

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK EVALUATION: FORT SISSETON

PREPARED FOR SOUTH DAKOTA HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Prepared by



May 2015

National Historic Landmark Evaluation: Fort Sisseton

Prepared for:
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1.0 Introduction

In September 2014, Stark Preservation Planning LLC (Stark) conducted an evaluation for National Historic Landmark (NHL) designation eligibility for Fort Sisseton, Britton Township, Marshall County, South Dakota. The study was completed on behalf of the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), which seeks to expand the state's NHL collection to better reflect South Dakota's role in national historical themes and to preserve places of great significance. The property was selected by the SHPO for its potential to represent national history. Three other South Dakota sites were also evaluated as part of this project and submitted under separate cover: the Spearfish Hatchery in Lawrence County, the Mobridge Auditorium in Mobridge, Walworth County, and the Prairie Homestead in Jackson County.

The investigation entailed initial contact with the property owner representatives to inform them of the study, to provide information on the NHL program, and to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study. Preliminary research was conducted at the South Dakota State Historical Society and field investigation took place in September 2014. Other resources available from the Fort Sisseton archives informed the history of the property. Additional research into comparative properties and historical contexts were completed, as needed. The National Park Service's bulletin *How to Prepare National Historic Landmark Nominations* was used to provide guidance on how properties may become eligible for NHL designation. The NHL program uses six criteria to assess the national significance of a property.

1. Properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained.
2. Properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.
3. Properties that represent some great idea or ideal of the American people.
4. Properties that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
5. Properties that are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture.
6. Properties that have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.

In addition to establishing national significance, a NHL-eligible property must also retain a "high degree of integrity" as expressed by the seven aspects of historical integrity: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The findings and recommendation of the Fort Sisseton evaluation of NHL eligibility are presented in this report. In addition, property information was entered into the SHPO historic sites survey database.

2.0 Property Data

Location:	NE ¼, NE ¼ Sect 10, R56, T126, Britton, Marshall County
Owner:	South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks
Contact Information:	Katie Ceroll, 605-448-5474, katherine.ceroll@state.sd.us 11907 434th Avenue Lake City, SD 57247
Ownership Category:	Public
NRHP Status:	Listed (1973)
Property Type:	District (15 masonry buildings, nine building sites, and other structures and archaeological sites)

3.0 Summary Description

Fort Sisseton is set within the Coteau des Prairies area near the Kettle Swamp in Fort Township, Marshall County, South Dakota. The location, on a 600-foot rise above the plains and nearly surrounded by lakes, was strategically chosen for its commanding view of the region and for its controlled access (Figure 1). The original military reservation encompassed some 82,000 acres measuring 9 by 15 miles. The historic site is limited to the fort itself, which is now designated as Fort Sisseton State Park (Figure 2).

The historic fort is a complex of buildings, structures and sites, mostly but not entirely contained within the earthen berm and ditch, measuring approximately 600' by 700', which served as a protective stockade. The buildings are generally aligned along the inner perimeter of the berm stockade, leaving a parade ground in the center. A stable and combination carpenter-blacksmith shop are located outside of the stockade to the north and the commissary sergeant's quarters to the south. The abandoned and disinterred cemetery site is located approximately a quarter mile west. Other potential archaeological sites related to the fort are located outside the berm as well (Figure 3).



Figure 1. Setting, Facing South



Figure 2. Park Entrance off of CR 5

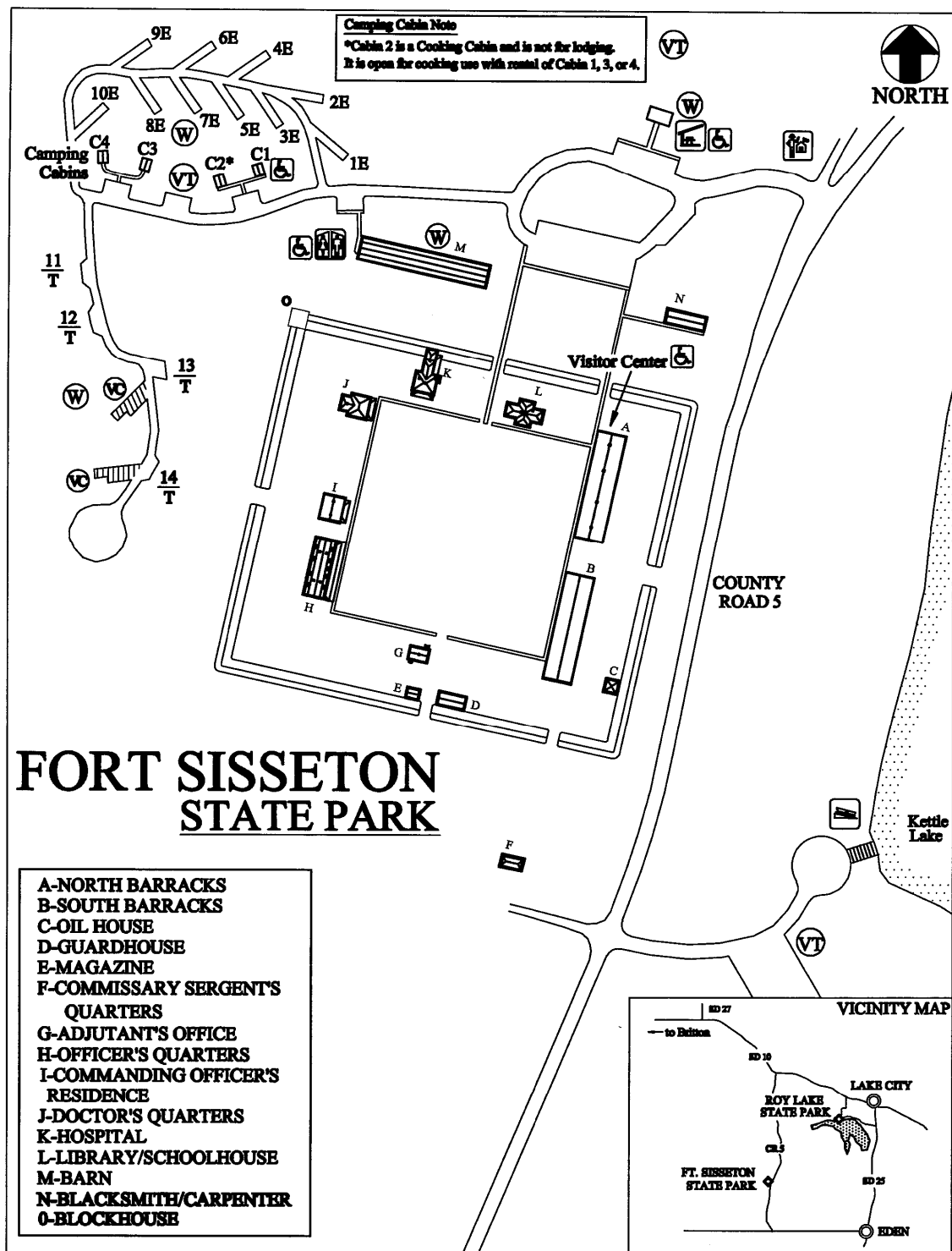


Figure 3. Fort Sisseton State Park Site Map

North Barracks: Contributing. One-and-a-half story with gabled roof building with measuring 45' by 182' was constructed in 1866 of split granite field stones. An open porch with wood posts is found along the west side. It was significantly reconstructed in 1934 when only the walls remained standing. Today it serves as the main visitor center, and includes gift shop, restrooms, offices, exhibits, and restored interpretive areas (Figure 4).

South Barracks. Contributing. Also constructed in 1866, it is similar to the North Barracks but does not have a porch. Portions of the wall and roof were reconstructed by the WPA in the 1930s. Its interior is used as an event center (Figure 4).



Figure 4. North Barracks and South Barracks

Oil House. Contributing. Square granite stone structure used to store oils for lamps, machinery and other needs at the fort. Constructed in 1888 (Figure 5).

Guard House. Contributing. Constructed in 1865, the brick rectangular guard house has a gabled roof and front porch (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Oil House and Guard House

Magazine. Contributing. Located opposite the Guard House is the Magazine, constructed in 1866 to store munitions. It is constructed of a granite fieldstone base with brick upper walls. The gable ends have stepped walls (Figure 6).

Commissary Sergeant's Quarters. Contributing. This one-story, c. 1880, rectangular plan dwelling has granite split fieldstone walls and a hipped roof. It stands outside of the breastworks, just south of the south gate. It was rehabilitated in the 1930s after it was allowed to deteriorate (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Magazine and Commissary Sergeant's Quarters

Root Cellar. Not specified in NR nomination. About 100' southwest of the Commissary Sergeant's Quarters is a depression marking the remains of a three-room root cellar used to store the produce raised in the fort's gardens. This site is mentioned in the National Register nomination, but not enumerated among the properties that comprise the historic site.

Adjutant's Office. Contributing. Constructed in 1869, the one-story, gabled building is constructed of split granite fieldstone. It was converted into a dwelling in the 1930s, entailing the construction of a basement, addition of a fireplace and application of plaster walls (Figure 7).

Officers' Quarters. Contributing. The long, one-and-a-half story brick building has a gambrel roof with dormers and housed the fort's officers. Three doors under the east porch offered access to the dwelling units. It was significantly rebuilt by the WPA in the 1930s (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Adjutant's Office and Officers' Quarters

Original Magazine Site. Not specified in NR nomination. The original log magazine was located within the southwest corner of the fort's breastworks, and was replaced by the brick and stone structure. It is marked by a shallow depression and protected by wood decking. This site was mentioned, but not enumerated among the properties in the National Register nomination (Figure 8).

Commanding Officer's Residence. Contributing. The 1866, two-story brick house with gabled roof and porch was used by the commanding officer. Following the decommissioning of the fort in 1889, it became the headquarters of the cattle and hunting lodge operation (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Original Magazine Site and Commanding Officer's Residence

Doctor's Quarters. Contributing. Constructed in 1881, the one-story brick dwelling has a hipped roof and was occupied by the fort's doctor. It was extensively restored in the 1930s (Figure 9).

Blockhouses. Non-contributing. Log blockhouses were constructed at the southeast and northwest corners of the breastworks for defensive purposes. As the threat of conflict faded, the blockhouses were used for storage. The wood structures did not survive. The northwest blockhouse was reconstructed in 1980 based on early images (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Doctor's Quarters and Reconstructed Blockhouse

Hospital. Contributing. The two-story brick hospital was constructed in stages and currently reflects the period of the fort's decommissioning in 1889. During the 1920s, it was used as a hunting lodge. Evidence of a later addition, since removed, is visible by the footings on the building's east side (Figure 10).

Library/Schoolhouse. Contributing. The one-story brick building has a cross plan with a hipped roof and was constructed in 1881 (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Hospital and Library/Schoolhouse

Stable. Contributing. A large stable or barn measuring 35' by 219' stands to the north of the breastworks. Originally constructed by 1873, its base is made of split granite stones. The roof was reconstructed in the 1930s in a gambrel style, replacing the deteriorated gable roof. It was intended to be used as a dairy barn, but never was. Most of the main floor contains horse stalls, and modern restroom facilities are placed at the west end (Figure 11).

Carpenter's and Blacksmith's Shops. Contributing. These one-story, brick shops are joined under one hipped roof and separated by a breezeway. They were constructed by 1889 (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Stable and Carpenter's/Blacksmith's Shop

Building Sites. Not specified in NR nomination. The locations of several sites east of the barracks and within the breastworks are marked by interpretive signs. These include latrines, a bakery, and a tailor's shop. Additional buildings were located outside of the breastworks on the east side of what is now County Road 5, including an ice house, lime kiln, post trader's quarters, post trader's storehouse, and post trader's store.

Sawmill Site. Not specified in NR nomination. The fort's sawmill was reported to be east of County Road 5 in the NR nomination.

Log Building Sites. Not specified in NR nomination. A grouping of log buildings once stood within the fort north of the Guard House. These buildings were once used for married soldiers, and later by laundresses, and became known as "soap row." Depressions in the ground are still visible.

Cemetery Site. Not specified in NR nomination. The fort's cemetery was located about one-quarter mile west-northwest of the fort's enclosure. The remains were disinterred and removed to another military cemetery upon the fort's decommission. The site is marked by a split rail fence, and temporary grave markers are placed for interpretive purposes (Figure 12).

Parade Grounds. Not specified in NR nomination. The breastworks and perimeter buildings form the setting for the center Parade Grounds, an open turf area. Several objects are grouped at the center of the Parade Ground, including a reconstructed wooden flag pole, 120-pounder Napoleon Model 1857 cannon (placed in 1990), a time capsule placed within a concrete block in 1964 and marked by a metal marker, and a bronze plaque within a brick pedestal marking the work of the WPA. The plaque reads "Fort Sisseton Rebuilt by State of South Dakota and Works Progress Administration, WPA Project Number 3384, nineteen thirty-nine" (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Cemetery Site and Parade Grounds

Picnic Shelter. Non-contributing. A picnic shelter, with a yellow brick enclosure and hipped roof, is a modern construction designed to blend with the look of the fort's historic buildings. It is located, along with a privy, to the north of the park's main entrance, outside of the historic fort area (Figure 13).

Camping Cabins and Sites. Modern log camping cabins are placed northwest of the historic fort, outside of the historic fort area. Camping sites are located to the north and west (Figure 13).

Corral and Bleachers. A corral and metal bleachers are set up west of the camping cabins, outside of the historic fort area.



Figure 13. Picnic Shelter and Camping Cabins

Circulation and Landscape. Within the breastworks enclosure, pedestrian circulation is provided by wood plank sidewalks placed to the front (inner) side of the perimeter buildings and is based on 1885 topographic maps showing the locations of boardwalks (Figure 14). Gravel drives provide access for service vehicles. A row of trees generally line the inner perimeter, and in some locations trees are planted between the buildings and the breastworks (Figure 14). At the north of the fort enclosure is the park's primary entrance and a small parking area. Camping and picnic facilities are provided in these areas. The two-lane County Road 5 is just east of the fort, beyond which is Kettle Lake. Modern intrusions within the historic area are minimal, but include some lighting, gravel trails, boardwalks, a propane tank, benches and interpretive signage.



Figure 14. Breastworks and Reconstructed Boardwalk

4.0 Significance

4.1 HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Fort Sisseton (originally named Fort Wadsworth) arose on the Dakota Territory prairies as one among a group of frontier forts commissioned following the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. For six weeks in the summer of that year, members of the native Dakota, faced with many hardships, led an uprising against the newly encroaching settlers. A series of attacks in the Minnesota River Valley and beyond left thousands of Euroamericans and Dakota dead. Terrorized by the events of that year, the U.S. revoked all treaties with the Dakota, resulting in the exile of the Dakota to western lands. As the Dakota were pushed farther west, the U.S. military established a series of forts along the western frontier in present-day Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota. These forts provided bastions of defense for the Euroamerican settlers and travelers who continued to push westward.

Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey began organizing an army under the command of General Henry H. Sibley to punish the Dakota and protect the settlers. Major General John Pope, Commander of the Department of the Northwest, suggested a series of army posts to be built at Devils Lake (Fort Hayes), on the Yellowstone River (Fort Stevenson), one near Fort Clark (Fort Rice) and one on the James River (Fort Wadsworth). These forts served multiple purposes. First was to prevent attacks on the Minnesota frontier and to protect settlers now entering the Dakota Territory. In addition, the forts would offer protection for miners enroute to the gold fields in Idaho as well as to the “farmer Indians,” those Indians who were in better compliance with U.S. laws and customs, and settled in attempts to grow food crops. Of these four forts, Devils Lake was never constructed. After discovering the lack of timber along the intended site for Fort Wadsworth, near present-day Aberdeen, South Dakota, a site was chosen near Kettle Lake on the advice of Pierre Bottineau and Norman Kittson, long established scouts and fur traders in the area.¹

Major John Clowney was in command of Fort Wadsworth when it was established on August 1, 1864. Located on a rise near the head of the Coteau des Prairies amid Kettle and Cattail lakes, Clowney wrote the site “is the strongest without improvement I have seen and ... is far ahead of my expectations” (as quoted in Johnson, p. 12). By September 1, the one-story blockhouses, the blacksmith shop, and a small headquarters were completed and logs were cut for the magazine. With insufficient timber to form a blockade, an alternative enclosure was constructed. It consisted of a ten-foot wide ditch with earth piled on the inside forming an eight-foot embankment. On top were placed two eight-inch wooden beams with holes in the bottom beams for muskets.²

Although the earliest buildings were constructed of wood, abundant local stone and clay allowed for the easy construction of buildings out of brick and stone. Officers’ quarters were erected in 1864. By the end of 1865, the soldiers trained by carpenters, stone masons, brick layers, engineers and sawyers had completed two stone barracks (45’ x 181’), one stone stable (30’ x 200’), two wooden stables, one brick guardhouse (20’ x 50’), one warehouse (24’ x 145’), one hospital made of square timbers (40’ x 40’), two bastions, one magazine, one carpenter shop, two blacksmith shops, one wheelwright shop, one stone sawmill and one brickyard. Materials

¹ Norma Johnson, *Chilson’s History of Fort Sisseton* (Pierre, South Dakota: State Publishing and Printing, 1996), 7-8.

² *Ibid.*, 50-51.

included 221,000 feet of lumber, 214 feet of shingles, 52,507 perch of stone,³ 215,000 bricks and 900 barrels of lime, at an estimated cost of two million dollars⁴ (Figure 15).

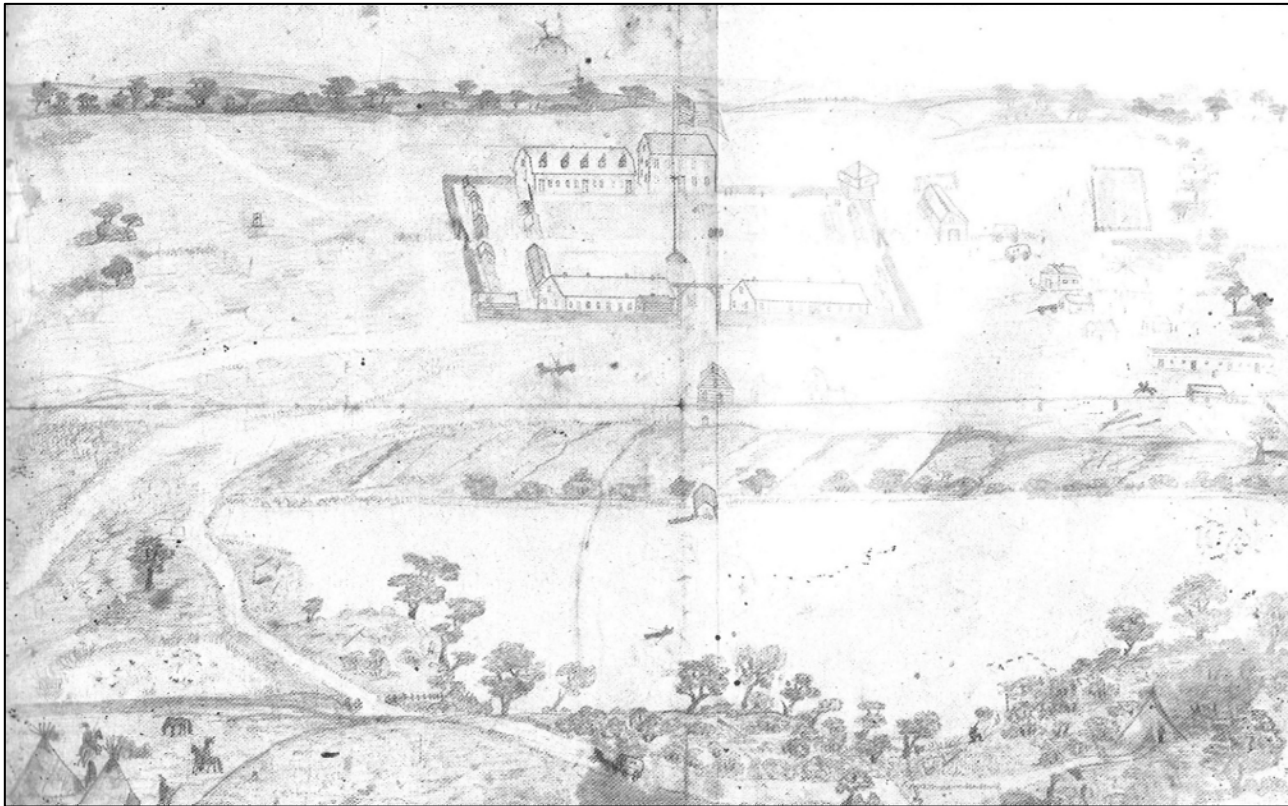


Figure 15. Fort Wadsworth (Sisseton) as sketched by Maximillian Miller, c. 1871, as published in Johnson (1996)

During the fort's active years it never came under attack or experienced direct military conflict. This was in large part due to the network of some 20 Indian scout camps strategically placed along the James River. These camps were manned by Indians loyal to the U.S. government and served as warning stations for the fort. As a result of the loyal service of the Sisseton Indians, the fort was renamed Fort Sisseton in 1876 after it was discovered that there was another Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island, New York.⁵

A grouping of log structures on the south side of the parade ground, originally used for married soldiers, were converted to use by the fort's laundresses, which were allotted to each fort. These log structures, no longer extant, became known as "suds row" or "soap suds row." The four-sided fort forms a central parade ground, which was used almost daily for drill. With the fort approaching 20 years of age, numerous repairs and improvements to buildings and grounds were completed in the 1880s, including gravel walks, new and cleaned drains, and 854 feet of wooden boardwalk. In 1887, the parade grounds were seeded with Kentucky blue grass and white clover. An 8-foot porch was added to the north barracks in 1885.⁶

³ A perch is a measure of volume for stone, about 24 cubic feet (0.7 cubic meters).

⁴ Johnson, *Chilson's History of Fort Sisseton*, 59-60.

⁵ Fort Sisseton State Park, *Fort Sisseton Walking Tour Guide*, n.d., 3-4.

⁶ Johnson, *Chilson's History of Fort Sisseton*, 71, 76.

By the late 1880s, the area became increasingly settled by homesteaders and concerns about the local Indians diminished. In February 1889 the Adjutant General in Washington, D.C. recommended the closure of Fort Sisseton, and on April 22 of that year, the Fort Sisseton Military Reservation was relinquished to the Department of the Interior. Soldiers prepared for the abandonment of the fort by sending durable supplies to other local forts. On June 1, 1889, Fort Sisseton was officially decommissioned. The last items remaining on site were auctioned off to local residents.⁷

A week after it was abandoned, the military reservation was turned over to the Dakota territorial government. The 81,000 remaining acres in the reservation were surveyed and eventually sold for settlement the following year. In 1892, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation was ceded and opened for settlement by white settlers. The one-mile square section of land containing the fort buildings were retained in public hands to be used by the state for militia purposes. Over the next years, the fort's grounds and 20 remaining buildings were used for various purposes, including cattle grazing and as temporary dwellings for those whose homesteads were being completed. The bodies interred in the fort cemetery were exhumed and re-buried at Custer Battlefield Cemetery (now Little Bighorn Battlefield National Cemetery) in Montana in the 1890s.⁸

During the early 1900s, the property was leased for a range of commercial and recreational purposes, including the Fort Sisseton Stock Company, a summer home and cattle pasture, and a private hunting club. Amenities such as putting greens, shooting range, boating and fishing excursions were offered to the well-healed leaders of commerce and industry who visited the old fort for hunting and recreation through the 1920s. By the early 1930s, increased awareness of the fort's historic value and significance grew, and local efforts under the Fort Sisseton Memorial Association urged the preservation and restoration of the property as a historic site. The South Dakota Lakes Association was founded in 1933 by a commission ordered by the state legislature to preserve Fort Sisseton.⁹

By the 1930s, many of the buildings had fallen into disrepair, and even partial collapse. Several of the New Deal federal relief programs formed under Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration played a significant role in Fort Sisseton's future. A transient worker camp for 125 to 150 men under the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) was established at the fort in 1934 to repair the buildings. It was at this time that the large stone stables received its gambrel-style roof, apparently with the intention of establishing a dairy farm, which never materialized. Workers under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) continued the repairs, this time under the supervision of the National Park Service. To assure accuracy of the restoration project, the NPS conducted a historical and archaeological survey of the site. The WPA work restored the north barracks, including replacing the roof that had been blown off in a recent storm, uncovered the foundation of the old icehouse on the bank of Kettle Lake, landscaped the area south of the fort walls, and re-dug and re-sodded the earthwork embankment on all four sides, among other projects.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 107-108.

⁸ Ibid., 109-113.

⁹ Ibid., 109-118.

¹⁰ Ibid., 119-122.

In 1954, Fort Sisseton was transferred from the State Adjutant General's Department to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission, and in 1959 it became South Dakota's eleventh state park. Under their auspices, the historic fort has been maintained, preserved, restored, interpreted and opened to the public. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

4.2 SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fort Sisseton is listed in the National Register under Criterion A for its important historical associations within the context of military involvement of the settlement of the west during the last half of the nineteenth century. More specifically, it is placed within the context of the establishment of military posts from Minnesota to the upper Missouri River region following the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War. Fort Sisseton (originally Fort Wadsworth) played a role in protecting immigrants, miners and settlers as they travelled westward and eventually settled the region. Its period of significance is the same as its military commission, 1864 to 1889. Nearly all of the buildings within the historic district date from this period, and it stands as a rare and relatively complete example of a western fort from this era.

5.0 Integrity

The integrity of the Fort Sisseton must be approached in two ways, addressing the integrity of the historical fort complex as a whole as well as the physical integrity of the individual buildings and sites that comprise the complex.

The *Historical Review and Plan for Preservation and Restoration of Fort Sisseton, Dakota Territory* completed by Schmucker, Paul, Nohr and Associates (1974) provides a detailed listing and chronology of the all documented buildings erected and used during the fort's active period, 1864 to 1889. The report documents major additions, alterations and reconstructions, as well as structures that were unfinished or abandoned during the active period (Figure 16). Several structures were originally erected out of wood, and then reconstructed from brick or stone several years later; these are counted as one structure in the chronology. As an example, the Magazine was originally built of timber in 1865, and then reconstructed in stone in 1873.

Forty-two structures and significant landscape elements were present on the fort site at various times between 1864 and 1889. By the time the fort was decommissioned, 29 remained. The 30 standing structures and objects identified in the report as of 1889 are listed below, with current status and assessment of physical integrity and alterations (Table 1). Of the 30 structures extant in 1889, 15 (50 percent) are currently standing. Among the standing structures are the most significant, including the two barracks, officers' quarters, hospital, etc. The buildings and structures not extant are typically ancillary supportive structures, such as the bakery, ice house, coal shed, root cellar, many of which were likely constructed of wood. In many cases, the locations of these buildings are known and may have preserved archaeological remains. Several structures no longer standing at the time of the fort's decommission, including the bastions, the earthen embankment and the boardwalk, have since been reconstructed based on historical documentation.

FORT (WADSWORTH) SISSETON D.T.

1883 INVENTORY OF BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES
FORT SISSETON D. T.

NO.	MILITARY NO.	DESCRIPTION	NO.	MILITARY NO.	DESCRIPTION
⑦	1	Commanding Officer's Quarters - Brick, 2 stories, Shingle Roof 30' x 15'.	23*	6	Laudress' Quarters, Logs, Shingle Roof 76' x 21'.
2	2	Officers' Quarters - 1 building - brick, 1½ stories, Shingle Roof (1 sets) 20' x 15'.	24*	25*	Laudress' Quarters, Logs, Shingle Roof 32' x 26'.
10	10	Officers' Quarters, Brick, 1 story, Shingle Roof 30' x 32' x 1 addition 16' x 65'.	25*	26*	Laudress' Quarters, Logs, Shingle Roof 20' x 30'.
7	7	Hospital, brick 1½ stories, Shingle Roof 33' x 60'.	26*	27	Davall, Logs, Shingle Roof 20' x 14'.
8	8	Hospital, Red Stone - Logs, Shingle Roof 16' x 24'.	⑩	28	Quartermaster's Stable, Stone, Shingle Roof 200' x 36'.
9*	9*	Hospital Storehouse - Logs, Shingle Roof 16' x 24'.	⑪	29	Headquaters and Blacksmith's shops, brick, Shingle Roof 60' x 20'.
10*	10*	Stables' Quarters - Logs, Shingle Roof 16' x 20'.	⑫	30	Company Sergeant's Quarters, Stone, Shingle Roof 32' x 15'.
11	11	Library and Schoolroom - Brick, Shingle Roof 40' x 20' w/2 - 30' x 20' wings.	31	31	Post Office, Stone Plank Roof covered by earth, built underground 56' x 56'.
12	12	Ward - Stone, Shingle Roof 17' x 35'.	32	32	Cool Shed - Frame, Shingle Roof 180' x 16'.
⑫	13/4	Company Quarters - for two Companies, Stone, Shingle Roof 150' x 24'.	33*	33*	Cooks' Quarters, Logs, Shingle Roof 36' x 16'.
14	14	Bakery - Frame, Shingle Roof 25' x 25'.	34*	34*	Quarters' Quarters, Logs, Shingle Roof 18' x 16'.
15	15	Laundry, Logs, Shingle Roof 16' x 24'.	35*	35*	Toolhouse 75' Ft. E.W. of Flag-staff, Logs, Tasheloh Roof 24' x 16'.
17/8	17/8	Quartermaster's and Company's Store House, Stone, Shingle Roof 180' x 24'.	36*	36*	Toolhouse 75' Ft. E.W. of Flag-staff, Stone, Shingle Roof 24' x 16'.
18*	18*	Quartermaster's Storehouse - Logs, Shingle Roof 150' x 24'.	37	37	Heret's Quarters, Logs, Shingle Roof, 17' x 24' 100 yards east of flag-staff
①	20	Adjutant's Office, Stone, Shingle Roof 19' x 25'.			
21	21	Magazine, Brick and Stone, Shingle Roof 16' x 22'.			
②	22	Quarrel House, Brick, Shingle Roof 22' x 50'.			

*Old log buildings and in a dilapidated condition; the rest of the buildings are in good condition.

LEGEND

----- BUILDING OR STRUCTURE
IN OPERATION

----- BUILDING OR STRUCTURE
UNFINISHED OR ABANDONED

Figure 16. Chronological Chart of Buildings and Structures (Schmucker, Paul, Nohr and Associates)

Table 1. Status of Structures Extant in 1889		
Building/Structure Extant in 1889	Current Status	Alterations
Hospital	Extant	Extensive renovations in the 1920s for its use as a hunting lodge; roof reconstructed; interior re-plastered; windows and doors replaced; restroom and mechanical upgrades
North Barracks	Extant	WPA reconstruction of roof and portions of walls; remodeled in 1960s, and further renovations in 1980s and 1990s for office, gift shop, visitor's center and replica barracks; porch and roof restored; windows and doors replaced; geothermal heating and cooling 1992; storm windows 1997
South Barracks	Extant	WPA reconstruction of roof and portions of walls; cut wide wagon door in south wall mid-20 th century; windows and doors replaced; kitchen and restrooms added; radiant heating system; window screens added
Stable/Barn	Extant	WPA reconstruction of roof changed from gable to gambrel with loft; restrooms added at west end
Guardhouse	Extant	WPA restoration of walls and reroof; windows and doors replaced
Magazine	Extant	WPA roof reconstruction; door replaced
Blacksmith Shop (with Carpenter's Shop)	Extant	Restoration in 1930s after period of decay; replacement of doors and windows
Wheelwright/Carpenter's Shop (with Blacksmith's Shop)	Extant	Restoration in 1930s after period of decay; replacement of doors and windows
Commanding Officers' Residence	Extant	Interior renovations during 1920 for use for cattle operation and hunting lodge; front port replaced; exterior stabilization; work on roof; window and door replacement; addition of picket fence. Repairs to foundation and geothermal heating and cooling installed 1996. Storm windows installed 1997.
Officers' Quarters	Extant	Major WPA restoration including re-plastered interior walls, beadboard ceilings, new woodwork, reconstructed roof with new dormers. Windows and doors replaced, porch reconstructed, picket fence installed, perimeter foundation drainage installed in 1990s to 2012.
Adjutant's Office	Extant	In 1930s converted to dwelling; basement dug beneath it, window replaced with casement window, new gable roof, and retrofitted interior with new plastering, woodwork and fireplace. Window and doors replaced in 1990s.
Bakery	Not Extant	Location unknown
Ice House	Not Extant	Location east of fort

Table 1. Status of Structures Extant in 1889		
Building/Structure Extant in 1889	Current Status	Alterations
Cemetery	Not Extant	Exhumed following decommission and headstones removed. Site still marked by split rail fence about ¼ mile WNW of fort.
Cisterns	Unknown	Several sites located in and out of fort walls. Condition unknown.
250 Trees	Unknown	Existing trees in and around fort are unlikely original; landscaping plan may conform to historic images.
Slaughter House	Not Extant	Location unknown
Lime Kiln	Not Extant	Location east of fort
School-Library	Extant	WPA restoration including roof reconstruction and re-plastering. Likely that the west addition removed at that time. Windows and doors replaced. Additional renovation in 2006.
Surgeon's Quarters	Extant	WPA restoration including roof reconstruction and re-plastering; possible addition of cellar. Windows and doors replaced.
Telegraph	Not Extant	Location unknown
Sergeant's Quarters	Extant	WPA restoration and new cellar dug beneath. New porch constructed 2004. Windows and doors replaced.
Coal Shed	Not Extant	Location south of fort
Root Cellar	Not Extant	Location south of fort
Wagon Shed	Not Extant	Location unknown
Bath House	Not Extant	Location unknown
Flag Staff	Reconstructed	Reconstructed at center of parade ground
Board Walk	Reconstructed	Reconstructed at perimeter of parade ground
Oil House	Extant	Relatively unaltered; windows and doors replaced

A summary of alterations is provided by the architectural conservation assessment completed by David Arbogast in 2012.¹¹ By the 1930s, the fort's buildings were in a severe state of deterioration, and it appears that little was salvageable except for the brick and stone walls. Nearly every building was touched by the work of the WPA, sometimes substantially so. Most often, roofs were reconstructed due to storm events or extreme deterioration. In several instances, stone and brick walls needed to be rebuilt. Most windows and doors have been replaced. More recently, the masonry was repointed using prison labor in the 1990s for most buildings. Many buildings have been updated with electricity, and in some cases have been significantly retro-fitted for alternative but sympathetic uses, such as offices, gifts shops, and event programming. Most have thoughtfully restored interiors that interpret the fort's history.

¹¹ David Arbogast, *Architectural Conservation Assessment: Fort Sisseton Historic State Park, South Dakota* (On file at Fort Sisseton State Park, 2012).

5.1 RECONSTRUCTED PROPERTIES

Two structures within the fort are twentieth century reconstructions: the block house and the earthen breastworks. The earthen embankment fell into disrepair by the 1930s and was re-dug and re-sodded by the WPA workers at that time, apparently based on the understanding of the size, style and location of the original breastworks. The fort originally had two wood blockhouses, or bastions – one at the northwest corner and another at the southeast corner – which disappeared by 1876. In 1980, the northwest blockhouse was reconstructed based on early images of the fort.

Based on National Register Criteria Consideration E for Reconstructed Properties, both the breastworks and blockhouse may be considered to be contributing properties within the historic district. The Criteria Consideration specifies that a reconstructed property may be eligible “when it is accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived.”¹² Both the block house and the breastworks are key to understanding the historical configuration, significance and associations of Fort Sisseton, and therefore appear to be wise choices for reconstruction within the context of the fort’s restoration and interpretive plan.

5.2 COMPARATIVE RESOURCES

Fort Sisseton is one of a chain of forts stretching from Minnesota to the Upper Missouri River (present day Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota) erected by the U.S. government to safeguard western expansion and settlement. Most of the forts within this context, Fort Sisseton included, were established shortly following the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Some were founded in the 1850s with similar purposes.¹³ Most were abandoned by the 1890s as the west became more densely populated, and as threats of violence from the Indian population diminished. Earlier forts related to the fur trade are also present in this region, but were constructed for different purposes and within different historic contexts, although there are examples of the government acquiring fur trade forts for protective purposes (e.g. Fort Pierre Chouteau).

Using the work of Robert W. Frazer on western U.S. military forts,¹⁴ I was able to compile a list of forts within the same historic context as Fort Sisseton. Based on this source, 26 U.S. forts were established in Minnesota and Dakota Territory between 1853 and 1878 to enable Euroamerican settlement and offer protection against local Indians. Using a Wiki-based web site on U.S. forts (www.fortwiki.com), I was able to determine the current condition of these forts (see Appendix). Few of these forts contain any

¹² National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997).

¹³ Fort Snelling, in Minnesota, was an early and key military fort on the western frontier. Established in 1820, the fort continued as an active military post through 1946. Although Fort Snelling played an important role in the U.S.-Dakota War as an administrative post and as an internment camp for surrendered Dakota, by the mid-nineteenth century it was no longer considered a frontier fort, and was therefore not included among the comparative properties.

¹⁴ 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, 1965).

intact buildings or structures dating from their active military period. Although they may contain important archaeological resources, 19 of the 26 forts contain no standing structures or only a few ruins, (five of these are submerged under water as a result of various dam and reservoir projects). Three forts contain just one to three original fort buildings: Fort Ridgely in Minnesota has a restored commissary building; Fort Abercrombie in North Dakota has a restored original guardhouse with other replica structures; and Fort Buford in North Dakota maintains the original stone powder magazine, wood-frame officers' quarters and a wood-frame officer of the guard building.

In addition to Fort Sisseton, only two of the 26 forts contain an extensive set of historic buildings and structures: Fort Totten in North Dakota and Fort Meade in South Dakota. Fort Totten, 13 miles southeast of Devils Lake, is currently operated as a historic site by the State Historical Society of North Dakota and is promoted as "one of the best-preserved frontier military posts in the United States." Built between 1868 and 1873, it actually spent most of its history as an Indian boarding school following its decommission in 1890. As a historical site, both layers of history are interpreted. The full complement of 17 historic brick military structures laid out around a parade ground is not unlike that of Fort Sisseton, and include the following: the Adjutant's Office, two First Lieutenant's quarters, two Second Lieutenant's Quarters, Commanding Officer's Quarters, Chaplain's and Surgeon's Quarters, Hospital/Chapel, Commissary Storehouse, Quartermaster's Storehouse, Powder Magazine, three Company Quarters, and Bakery. A gymnasium built for the Indian school in 1923 also stands on the grounds.

Fort Meade, near Sturgis, South Dakota, was established in 1878 to protect major routes to the Black Hills gold fields. It was the last of the Dakota Territory frontier posts, and reflects a prolonged period of use, which includes a post-improvement period from 1900 to 1910, and WPA renovations and improvements in the 1930s. Although the post ceased to serve its original purpose by 1910, it continued as an active military fort until 1944, when it became a psychiatric and out-patient hospital under the Veterans Administration. As of 1971, four buildings survive from the earliest period, 1878 to 1900. Although they are "simple and unimpressive" they are sited along the perimeter of the parade grounds. Eleven other buildings from this period survive, but were veneered with fieldstone in the 1930s as a WPA project. Another 20 structures remain from the period 1900 to 1910, when the fort underwent significant improvements. These buildings reflect a Classical style, and were typically constructed of brick or sandstone. Additional buildings were added to the grounds between 1910 and 1971.

Although both Fort Meade and Fort Totten are listed in the National Register, neither is designated as an NHL. With only four buildings remaining from the nineteenth century fort and modern intrusions from its continued use as a military installation and hospital, Fort Meade does not possess the same integrity standards as Fort Sisseton, and would not appear to meet NHL standards within the context of frontier forts. The historic context and integrity of Fort Totten appears to be comparable to that of Fort Sisseton, as both possess a strong collection of preserved building stock from their respective periods of significance. One important distinction is the historical use of Fort Totten as an Indian School, which adds a layer of significance within another historic context, and also resulted in alterations to the original fort structures and setting.

6.0 Recommendation

Fort Sisseton is a strong candidate for NHL designation. It meets NHL Criterion (1) as a property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to and is identified with the broad national pattern of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained. Fort Sisseton would be significant within the NHL Theme Study: *Westward Expansion and Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898: Military and Indian Affairs (1959)* (this study is listed as out of print or otherwise unavailable, so associations with this context could not be determined). Archaeological resources were not investigated as part of this study, but it is likely that the buried archaeological deposits at Fort Sisseton also possess significance meeting NHL Criterion (6) for information likely to shed light on life and activities at the fort during its active period.

As a collection, the Fort Sisseton district maintains outstanding historic integrity. Nearly all of the principal buildings and structures dating from the period of significance remain intact. Approximately 10 structures known to be standing when the fort closed in 1889 are no longer extant. While this represents a diminished integrity of the district, most of these buildings were ancillary structures (e.g. bakery, bath house, coal shed, etc.) and do not represent the principal purposes and significant historical associations of the fort. Few modern intrusions have been introduced into the historic district or within its immediate context. Newly constructed properties within the fort compound are mainly limited to thoughtful and authentic reconstructions and a few commemorative and interpretive objects (e.g. interpretive signage). As a property operated as a state park, several modern intrusions are found within the immediate setting, including a parking lot, picnic shelter, and camp sites. All of these have been completed with great care so as not to impair the setting of the historical fort. Much of the broad landscape surrounding the fort remains natural, and evokes the feelings and associations of the nineteenth century fort.

Many of the individual buildings within the fort have diminished material integrity. By the 1930s, the buildings are described as being in a state of ruin or deterioration. Under the auspices of the WPA, reconstruction, typically based on historical photographs, was undertaken. In most instances, the brick and stone walls were repaired and in some cases reconstructed. Many of the wood roof structures needed to be re-built entirely, and were completed based on the best understanding of the historical design. One important exception to this is the stable, where the gable roof was re-designed and constructed as a gambrel roof, with the intention of using it as a dairy barn.

Even with these alterations, Fort Sisseton compares favorably with its cohort of western forts from Minnesota to the upper Missouri River. Only Fort Totten in North Dakota would rival Fort Sisseton for a complete complement of fort buildings dating from the period of significance. Fort Totten has also lost a number of its historic buildings, including one of the barracks, half of a mess hall, the dead house, the well house, and the guard house. In addition, major alterations have been made to the interiors of the existing structures for their use as classrooms and vocation training in the twentieth century. Other modern intrusions diminish the integrity of Fort Totten, including a 1923 gymnasium and structures within the immediate setting of the fort.

No other forts within this category of significant American and military history have been designated as an NHL. Based on the historical significance, inherent integrity and comparisons with similar sites, Fort Sisseton is recommended as a candidate for NHL designation.

Recommendations for Additional Investigation Include:

- Seek the advice and input of the National Park Service's National Historic Landmark staff for the designation of Fort Sisseton as an NHL.
- Seek the support of South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks for NHL designation.
- Develop a fuller historical context of western frontier military forts from c. 1860 to c. 1890 within which to better evaluate the importance these events had on U.S. settlement of the west and U.S.-Indian relations.
- Confer with National Park Service to determine if the two significant reconstructed properties – the breastworks and the blockhouse – meet National Register Criteria Consideration E for reconstructed properties for inclusion as contributing elements to the historic district.
- The historic district boundaries of the National Register nomination are not clearly defined. The boundaries of the National Historic Landmark property will need to be carefully defined. Consideration should be given to including the fuller extent of the fort's activities beyond the enclosure boundaries, including sites with known or suspected archaeological deposits (e.g. sutler's store) and excluding non-contributing structures, such as the modern camping facilities.
- Plan to include additional contributing properties within the historic district, such as the Parade Ground, and archaeological sites if found to be eligible through additional investigations.
- Conduct site visits by SD SHPO and National Park Service staff to Fort Sisseton and Fort Totten to assess comparative qualities.

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