

# Fort Laramie

Fort Laramie, the military post, was founded in 1849. It marked the gateway to the Rocky Mountains. It served many functions throughout its history. It was located along the Oregon Trail to protect and supply emigrant wagon trains. It later became a major link in the Pony Express, Overland Stage and transcontinental telegraph systems. It also served as a base of operations for the High Plains Indian Wars.

It was the first sign of civilization the emigrants had seen in six weeks. The emigrants were now 1/3 of the way to the Willamette Valley. Here, they rested and regrouped. Some would give up the dream, turn around and go home, but most made the decision to push ahead.



There was only one building at Ft. Laramie that warranted a visit by the Oregon-bound emigrants--the post trader's store. It was the only reliable post office within 300 miles. Supplies could be purchased here too although prices were outrageously high. Tobacco, for instance, that could be had for a 5¢ in St. Louis, cost a \$1.00 here.

Luckily, only a few of the emigrants needed to purchase supplies at Ft. Laramie; most wanted to sell their excess. Their overloaded wagons had become a greater and greater burden, but most held on until Ft. Laramie--in hopes they could earn some money for their extra supplies. But the fort trader wasn't buying.

So here the emigrants underwent wholesale dumping. The Trail near Ft. Laramie was littered with heirloom furniture, stoves and food. One emigrant saw ten tons of bacon by the side of the Trail. Despite the temptation, the emigrants did not pick up this valuable litter because weight was the great enemy of their wagons.

Fort Laramie was never enclosed by a wall. Fort Laramie was always an open fort that depended upon its location and its garrison of troops for security. The fort was later sold to the American Fur Company, and they rebuilt it as an adobe structure in 1841. The fur trade was in decline by then and fur traders would be gone from Ft. Laramie by 1849, when the army bought them out and embarked on a major expansion. Their duty was to protect the emigrants from the increasingly hostile Sioux.

*Emigrant/Author Francis Parkman:*

*"In one bargain, concluded in my presence, I calculated the profits that accrued to the fort--and found that at the lowest estimate they exceeded eighteen hundred percent."*

*Pioneer James Clyman:*

*"Groceries and Liquors exorbitantly high. For instance, Sugar \$1.50 per pint or cupful. Flour \$1 per pint."*