 1867, the year construction began on Fort Totten, the Sissetons and Wahpetons negotiated a new treaty with the United States establishing two reservations: Devils Lake Indian Reservation, later renamed Spirit Lake Indian Reservation and situated just south of Devils Lake in present-day North Dakota, and Lake Traverse Indian Reservation near Fort Sisseton. The army constructed Fort Totten on land adjacent to the Devils Lake reservation on the lake's southern shore in order to defend travel routes to the west and oversee the reservation. The Sissetons and Wahpetons at Devils Lake had suffered extreme hardships since fleeing to the northern plains, especially during the winter of 1866–1867. As a result, the work of the units at Fort Totten turned partially from partaking in military operations to supporting the reservation and protecting peaceful groups from the harassment of hostile bands.[20]

17. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, pp. 63–65.

18. [Barlow and Gillespie], *Outline Descriptions*, pp. 16, 19.

19. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 64; Kapler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 15; Johnson, *Chilson's History of Fort Sisseton*, p. 107.

20. Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, pp. 58, 69; Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile*, p. 157; Elijah Black Thunder et al., *Ehanna Woyakapi: History and Culture of the Sisseton-Wahpeton*

Starting in the summer of 1867, General Alfred H. Terry ordered three hundred men under Colonel Samuel A. Wainwright to build Fort Totten. Similar to Fort Sisseton, troops initially constructed a temporary fort of crude buildings made of logs from local oak trees, which the men completed with the help of a sawmill from nearby Fort Stevenson. The temporary Fort Totten had a six-hundred-by-four-hundred-foot layout with a high palisade wall marking the perimeter. After Congress authorized construction of a permanent post in 1869, the army hired contractors to rebuild Totten with long-lasting materials approximately eight hundred yards south of the original site. The builders relied on bricks made from local clay and lime burned from limestone gathered on the shores of Devils Lake, giving the station a more uniform look than Fort Sisseton had at the time.[21] The army's description of Fort Totten nine years later reflects this standardization. Five buildings served as quarters for four companies and their officers. The other buildings included a "hospital, guardhouse, magazine, bakery, [and] offices." The grounds also held two "store houses . . . with capacity for a year's supplies," except for grain that was stored in a log building. All of the structures, excluding the grain storeroom, were "brick with stone foundations." By the time of the 1876 report, however, the stable with an attached blacksmith shop was in poor condition.[22]

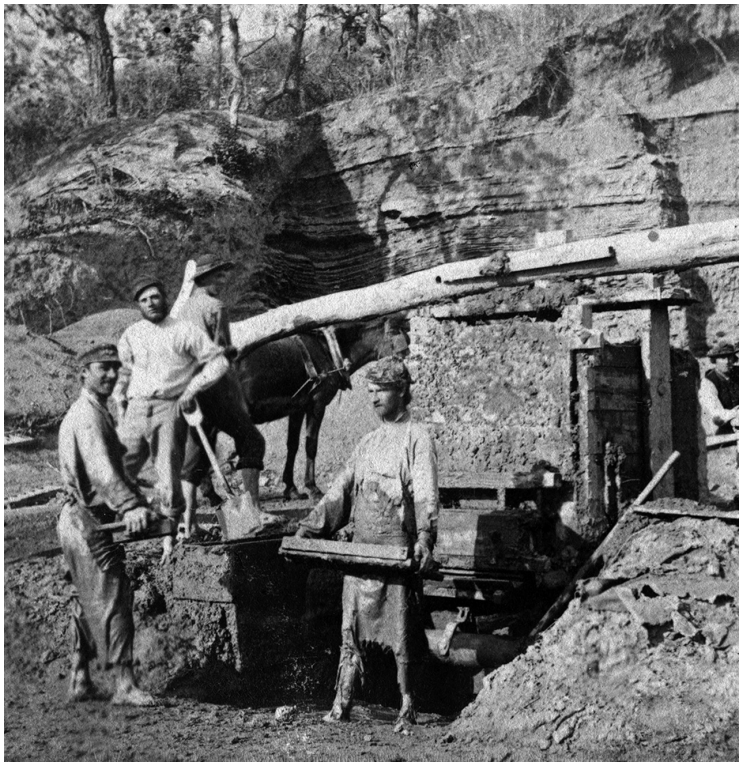
Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten feature similar layouts that demonstrate how the war department's model plans served as guides for standardizing frontier outposts in the 1860s. In 1860, the department included suggestions for fort layouts in a report titled *Regulations Concerning Barracks and Quarters for the Army of the United States*, which allowed for individual variations but recommended certain patterns for the arrangement of buildings.[23] It advised that a garrison should

Sioux Tribe of South Dakota (Sisseton, S.Dak.: Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 1975), p. 9; J. Michael McCormack, "Soldiers and Sioux: Military Lives among the Indians at Fort Totten" in *Fort Totten*, ed. Davison, pp. 8–9, 17.

21. Foughty, *Fort Totten*, pp. 3–5; Mark Diedrich, *Mni Wakan Oyate (Spirit Lake Nation): A History of the Sisituwan, Wahpeton, Pabaksa, and Other Dakota that Settled at Spirit Lake, North Dakota* (Fort Totten, N.Dak.: Cankdeska Cikana Community College Publishing, 2007), p. 58.

22. [Barlow and Gillespie], *Outline Descriptions*, p. 20.

23. Alison K. Hoagland, *Army Architecture in the West: Forts Laramie, Bridger, and D. A. Russell, 1849–1912* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), pp. 147–66, and "Vil-



Workers use local materials to make bricks for the construction of permanent buildings at Fort Totten in 1869.

possess "officers' quarters, chaplain's quarters, and officers' mess on one line, facing a parade ground open at both ends and varying in breadth . . . from 250 to 400 feet," with the other buildings, especially the soldiers' barracks, opposite the officers' line.[24] Frequently, the guardhouse and headquarters sat on the opposing ends of the parade ground. Situating the officers' quarters on one side and the soldiers' barracks on the other maintained a necessary sense of hierarchy.[25]

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lage Constructions: U.S. Army Forts on the Plains, 1848–1890," *Winterthur Portfolio* 34 (Winter 1999): 222; R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, *National Historic Context for Department of Defense Installations, 1790–1940*, vol. 1 (Baltimore, Md.: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1995), p. 154.

24. Goodwin & Associates, *National Historic Context*, p. 154.

25. Hoagland, "Village Constructions," p. 223.

The construction patterns of the two Dakota installations both followed the war department's guidelines. Most notably, the buildings at both forts sit on the perimeter of the parade grounds with the company barracks situated directly across from the officers' and commanding officer's quarters. The fact that Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten so closely resemble one another reflects the army's move to codify its existing practices in the post-Civil War years. A Division of the Missouri survey in 1872 also illustrates these early efforts at standardization. All of the western forts, according to the report, adhered to a general pattern but allowed for differences based on local terrain and resources.[26]

Defenses, or a lack of them, were also a defining feature of frontier forts. Stockades were a regular feature of eastern forts, where they served a defensive purpose. The army eagerly tried to include palisades in western outposts as well, but many locations in the region lacked the resources required to build them. At Fort Sisseton, the lack of local timber forced Major Rose to incorporate the earthen embankment. Fort Totten, in contrast, had a wooden stockade surrounding the fort,

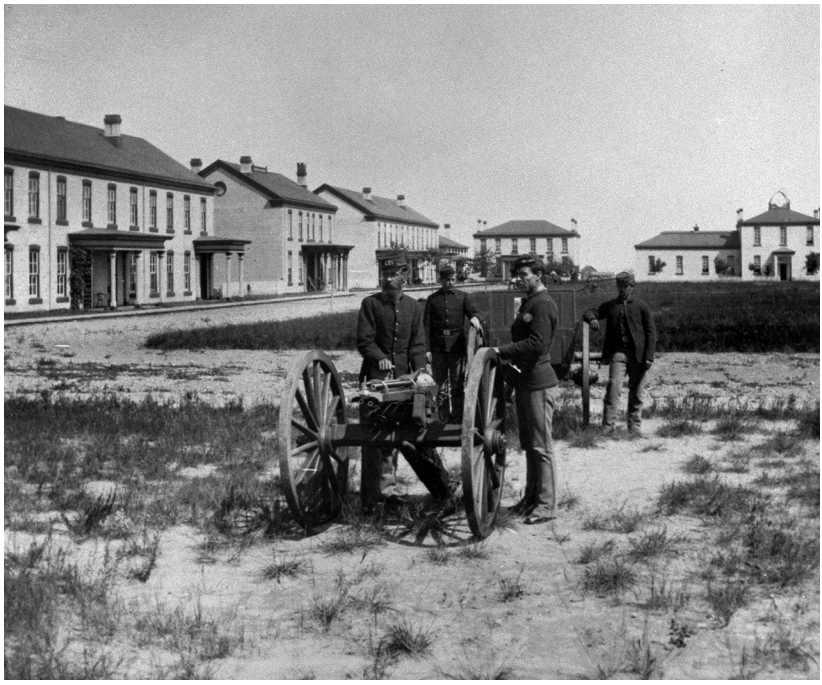
26. Goodwin & Associates, *National Historic Context*, p. 154. For the layouts of posts across the frontier, *see* [Barlow and Gillespie], *Outline Descriptions*.

This 1878 view of Fort Totten shows the officers' quarters, administration buildings, and headquarters at left and center. The soldiers' barracks were situated just off the right edge of the image.

but as the 1876 description indicates, it was in poor condition less than a decade later.[27]

Just as physical defenses were not always feasible, neither were they always necessary. As historian Alison K. Hoagland points out, the nature of American Indian warfare often made them impractical, as Plains Indian forces rarely laid siege to or directly assaulted established forts. Posts along emigrant routes, such as those on the Missouri River or the Bozeman Trail, were more likely to have stockades because they faced a greater risk of harassment from local tribes. As the threats dwindled in the late nineteenth century, however, so too did the need for strong defenses. Fort Sisseton, for instance, never experienced a direct assault or siege, and Renville's Dakota scouts rather than army soldiers engaged in most of the violent encounters that took place in

27. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 63; [Barlow and Gillespie], *Outline Descriptions*, p. 20.



Four troops man a Gatling gun, precursor to the modern machine gun, at Fort Totten in 1881.

the area. Army personnel there dismantled the earthen defense in 1875 when the risk of attack became negligible.[28]

The materials used to build the two stations mark the biggest differences in the construction of Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten. After the Civil War, the federal government focused on paying its war debt and attempted to save money wherever possible. Consequently, construction of frontier forts relied heavily on locally available resources and troop labor, allowing the military to build frontier installations cheaply. The construction materials for both these installations came from the surrounding landscape, which impacted later repair efforts and the permanence of the structures. The bricks used at Fort Totten, created from local lime and clay, for instance, required continual maintenance and repairs. When contractors learned that exposure to moisture caused the bricks to disintegrate, they painted them to seal out the elements. Even after the fort's decommissioning and conversion to a school in 1891, the buildings required regular painting to protect them from deterioration.[29]

The army decommissioned Fort Sisseton shortly before South Dakota achieved statehood in 1889.[30] For the next forty-four years, a series of caretakers and lessees, who made inconsistent repairs and alterations to the buildings, took over the post. The lack of continuous occupancy and the inconsistent care of individual buildings impacted the condition of the structures.

The first custodian at Fort Sisseton was Edward Ruggles, whom the United States Department of the Interior appointed when the post was decommissioned, but he did little to maintain the structures. In fact, during his brief time as custodian, Ruggles dismantled two of the log buildings and used them for fuel. The State of South Dakota then employed caretakers to maintain upkeep of the buildings until 1902.

28. Hoagland, *Army Architecture*, pp. 29–38, and "Village Constructions," pp. 218–19; Marvin Scott, *History of Fort Sisseton, South Dakota* (National Park Service, Branch of National Planning and State Cooperation, Region Two, n.d.), p. 15; Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 71.

29. Goodwin & Associates, *National Historic Context*, pp. 23, 154; Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 61; Ryan and Linn, "Fort Totten State Historic Site," pp. 97–99; Diedrich, *Mni Wakan Oyate*, p. 68.

30. Johnson, *Chilson's History of Fort Sisseton*, pp. 108–9.

During these years the state anticipated using the fort as a training ground for the South Dakota National Guard. Although those plans never materialized, the national guard officially owned the grounds. In 1893, the state adjutant general, George A. Silsby, documented the condition of the remaining twenty buildings at the fort. He reported that eleven of the brick and stone buildings, including the surgeon's house, commanding officer's house, hospital, and library, among others, were in good condition. He counted only six structures made of mixed materials, such as the blacksmith shop, sergeants' quarters, and bakery, as being in fair condition. The final three buildings, including one of stone and the two remaining log structures, were in poor condition.[31]

After making his report, Silsby replaced Ruggles with a new caretaker, Daniel Hubbard, who managed the site between 1894 and 1896. He found maintaining the structures overwhelming and gained approval from Governor Charles H. Sheldon to sell some of the buildings and fixtures in 1894. Hubbard also received as part of his pay an old log commissary and a frame bakery, which he dismantled and sold for scrap lumber. By 1896 when a new custodian, A. Sherin, replaced Hubbard, only fourteen of the original twenty buildings remained. Sherin maintained the grounds until 1900 when the adjutant general relieved him of his duties due to negligence. He had allowed the buildings to continue to deteriorate and left the surrounding fields overgrown, creating concern that prairie fires might damage the structures.[32]

Beginning in 1902, the South Dakota National Guard leased out the fort, allowing a series of companies and individuals to rent the former post. The Fort Sisseton Stock Company first occupied the grounds and used the 640 acres of the former military reservation for agricultural purposes. The company owner fenced the property around the fort proper to ensure that livestock stayed out. With the officers' quarters still in good condition, the organization rented them out to seasonal hunters. Without use, other buildings, such as the guardhouse, were on the verge of crumbling.[33]

31. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, pp. 229–32.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., pp. 230–34.

In 1908, Herbert Warren Allen, a prominent Saint Paul attorney and president of the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Gun Club who had hunted in the vicinity, took over the lease for the next twenty-five years. He used the former Fort Sisseton as a cattle operation, summer home, and fall hunting headquarters and hired a group of men to restore the buildings. They almost completely repaired the library and made it livable. They likewise fully reconstructed the interior of the old hospital, replacing plaster, adding new linoleum flooring, fixing the roof, screening in the porch, and installing a lighting system. During the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, Allen and Chicago millionaire William D. Boyce, a frequent visitor to Sisseton area, hosted a group of senators there for hunting season after the restorations were complete. Allen's daughter Edith Allen Goltz wrote that they entertained more than forty guests, who came in smaller groups for two to four days before returning to Washington, D.C. Allen even had a private telephone installed so the senators could stay updated on affairs in the nation's capital.[34]

After Allen suffered a stroke in 1917, Boyce sublet the old hospital as a hunting lodge, adding a large fireplace on the east wall. Once Allen died in 1921, his son, Herbert Warren Allen, Jr., managed the grounds until the lease expired in 1933. At that time, the younger Allen built his own personal hunting lodge just outside the fort's grounds. While several buildings received extensive repairs under the lessees, those used for agricultural purposes got less attention, leaving them in much poorer condition by the 1930s.[35]

In North Dakota, the army officially decommissioned Fort Totten on 21 December 1890, but its usefulness as a military post had been in decline for many years. By the late 1870s, the army's presence at Totten had become more a nuisance than a source of support for those living on the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation on Devils Lake. The reservation had its own government and police force, making the policing function of the fort obsolete. By the 1880s, the troops found themselves with less and less work, and drunkenness became a problem. When the army closed the installation in 1890, it turned over control of the site to

34. Ibid., pp. 234–35.
35. Ibid., pp. 234–40.

When its use as a hunting lodge ended in 1933, Fort Sisseton's hospital building fell into disrepair.

the Department of the Interior, and the superintendent of the Indian school on the Spirit Lake reservation quickly repurposed the buildings for classes.[36]

The new Fort Totten Indian Industrial School was a boarding facility designed to assimilate Indian children into white society by separating pupils from their traditional ways of life and social structures. Curriculum instructed girls in European American styles of homemaking, while boys received training in trades like carpentry, masonry, plastering, and plumbing to steer them into careers as farmers and tradesmen. Not coincidentally, these skills were needed for the upkeep of Fort Totten's buildings, and students composed the primary labor force responsible for their maintenance. The students' school schedules reflected the need for their labor. Mornings were reserved for academic

36. McCormack, "Soldiers and Sioux," pp. 19–23.

coursework and afternoons for work in various trades. The students took on numerous repair and construction projects in the early 1890s, including renovating the old barracks, constructing a new water tower, and establishing a new electric plant to replace old gas and kerosene lamps.[37]

The Fort Totten Indian Industrial School struggled to recruit students from the neighboring Spirit Lake Indian Reservation, where it competed with a Catholic mission school established in 1874 by the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, known colloquially as the Grey Nuns. Both schools were boarding schools, but many Spirit Lake reservation parents objected to the compulsory attendance and English-only instruction of the government-run industrial school. To counteract the lack of local students, the industrial school focused on recruiting and enrolling those from the farther reaches of North Dakota and Montana. In the 1890s and early 1900s, the school went through several superintendents, and life for students was particularly harsh. They faced an array of punishments, such as being forced to march in below-zero

37. Merlan E. Paaverud, Jr., "Swimming with the Current: Education at the Fort Totten Indian School," in *Fort Totten: Military Post and Indian School, 1867–1959*, ed. Larry Remele (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1986), pp. 43–45.

Student labor helped to maintain and modernize the buildings at the Fort Totten Indian School. The water tower was one of the first projects completed.

temperatures, for offenses such as lying, playing cards, or smoking. Similarly, the administrators kept students from eating with other family members and prevented parents from visiting to try to break tribal community ties. In 1910, the school adopted a less harsh "home school" policy that allowed families to maintain closer connections and led to an increase in enrollments.[38]

Budget shortfalls forced the school's brief closure from 1917 to 1919, but increased funding from the Office of Indian Affairs allowed the school to resume classes as well as operate a "preventorium" to care for sufferers of tuberculosis in 1919. Fort Totten eventually transitioned into a combination boarding/day school at the beginning of the Great Depression, allowing it to compete with the local public schools that had recently opened their doors to American Indians. Despite struggling with finances for much of the next two decades, the administration successfully maintained the buildings. A survey of the school in 1942, for example, described the girl's dormitory as "homelike" and in relatively good condition. Fort Totten continued to function as an educational facility until the opening of a new campus east of the original site. Following a resolution on 6 March 1959, the State of North Dakota accepted transfer of the property from the Department of the Interior and placed it under the care of the State Historical Society, which assumed ownership in 1960.[39]

The buildings at Fort Totten and Fort Sisseton received differing degrees of care in the period directly following their military use. The structures at Fort Sisseton underwent numerous alterations and repairs that served their various occupants. This approach made them more livable for the lessees but involved adding modern amenities and building materials that altered their historic appearance. Fort Totten's role as an Indian industrial school led to more consistent care from the students and administrators who occupied the facility. Its buildings were updated with modern amenities as well, but unlike Fort Sisseton, its secondary use contributed to the site's historical significance. Ulti-

38. Ibid., pp. 46–48; James T. Carroll, "A Beacon of Indian Education: Fort Totten, North Dakota," in *Fort Totten*, ed. Davison, pp. 26–27, 31–32.

39. Paaverud, "Swimming with the Current," pp. 51–55.

This image of the Fort Totten Indian School band reflects both the wide age range of the students and efforts to assimilate them into white culture.

mately, both sites were deemed worthy of preservation for their roles in the region's history.

By the early 1930s, the South Dakota National Guard no longer had an immediate use for Fort Sisseton. In 1933, the state legislature created a board to dispose of the property. American Legion Post No. 80 in the nearby town of Britton, South Dakota, however, successfully lobbied to save the installation. The Britton post and the Fort Sisseton Memorial Association subsequently established a transient camp at the site for seventy to one hundred homeless men during the Great Depression. In exchange for one dollar a day plus free shelter, the men worked to mend the aging facilities. Some restoration work at this time diverged from historical continuity. Volunteers added a second-story hayloft and gambrel roof to the originally one-story gable-roof horse barn, for example. As a result, the National Park Service took over the rehabilitation efforts in 1935 with funding from the Works Progress

Administration (WPA). The administration also sponsored research at the National Archives and archaeological work on the site and initiated significant building repairs. The officers' quarters underwent extensive renovation while workers weatherproofed multiple buildings and replaced or repaired damaged roofs. The WPA also restored the north barracks, fixing the roof that had blown off in a windstorm, and the foundation of the icehouse. Workers landscaped the area south of the fort walls and re-dug and sodded the earthwork embankment on all four sides as well.[40]

In 1947, the state legislature officially transferred responsibility for Fort Sisseton from the South Dakota National Guard to the Department of Game, Fish and Parks, stipulating that it be "preserved as a historical feature . . . open to the public."[41] The National Park Service had completed its restoration work by 1939, but the site still needed constant maintenance, in one instance requiring an appropriation of twenty-five thousand dollars from the State of South Dakota to refurbish crumbling roofs. To help ensure consistent funding, the 1959 legislature passed a bill designating Fort Sisseton a state park and stipulating that admission fees be used for building maintenance.[42]

Since then, restoration efforts have sought to return the structures to their appearance during the era of army occupation. Apart from the gambrel roof, which has remained on the horse barn since the pre-National Park Service repairs, conservation work has removed alterations made to the buildings after its decommissioning in 1889. Historical consultants in 1974, for example, recommended the removal of electrical fixtures when they had been identified as post-1888 additions.[43]

Preservation of the buildings at Fort Sisseton has required continued commitment and investment. One year after Fort Sisseton gained listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, the state commissioned a plan for preservation and restoration. The proposal

40. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, pp. 240–42; Kapler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 2; Stark, *National Historic Landmark Evaluation*, p. 12.

41. Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, p. 245.

42. Ibid., p. 246.

43. Schmucker, *Historical Review and Plan*, p. 53.

The south barracks at Fort Sisseton show the state of decay the National Park Service found when it took over renovation efforts in 1935.

called for rebuilding the magazine; reconstructing the commanding officer's quarters, doctor's quarters, guardhouse, and carpenter/blacksmith shop; and stabilizing the adjutant's office, south and north barracks, barn, hospital, and library. The report estimated the repairs at seventy-five thousand dollars. All told, South Dakota's Department of Game, Fish and Parks spent $323,169 for maintenance and repairs of various buildings between 1953 and 1990.[44]

Fort Totten's use as a school until 1959 necessitated the regular maintenance of its historic buildings. Entrusted with the facility in 1960, the State Historical Society of North Dakota invested considerable effort in its preservation and development as a historic site for the public. At the time of its application for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, the North Dakota Legislature appropriated funds for the site's restoration. Its listing on the National Register in 1971 made

44. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Fort Sisseton, Britton, S.Dak.," South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre; Schuler, *Fort Sisseton*, pp. 243, 247; Schmucker, *Historical Review and Plan*, p. 97.

The fully restored soldiers' barracks illustrate the extent of reconstruction accomplished at Fort Sisseton since the mid-1930s.

it eligible for matching funds from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and helped to secure money to maintain the buildings and develop public programming.[45]

Fort Totten's time as a school also shaped how the State Historical Society of North Dakota interpreted its historical significance. Much of the restoration work has reflected both its service as an army post and its later use as an Indian boarding school. In contrast to the renovation of Fort Sisseton that has returned all the buildings to their pre-1888 designs, Fort Totten's educational period carried as much weight as its military service. The State Historical Society of North Dakota has attempted to capture the aesthetics of both eras. Some buildings display

45. U.S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Fort Totten, N.Dak.," p. 2, npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp, and "How to List a Property," nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/how-to-list-a-property.htm, both accessed 19 Sept. 2019.

a gray with red trim paint scheme to reflect the military period, while others exhibit a white with green trim pattern to imitate the boarding school generation.[46]

Historic preservation remains an ongoing process for both sites. As recently as 2015, the State of North Dakota appropriated five hundred thousand dollars to restore the hospital/cafeteria building, with the historical society's foundation adding another hundred thousand dollars to the efforts. Fort Sisseton was recently nominated for National Historic Landmark status, a designation that would provide the site with greater access to funding and assistance from the National Park Service.[47] Ultimately, Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten, like other historic sites, are preserved to relate important stories about the past. Both posts are significant to the history of the United States Army in the West and to the communities of Dakota people associated with them. Continued investment in Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten in the future are key to preserving physical structures and funding the research and interpretation that expands historical knowledge of the time, place, and people.

46. State Historical Society of North Dakota, "Fort Totten State Historic Site–History," history.nd.gov/historicsites/totten/tottenhistory2.html, accessed 17 Aug. 2019.

47. Guinn Hinman, "Preservation Efforts and the Fort Totten State Historic Site," *Prairie Places* (State Historical Society of North Dakota newsletter) 7 (Winter 2018): 3; South Dakota, Department of Game, Fish & Parks, "Events: Fort Sisseton and the National Historic Landmark Nomination," gfp.sd.gov/events/detail/947/, accessed 18 Aug. 2019. For the full range of benefits that come with a National Historic Landmark designation, *see* National Park Service, "Benefits for Properties Designated as National Historic Landmarks," nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/benefits.htm, accessed 18 Aug. 2019.

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On the covers: In this issue, Heather Mulliner explores Forts Sisseton and Totten, both constructed in the aftermath of the United States-Dakota War of 1862. Preservation efforts helped restore several buildings at both sites, including the hospital at Fort Sisseton (front). Pictured on the back are original structures that likely served as officers' quarters at Fort Sisseton.