A History of Fort Maginnis, Montana

Frederick Moodry
Carroll College

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses

Part of the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.carroll.edu/history_theses/90

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Carroll Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of Carroll Scholars. For more information, please contact tkratz@carroll.edu.
A History of Fort Maginnis, Montana

by

Frederick P. Moodry

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Carroll College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts Department of History

March 1958
This thesis for the B. A. degree, by
Frederick P. Moodry
has been approved for the
Department of
History
by

Thomas A. Clinch
Grade - A

Date March 23, 1958
Preface

This thesis surveys the development of a military post in early Montana history. Necessarily, it is concerned with the region and the people who dwelt there.

It is the author's opinion that, in order to truly understand any historic phenomenon, one has to place one's self in the shoes of those affected. The question naturally arises as to the importance of this one isolated fort. To those of this mind, I would simply offer the fact that to some five-hundred people in the area surrounding the fort it was of prime importance.

Care has been taken to avoid error, but it becomes a difficult proposition when dealing almost entirely with newspaper accounts. For the most part, however, the papers and their editors, upon investigation, seem to be most reliable. I have purposely avoided some pseudo-historians, for inaccuracies have been found in cross checking their references.

A special word of appreciation is due Mr. John Hakola and Miss Virginia Walton of the Montana State Historical Library, and the staff of the same library for invaluable help in locating source material.
A word of gratitude is also due Professor Thomas A. Clinch, Head of the Department of History, Carroll College, my advisor, counselor and critic, without whose assistance this thesis would probably have never been written.

F. P. M.
# Table of Contents

I. Development and Necessity ................................................. 1

II. Economic Reasons for the Establishment of the Fort .......... 13

III. The Indian Problem .................................................. 19

IV. The Fort Itself .......................................................... 22

V. Military Functions ...................................................... 31

VI. Social Aspects of the Fort ........................................... 37

VII. Disestablishment ....................................................... 42

Conclusion ........................................................................ 45

Appendix .......................................................................... 47

Bibliography ................................................................. 49
Chapter I

Development and Necessity

In 1880, Fort Maginnis was established as the eleventh fort in Montana Territory. Unlike the other forts heretofore established, it was not essentially part of the chain of forts, i.e. those established as a means of quelling the Indian problem, for at this time the Indian question was fairly well settled. However, this does not imply that Fort Maginnis did not serve in a protective capacity. The foregoing will be discussed in a later chapter.

In this thesis, I shall first treat the development of the fort and progress through its necessity. A fort situated in the Musselshell and Judith Basins had long been the dream of many from both an economic and military standpoint. A cry was sent up to protect the new stock-growing interests growing up in the Musselshell region as early as 1876. Colonel John Gibbon advocated the moving of Fort Logan to this area in 1875, but local influence prevented the move. His report to the Secretary of War, J. D. Cameron states in part:

2. Helena Daily Herald, February 11, 1876, p. 3.
3. Annual Report of the Secretary of War for 1875, I, p. 64.
"As a preventative measure, the establishment of a post at the forks of the Musselshell is of great importance, and if Camp Baker (Fort Logan) were moved out to that point, it would be in a much better position than where it is, and the service of the troops much more efficient." 4

This report was well received by the Secretary of War to which he replied:

"I am deeply impressed with the importance of this suggestion, and fully concur in Colonel Gibbon's recommendation. It is my opinion that a post for four companies should be established at the forks of the Musselshell, to be occupied by a mixed force of cavalry and infantry, with a view to the abandonment of Camp Baker; and I recommend that an appropriation for its construction be asked for, and a reservation including sufficient timber land, be declared without delay. 5

Action was taken almost immediately. On February 14, 1876, Martin Maginnis, Montana Territorial Representative, introduced a bill in Congress (H. R. No. 2113) to provide for the construction of military posts on both the Yellowstone and Musselshell Rivers. 6 This bill was passed by both Houses on July 13, 1876. The bill appropriated $200,000 for the construction of such military posts or depots at such points

4. Ibid., p. 64.
5. Ibid., p. 64.
6. Congressional Record, February 14, 1876, p. 1072.
as might be selected by the Secretary of War. However, the post for the Musselshell was not to become a reality at this time. The tragic destruction of the Custer command on June 25, 1876, was to have a direct bearing on the sites selected by the Secretary of War. Two telegrams were brought before the Senate prior to the voting on the bill. They were from General P. H. Sheridan and read:

Chicago, Illinois
July 7, 1876
To General W. T. Sherman, Washington, D.C.

Do not neglect to urge the appropriation for the two posts on the Yellowstone-on at or about the mouth of the Tongue River, the other in the Big Horn Valley. Our summer's work with all its hardships and losses may be of no avail if these posts are not established. If we could only get one, that at or about the mouth of the Tongue River, it would be of incalculable value.

P. H. Sheridan
Lieut. General 3

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
July 12, 1876
To General W. T. Sherman, Washington, D.C.

Your dispatch received. I think it premature to think of asking for volunteer cavalry, with the attendant expense. If Congress will give the $200,000 for which I have asked for the past two years for the establishing of posts at Tongue River and the mouth of the Big Horn, it

7. Ibid., July 13, 1876, p. 4546.
8. Ibid., p. 4546.
will be in the interest of economy and will settle the Sioux question.

P. H. Sheridan
Lieut. General

9

The requests had the desired effect, and Forts Custer and Keogh were established in the Yellowstone country, leaving the Musselshell without a fort. To say this was wrong would be grossly unjust, for these forts were situated in the heartland of the Sioux and justified their establishment. One question remains unanswered in the author's mind in regard to Sheridan's telegrams. In the second, he maintains that he had long been of the opinion that forts were necessary on the Tongue and the Big Horn Rivers. But in the preamble to H. R. 2113, he states the importance of the establishment of forts on the Musselshell and Yellowstone Rivers. 10

However, the Musselshell area was not forgotten. A reconnaissance had been made in the region in the late summer of 1875 by Captain William Ludlow, of the Corps of Engineers. His report stated, "This trip demonstrated the practicability of a wagon-road through the Judith Basin to the Missouri;" this road would later be known as the Carroll Road, and became a legislative bone of contention. 11

9. Ibid., p. 4546.


Opinions both for and against the fort appeared in Montana newspapers as early as 1875. The Benton Record stated, "The people of Montana want more troops scattered along the frontier, for the protection of life and property, and to encourage the speedy development of vast natural resources." 12

In another article written in the Fort Benton Record appeared the following:

"The people of Eastern Montana would not put one straw in the way of such a scheme could they discover any present necessity for establishment of the suggested post; but with the present depleted condition of the army, and the exposed position of the settled portion of what may be claimed as the Indian section of Montana is considered, they must object to a Musselshell post. We submit that the carrying out of this Musselshell plan would be an outrage against the territory at large." 13

Perhaps the leading newspaper advocating a post near the Musselshell River was the Rocky Mountain Husbandman. Articles appeared beginning in 1873 and until the establishment of a post in 1880. (Naturally the newspaper was chiefly interested in the promotion of stock raising and agriculture, for this was one of the major purposes of the paper.) In an article written in 1878, the editor listed the desirable

12. The Benton Record, March 1, 1875, p. 1.
qualities which the region afforded not only to civilian but to military personnel. This article also contained a most important statement to the effect that areas adjacent to military posts had a tendency to grow with great rapidity. "A large garrison maintained at this point for a few years would cause the valleys of Musselshell, Sweet Grass and Judith to settle up rapidly, and they would soon become self-sustaining." 14 Later in 1873 another article appeared which stressed an equally important point. A fort near the Musselshell would, with Forts Benton, Shaw, Keogh and Custer, form a complete semicircle of defense around the settlements in Eastern Montana. 15 The military question was stressed again when General Miles wrote in an official report, "In addition to the military posts already constructed, I would recommend the establishment of a large post either opposite the mouth of the Musselshell on the Missouri or near People's Creek, on the Milk River." 16 The latter site was agreed upon as the better of the two, and Fort Assiniboine was the direct result of General Miles' request. Since the fort was forgotten again, some adverse criticism appeared from settlers in the Musselshell Valley and charges of favoritism were raised. Authorities in Meagher County be-

15. Ibid., June 6, 1873, p. 2.
gan petitioning the government for the establishment of a temporary military post on the Musselshell at once and for the construction of a permanent post there as early as possible. 17 The stockmen wanted the fort built for purposes of protection and used as a precedent Camp Lewis (Montana) which was created for the protection of the Diamond "R" Transportation Company. 18

Nearing the date of the establishment of Fort Maginnis, another situation arose which, in 1879, caused a new upsurge of interest. Felix Reville Brunot, a missionary and Indian commissioner, attempted to make a treaty with the Crow nation. 19 His attempt was successful, and the treaty which would have moved the entire Crow nation from the Yellowstone Valley to the Judith Basin was placed on paper and offered to the Senate of the United States for ratification. However, it failed to be ratified. I would appear that Montana officials were in favor of the move. Governor Potts wrote Brunot:

"I feel that it is due you that I should express to you my thanks and the thanks of the people of Montana for your patient labor and skill in consummating the late

17. Ibid., July 18, 1878, p. 2.
18. Ibid., July 18, 1878, p. 2.
successful treaty with the Crow Indians, by which they have surrendered to settlement one of the finest and most extensive valleys in the Rocky Mountains. I believe the success you had in forming this treaty is due to the ability and patience by which the negotiations were conducted, aided by the friendly feeling that has been brought about by the humane policy of the President towards the Indian tribes." 20

Brunot's biographer, Charles L. Slattery, was rather provoked when the bill failed to pass Congress and wrote, "Unfortunately, a short-sighted Congress, blinded by the temporary failure of the Northern Pacific failed to ratify this treaty with the Crows and a great opportunity was sacrificed." 21

It was once again brought to light that the regions of the Musselshell and Judith Valleys were being settled very slowly because they were the runway, as it were, for various bands of Indians from the Northern reservations and the Yellowstone River. Numerous requests for the protection of settlers were made by Montana's representative, Martin Maginnis, and such military figures as Generals Terry and Sherman. The plan to attain establishment was to urge the sale of posts overrun by settlements and the investment of this money in new forts on the frontier. 22 The proposed moving of Fort


21. Ibid., p. 213.

22. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, April 15, 1880, p. 2.
Logan (Camp Baker) became a reality when the Forty-Sixth Congress passed H. R. 5894 in 1880. This bill authorized and empowered the establishment of a new military post near the Musselshell and also authorized the sale of Fort Logan (Camp Baker). However, the total cost for building was not to exceed $50,000. 23 This was but one-half of the amount which had been offered earlier. 24

The long awaited day had at last arrived for the settlers of the Musselshell and Judith Valleys. A new advent of settlement was made possible because of this bill and would continue for some forty years. A question arises as to whether political coercion was exerted by prominent Montana businessmen. From the data which I have gathered my opinion is voiced in the affirmative. The following paragraph and quotes seem to substantiate my view.

The D H S outfit, owned by Andrew J. Davis, Erwin Davis, Samuel T. Hauser and Granville Stuart, became interested in the Musselshell area early in 1880. The reason for interest in this particular region was that it would afford grazing land for their beef. Stuart, who seemed to be the trouble-shooter for the organization, went about Montana seeking adequate range. He finally wrote Hauser:


Could find a splendid range on this lower Musselshell, but the d——d Sioux would be after our horses all the time, unless you and Maginnis can induce our imbecile Govt. to remove Ft. Logan (Camp Baker) out of the middle of the settlements and put it at the Big Bend of the Musselshell, or better still a little further N. E. at the mouth of Box Elder Fork, which would enable us to put our cattle on the very garden spot of Montana E. and S. E. of the Judith and Little Snowy Mountains. Try General Sherman and the Secy. of War a little on that—it's ridiculous leaving Fort Logan where it is when the settlements are from one to two-hundred miles beyond it already and just as much exposed to Indians as though there was no such post at all. 25

Action was taken less than one month after the letter was written. Martin Maginnis wrote to General W. T. Sherman:

Sir: During the presence of Gen. Terry in the city I desire to call your attention to a matter in which the people of Eastern Montana are greatly interested... The Musselshell Valley and Judith Basin are being rapidly settled up by stockmen, and, in addition, mines have been discovered in the Judith Basin. This portion of Montana is not on any Indian reservation, and, as you are aware, is very attractive. Its settlement has been slow... For many years the district and department commanders have recommended the establishment of a post in this region... Logan is surrounded by settlements, and I would especially urge that it be moved out to the Musselshell... A good deal of the material of Fort Logan might be utilized in building the post; or the buildings, etc., or Logan could be sold

at a good price to farmers and stockmen and the proceeds applied to the erection of a new post. 26

General Sherman lost no time in acting. Four days later he wrote:

Respectfully submitted to the Hon. Secretary of War, urging the importance of some legislation which will permit the sale of posts overrun by settlements and investing the proceeds of sale in new posts. The case of Fort Logan, Montana, is a case in point. Failing in this, I recommend that an appropriation of $50,000 to build a new post, to protect the settlements of the Judith Basin and the Musselshell. 27

Lastly, the Secretary of War wrote to Martin Maginnis:

Sir: Enclosing herewith a copy of your letter of the 21st ultimo, relative to the establishment of a new military post for the protection of the Musselshell Valley and the Judith Basin, Montana... I have the honor to inform you that the subject has this day been submitted to the Senate and House of Representatives, with recommendation for an appropriation of $50,000 to build the new post referred to.

Alexander Ramsay
Secretary of War 28

It seems rather odd that for five years the settlers had petitioned their representative and nothing of note had been

27. Ibid., April 15, 1880, p. 2.
28. Ibid., April 15, 1880, p. 2.
accomplished. But once prominent figures in Montana became interested, results appeared almost immediately. This one isolated incident shows forth to a degree the usage of friends in political or official capacity in order to attain certain ends. It is further noted that a chain reaction of letter writing ensues and produces the desired effect.
Chapter II

Economic Reasons for the Establishment of the Fort

Economically speaking, the valleys of the Judith and Musselshell afforded the pioneer a wide variety of choice. He could easily become a rancher, sheep-man, miner, farmer or merchant. The vast rolling hills where green grass grew in abundance and the water ran freely represented an ideal locale for ranching. Needless to say, these conditions were also favorable for game, and buffalo abounded in huge numbers. 29 The Treaty of 1855 had given to the Blackfeet the country south of the Missouri and west of the Musselshell River as their hunting ground. 30 Memorials to Congress from the Territorial Legislature, complaints of Indian Commissioners and, lastly, demands from newspapers opened this area to the cattlemen in 1873. 31 Regarding this area and its settlement, a newspaper article appeared:

To the east lay the Smith River, and beyond, the valleys of the Judith and Musselshell, a region of well-watered, natural pasture land, perfectly adapted to cattle growing. Into these valleys the


frontier cattleman began to penetrate with his herds. 32

These first cattlemen were not without problems, for they risked not only the hides of their animals but their own as well. The Blackfeet were not the friendliest of the Great American Indians, rather, they were among the more savage. Another dilemma faced the pioneers (pilgrims as Granville Stuart called them). The buffalo went, but the Indian remained. The settlers sent up their cry and Congress answered with a bill to establish a fort on the Musselshell. However, they might as well have been as "ones crying in the wilderness," for their path was not made straight. The redman retained his position and was a constant threat, living from the fruits of nature and the white man's cattle. The stockmen were determined not to let anything stand in the way of ranching in the Musselshell Valley, which is roughly three-hundred miles long by an average of seventy miles in width. This valley had another distinction; it was second only to the Yellowstone Valley in size, and was one-eighth the size of Montana Territory as of 1880. 34 Granville Stuart commented in his journal on the splendid grass of this valley. This, plus the ex-

32. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, April 13, 1876, p. 2.
33. Stuart, op. cit., p. 2.
34. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, January 29, 1880, p. 7.
istence of numerous mountain streams comprised, the leading reasons for cattlemen to "plant their roots" in the hills of the Musselshell and Judith Valleys. 35 By 1883, there were twelve outfits on the Fort Maginnis range, and another twelve on the Cone Butte and Moccasin ranges. These ranchers worked the roundup together, having as their starting point the DHS ranch. 36 A roundup occasioned much work; but before and after the busy days of branding, roping, and separating cattle, celebrations were in order, and thus the roundup acquired social overtones.

The upper part of the Musselshell was an ideal sheep raising region. The river bottom was not too wide, thus eliminating the cattlemen, although there was a considerable amount of good farming land. This land was in turn used by the sheepmen for production of hay. 37 In 1884, there were some fifty-thousand sheep in this area. 38 But it seems there never existed any great problem between the raisers of the two types of animals. 39 Nevertheless, in regard to the Maiden,

36. Ibid., II, p. 178.
37. Residence and Business Directory of Billings, Montana Hendry & Fell (Minneapolis 1883) p. 32.
Montana area, the following appeared:

Two years ago that region was almost a wilderness. Now almost every valuable location has been taken up. It is not sufficiently watered for general farming and the few springs and hay patches scattered over that belt of country are being rapidly utilized by (sic) sheepmen. In fact, it seems that there, as elsewhere in Montana, sheep are fast crowding out the large bands of cattle. Within the past two years thirty-thousand sheep have been brought into that section. There are also about 35,000 head of cattle there, but already cattlemen are looking to other sections to maintain their large herds. 40

No repercussions resulted in the form of wars etc., as was the case in other neighboring states. Sheepmen took a great interest in grading their bands, and thoroughbreds were imported to improve stock. 41 By this very statement it can be seen that these sheepmen were interested in developing the area and were more interested in raising stock than in petty bickering with their neighbors.

Gold was discovered here as was the case elsewhere in Montana. A telegram dated July 6, 1878, to Martin Maginnis announced, "Gold has been discovered in the Bear Paw Mountains one-hundred miles north east of Lebanon." 42 Late in the next

41. Ibid., January 10, 1884, p. 5.
42. Letters to Major Maginnis, Montana State Historical Society.
fall, the rich and extensive mines of the Judith were discovered. The principle gulch at the time was known as Yogo. It afforded opportunities in the placer mining field. Various mining companies came into the area, systematically prospecting the bars joining their gulch claims by building ditches to them and by ground-sluicing. There were from thirty to fifty bars along the gulches paying $15.00 and more to the mining hands daily. It was felt that these discoveries of gold would entirely eliminate the Indian problem. Unfortunately such was not the case, and the demand for the establishment of a fort persisted, for these mines did not attract attention nor many miners until 1882. Helena capitalists, in 1881, brought new interest to the area by erecting a ten-stamp mill, containing crushing devices which eliminated sluicing. A custom mill, for the small miners' benefit was established enabling them to obtain a greater amount of profit from their respective claims. With the establishment of the new fort, these claims would become a leading issue, for the military reservation included many of the miners' claims. The chief metals mined were gold and silver, although copper existed in abundance. Copper, however, was overlooked in lieu of the

44. Ibid., September 4, 1879, p. 2.
more precious metals. 46 Coal was also obtainable in this region.

Farming, although not fully developed at this early date, was also a possibility in the region. The soil was rich and very fertile, in fact to such a degree that produce could be raised without irrigation. 47 Fruits of all kinds were easily raised, and grains yielded a prolific harvest. An abundance of water also made possible the irrigation of less fertile soil, and the winding character of the streams aided the farmer in easily obtaining water for his land.

It can readily be seen that with such economic interests present those concerned would want protection from intruders, especially when life and property could be placed in jeopardy.

46. Ibid., p. 35.

47. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, January 29, 1880, p. 7.
Chapter III

The Indian Problem

Indians were not unknown to the settlers of the Musselshell. As early as 1863, they had an encounter with a band of Sioux. Sitting Bull had attempted to wipe out the small settlement. However, a friendly Indian warned the settlers beforehand, enabling them to fortify themselves, and the result of the minor battle was a victory for the settlers. 48

The Musselshell Valley and Judith Basin were avenues of travel for the Indian on his migrations north. Along the way the Crows occupied themselves by engaging in horse-stealing expeditions and in general by harassing the settlers in the area. The Northern Indian in turn, in traveling south, passed through the same area, and when the two tribes came in contact a conflict usually ensued between the different tribes. 49 Thus this fruitful region was settled very slowly.

In order to overcome the migration problem, Fort Assiniboine was established in 1879. But Indian raiding parties had no great trouble in bypassing the post to the east and descending on the settlers of the Musselshell. 50 Criticism

48. Fort Benton Record, July 23, 1876, p. 3.
49. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, April 15, 1880, p. 2.
50. Ibid., May 1, 1879, p. 2.
by newspaper editors brought this situation to light:

There is no doubt that the Sioux are raiding the region of the Judith, Musselshell and Yellowstone in greater numbers this fall than ever before, not with standing the presence of the new post (Fort Assiniboine). Herefore when we urged the necessity of placing a military post in the very midst of this region it was claimed that the proper place for such a post was north of the Missouri River, in the vicinity of the (sic) boundary line and that from such a point the military could operate and effectively prevent raiding parties passing and repassing to and from our settlements; but the fallacy of these assertions are now verified. 51

An executive order of July 5, 1873, had taken this land from the Indian. The order opened the area as public domain. The order also accentuated Indian animosity toward the settlers, for it took from him his hunting ground. He was now forced to subsist by other means. Not being industrious he tended to resent the government policy of education and civilization and, in turn, turned to procuring his food and livelihood by the easiest means possible. The cattle and horses of the white settler offered him a solution, and he took advantage of the situation. No fort could entirely free the range of this circumstance. Accordingly, the Fort Maginnis garrison dealt continually with the problem. Stockmen claimed they

51. Ibid., October 30, 1879, p. 2.
fed the Indian all during the summer months, while the Indian agents at the reservations claimed the government had not allowed enough meat to tide the Indians through the winter. 52

In the main, Indian raiding parties, though small in numbers, posed an acute problem. This, in turn, kept this area uninhabited to any great degree. The settlers wanted the land, but did not want the Indian nor the situations which he precipitated.

52. Ernest S. Osgood, op. cit., p. 145.
Chapter IV

The Fort Itself

The original site of the fort was within a niche of the Judith Mountains. This afforded good protection from three sides, but the rear of the fort was directly accessible from the mountains. Another bad aspect of the situation was that Cone Butte Pass, a favorite Indian passage, lay to the north at a distance of two or three miles. Consequently, if the fort were situated near this pass, it would at least discourage its use by the Indians and also do away with a blind side.

Therefore, Fort Maginnis, which received its name from the Honorable Martin Maginnis, was established on August 27, 1880. It was a very rare instance when a fort was named for a civilian, much less a living civilian. General Sherman was the power behind this suggestion. He recognized the service of Maginnis in effecting the post's establishment, and aptly bestowed the representative's name on the new garrison. This was situated at latitude 47 deg., 1 min., 9 sec. north; longitude 109 deg., 10 min., 15 sec. west; elevation above the sea, about 4,200 feet; on the right bank of Ford's Creek.

53. The Benton Weekly Record, November 6, 1880, p. 5.
It was located on the south-east side and at the foot of the Judith Mountains. Timber, water, and hay were easily gotten.

In regard to the latter, Granville Stuart wrote:

The location for the cantonment was on the upper end of the hay meadow that I had selected for my home ranch. In spite of my best efforts at persuasion they included more than half the meadow in their reservation. It was annoying to loose the hay but the fort was a convenience as it furnished telegraphic communications, post office and a convenient place to purchase supplies. 56

Distances to cities located near or on transportation routes constituted another advantage. The camp was sixty miles from Carroll on the Missouri, and roughly one-hundred miles from Custer (near the Yellowstone River), which was on the Northern Pacific Railroad line. 57 Direct wagon roads ran to Junction City (located on the north bank of the Yellowstone fifty-five miles from Billings), and to Helena and Fort Benton. 58

Major Bartlet, the post quartermaster, was in charge of the construction of the post. The buildings were arranged in the form of a square, the parade grounds taking up the space inside. The Commanding Officer's residence, a one story frame


57. The Benton Weekly Record, November 6, 1880, p. 5.

house, 40x37, with a wing, 24x17\2 feet, was so situated as to have a commanding view of the entire garrison. On either side of the commander's house, the quarters for the field officers and company officers were located. Three double-set frame buildings, two stories, 40x35 feet, with wings to all the buildings, 10x23\2 feet, constituted these quarters. 59

Enlisted men's quarters faced the officers. They were three in number, 30x232\2 feet, designed for two companies each, with a kitchen and dining room in the rear of each building. The other necessary buildings were directly behind the men's quarters. 60 In 1834, these quarters housed two-hundred and fifty-two enlisted men, the largest number ever assembled at the post. 61

Buildings controlled by the quartermaster's department were: commissary store house, a frame building with a stone basement, 200x25 feet, and an adjoining root house; quartermaster's store house, a frame building with a stone basement, 200x25 feet; a brick magazine, tin roofed, 12x15 feet; bakery, a frame building, 23x20 feet, containing a brick oven; and a one story frame house, 27\2x39 feet, occupied by the chief clerk of

60. The River Press, December 23, 1831, p. 11.
the post quartermaster office. 62

Other buildings located about the compound were: a stone guardhouse 63\frac{1}{2}x32 feet; stables 25x130 feet (there were four in number, three troop and one quartermaster, sheltering seventy-five animals each); a frame building for teamsters and mechanics, containing sleeping, eating and cook rooms, 100x25 feet plus a 50x20 foot wing; one frame building one story, with quarters for three non-commissioned staff officers, 60x24 feet; a library, reading and school room were contained in one set of company quarters; a gymnasium and chapel, one and one half story frame building, 120x20, containing the wheelwright, blacksmith, saddler, and tinsmith shops; there was also a post saw mill but no description of the building has been found. 63

In addition to the above there were six cottages supplied for the post laundresses. 64

It seems apparent that all of the above buildings could not have been built for the $50,000 originally allotted by Congress. Therefore, on June 16, 1880 an additional $40,000 was appropriated. Another bill of March 3, 1881, appropriated $55,705.84. With this money the following buildings were completed: three storehouses; one issuing room; quartermaster

63. Ibid., August 13, 1885, p. 1.
64. The River Press, December 23, 1881, p. 11.
and commissary offices; hospital; three double sets of officers' quarters; administration building; two double barracks; guard house; bakery; three stables; and root house. In 1882, a further appropriation of $25,000 was asked for and received to complete the following; one double barrack; commanding officer's quarters; four double sets of lieutenant's quarters; surgeon's quarters; quartermaster's stable, inclosed; magazine; laundress' quarters and sinks; and an employees' building. 65

Supplies for the fort came from Chicago, Jeffersonville, New York, Saint Paul and St. Louis during that period of the year when the Missouri was navigable (May, June and July). During the other months, supplies were brought by rail to Custer, and thence to the post over wagon roads. A year's supply of rations was maintained at the post commissary. Wood was obtained from the neighboring hills, furnished by contract, as was hay. Water was obtained from wells at the post, and from Ford's Creek by means of water wagons. 66

The original post store was owned by Broadwater, McNamara and Company. In 1883, it was destroyed by fire, and the two partners rebuilt the store in the same year. 67 Hence the following description deals with the second store.


The main store, which contained a sales room, counting rooms and a private office was 35x30 feet; the warehouse 35x25 feet; granary 100x16 feet. The post trader had a private residence, and an additional one story house was tendered to the officers of Fort Maginnis as a club room. 68

A controversy began as a result of the post tradership. Granville Stuart wrote S. T. Hauser:

We can cut 600 tons (hay) here and we are always sure of supplying this post at paying figures for there is no hay land to amount to anything except ours. we were in luck to get here first. We must do our best to get the post tradership here for there is a good thing in it-I hear Broadwater has an outfit on the way here so of course he is after it. And you and Maginnis (if he has any influence with him) must get him to withdraw his claim and go for us which will probably carry it. 69

He later wrote June 18, 1881, "Broadwater got away with the tradership here." This gave C. A. Broadwater the tradership at Forts Assinniboine, Keogh, Custer and Maginnis, besides those at summer camps such as Coal Banks and Rocky Point. 70

Broadwater was also awarded the contract for hay at Maginnis. At this point the incident came to a head. The contract


69. Granville Stuart to Samuel T. Hauser, September 3, 1880 (Hauser Papers, Montana State Historical Society).

70. Ibid., June 18, 1881.
called for one-thousand and thirty-two tons of hay at $8.47 per ton. This amount was not attainable in the region, and therefore Stuart was apprehensive over the possible loss of his hay lands. He suspected that Broadwater was behind the enlargement of the size of the reservation. This was accomplished on May 5, 1881, in a letter to Stuart. Captain Parker, the commanding officer informed him:

You are respectfully notified that hereafter no timber nor hay must be cut within the limits above specified, without special permission to be obtained from Superior Headquarters. 71

The limits in the above paragraph had increased the size of the reservation from 2x2 to 7x9 miles. 72 After much letter writing and worry, a compromise was finally reached:

Gen. Ruger decided that they would cut us out of the reservation by running a line S. W. cutting off our upper meadow, which comprises about half of our hay land, and about one-fourth of the whole ranch, and they have run the line today. As good as we could expect better than continuing the fight for the whole. 73

Little more is said in regard to the Broadwater dispute in

71. Ibid., May 5, 1881.
72. Ibid., May 5, 1881.
73. Ibid., August 20, 1881.
Stuart’s letters to Hauser. So it would seem that the problem, although not having a happy ending for Stuart, was settled.

The reservation also affected the miners in the region, for part of the mineral belt was included. The sincerity of Martin Maginnis was questioned because of his lack of interest in securing relief. 74 A heated discussion was carried on by The Mineral Argus urging the people to petition Congress for the removal of the mineral belt from the reservation. The culmination of the situation came about on April 24, 1884, when the U. S. Senate passed Bill No. 1531:

In the Senate the bill was passed providing for the disposal of the abandoned military reservations. It authorizes the President whenever in his opinion any portion of a military reservation becomes useless, he shall place it in charge of the Secretary of the Interior who shall have it surveyed, subdivided, appraised and sold. 75

Because of this bill, the settlers were allowed to remain on their claims, and little more is written in this regard.

As a direct result of the fort’s establishment, population increased sharply. By 1881, some twenty new ranches were established, while the miners at the Judith mines grew in number to two-hundred and fifty. This is a strong indication of

74. The Mineral Argus, April 24, 1884, p. 1.
75. Ibid., May 8, 1884, p. 4.
the impetus of the fort on settlement in the area. 76

Because of its length, a list of the commanding officers stationed at Fort Maginnis is contained in an appendix. (The officers, years, and the complement of men is included in the appendix.)

Chapter V

Military Functions

There has been a trend in recent years to conceive a military fort as being in a constant state of alarm. When not out fighting the soldiers are posted, ever alert, at the walls of the fort. Needless to say, such occurrences were never occasioned at Fort Maginnis.

In order to draw a true picture of the fort in the 1880's we must first investigate the reasons for its foundation. The fort described in this thesis had as its basic purpose the protection of settlers in a definite region. Once the initial end was accomplished, the maintenance of protection became the fort's prime objective. This latter reason, then, will be discussed as the military function of the garrison.

Cattle raising brought forth the problem of cattle rustlers. These men, with little or no conscience, reaped the profits of the hard working cowpuncher. This, in turn, greatly irked the cattlemen. Aid was sought from the military but, with results not being to their fancy, a vigilante committee was established. 77 A number of thieves were hanged, but the organization never reached the prominence of their earlier predecessors in Montana.

The rustling situation was further aggravated by the presence of Indians in this general area. Frequent scouting parties were sent out from the Fort to combat this problem. The Mineral Argus during the years 1884 and 1885 has numerous articles pertaining to expeditions leaving the Fort in quest of Indian rustlers.

Horse thieves also gained prominence in this region. The Crows stole from the Piegans, and the Piegans stole from the Crows, and, in the process, they picked up white settlers' horses. White rustlers, in turn, used this situation to cast suspicion on the Indians. Adverse newspaper criticism appeared because of the foregoing as the following line will illustrate. "There is a squad of soldiers at Fort Maginnis the most of whom have never seen an Indian since they have been at the post." A fact which is usually forgotten shows the position of the military in a different light. When an Indian was caught in the act of stealing horses or cattle, the property could be returned to its rightful owner and the Indian was reprimanded and sent back to his reservation without any grave punishment. This shows the powerlessness of the military in this regard.

78. The Mineral Argus, October 1, 1885, p. 1.

79. Ibid., October 1, 1885, p. 1.

80. Granville Stuart to Samuel T. Hauser, August 9, 1881, (Hauser Papers, Montana State Historical Society).
Since the fort was near the Missouri River, an additional task was the receipt of freight from the ships and the guarding of it until claimed by the addressees. 81 This service greatly facilitated the settlers' receiving their goods intact.

For a few months during the year 1885, the Fort was quite apprehensive because of Louis Riel, the noted leader of the half-breed rebellion in Canada. Orders were received which stated that the cavalry was to be in readiness to march to the Canadian border to stop any American half-breeds from joining Riel's forces. 82 Anxiety was further increased by reason of the fact that some fifty half-breeds lived in the vicinity of Fort Maginnis. However, all was in vain. The half-breeds didn't attempt to join Riel, and the troops never left Fort Maginnis.

A military post, in performing its functions and duties, was a good thing for the whole of society involved in that area. But, with the coming of a group of military, some resentment was bound to follow. Fort Maginnis was no exception. When on a march, soldiers frequently would run out of food and, if a beef chanced by, steaks were the menu of the day. 83

Another occasion for resentment arose when soldiers were re-

81. The Mineral Argus, April 17, 1884, p. 5.
82. Ibid., April 16, 1885, p. 4.
83. Stuart to Hauser, op. cit., December 6, 1881.
quested to aid in returning Indians to their reservations and the request was refused with the remark, "We are too busy." 84

The treatment which the soldiers gave to their steeds was sometimes frowned upon. As a case in point, two soldiers, after having driven their horses rather hard from Fort Maginnis to Maiden, a distance of three miles, left their animals outside on a rather cold day. It was noted that these animals were accustomed to being sheltered, and thus the riders were criticized, to say the least, by the populace.

But the paramount sign of indignation came in 1886, when Lt. Col. Leslie Smith was in command at the garrison. A fire broke out in Collar Gulch, which was entirely on the Fort Maginnis reservation. Colonel Smith maintained that he was not there to put out fires, and he took no action until civilians telegraphed the Adjutant General of the Department of Dakota. Only then, knowing of the telegram, did Smith show any response to the call for aid, by ordering out every available man to fight the fire. In the meantime, thousands of valuable trees were killed, and a considerable amount of cord wood was lost. 86 Smith's action contrasted sharply with that of Captain J. G. McAdams, commanding officer in 1883. McAdams

84. Ibid., July 3, 1881.
85. The Mineral Argus, March 6, 1884, p. 5.
86. Ibid., May 27, 1886, p. 3.
had ordered out the entire garrison to fight a fire in the Snowy Range, some thirty miles from the reservation. The Captain's reason for his action was that, "soldiers are stationed in various parts of the country to protect the life and property of the citizens." Colonel Smith was asked what his purpose was in being on the frontier. 87

The Government, obviously, did not seem to notice this situation, for Smith remained in command until 1888 and has the distinction of being the commanding officer for the longest period of time at the Fort.

Desertion was a problem which existed at the Fort, especially after paydays. Usually, however, the troops returned after running out of money. 88

During the bulk of its existence the Fort was a five company post, three cavalry troops and two infantry companies. Until the year 1884, when it was rumored that the fort would be abandoned, the Second Cavalry and Eighteenth Infantry were stationed here. 39 In 1884, the Second Cavalry was replaced by the First Cavalry. 90 The five companies remained until 1886, when the garrison of the post was cut to three com-

37. Ibid., May 27, 1886, p. 3.
38. Ibid., May 21, 1885, p. 4.
panies. 91 In the following year the garrison of the post was once again cut in size to two companies. 92 Two years later the garrison was increased to three companies. 93 It remained such until shortly before its disestablishment.

Troops at Fort Maginnis also assisted other military posts at various times. In 1888, a troop of cavalry left for Fort Custer where they joined the bulk of a detachment to put down refractory Crows. A skirmish was fought, although no serious consequences resulted. 94

In fine, the military functions were varied. Discontent from idleness was evidenced at various times by young officers in the post's column in The Mineral Argus. One particular notice read, "Come over to Maginnis all of you that are weary of the excitement of city and ranch life and we will guarantee you quietude." 95 In spite of all this, the garrison was a valuable asset to the region.

91. Ibid., I, 1836-1837, p. 88.
92. Ibid., I, 1887, p. 90.
93. Ibid., I, 1889, pp. 98-99.
94. Ibid., I, 1838, p. 153.
95. The Mineral Argus, August 26, 1886, p. 2.
Chapter VI

Social Aspects of the Fort

Forts indirectly promoted social activities. Though these were not the forts' major purpose, they tended to bring people together at a common meeting ground. A prerequisite for such gatherings was a hall or building large enough to house those invited, especially during the winter months. Fort Maginnis had such a building which was used to great advantage. Settlers were not hampered by distance as they were inclined to build near the reservation proper. Therefore, this fort did become a social center.

Minor dances and grand balls were held at regular intervals. Any holiday or week-end afforded an opportunity for such gatherings. Miscreant pranksters were not unknown in this early age. An illustration of the aforesaid happened when a group of soldiers went to Maiden, Montana, to transport local girls back to the post for a dance. A practical joker unscrewed the nut from a wheel of the conveyance and discarded it. The occupants, however, were unhurt as the wheel came off on a good stretch of road. Regardless of minor incidents, the

96. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, April 25, 1878, p. 2.
98. Ibid., January 17, 1884, p. 5.
dances were most successful and resulted in a cementing of ties between the military and civilian population.

Christmas and roller skating parties were given for the children of the region. 99 A library was maintained for adults, and guest lecturers were occasionally present at the fort. 100

The theatre was not lacking at this post. A group of amateurs from the Second Cavalry and Eighteenth Infantry organized a little theater and presented comedy and light sketches. These in turn were well received by the people in general. 101 The Germans at the post formed a glee club, which seemed successful though not long lived. 102 An orchestra and a minstrel troupe were also organized to entertain the settlers. 103

Athletic competition, both organized and individual, was scheduled. A baseball team from Maiden challenged a team composed of the soldiers at Fort Maginnis. The army nine were not fortunate in their endeavor as the box score indicates:

| Maiden  | 3 3 3 0 0 10 0 1 6 --26 |
| Maginnis | 5 3 0 0 0 2 4 2 0 --16 104 |

99. Ibid., April 17, 1834, p. 1.
100. Ibid., December 20, 1833, p. 5.
101. Papers on Fort Maginnis, Montana State Historical Library.
103. Ibid., August 14, 1834, p. 5; September 13, 1834, p. 5.
104. Ibid., June 19, 1834, p. 1.
However, in the one individual sport, foot racing, the army had a champion in Private Patrick Smith, who beat all comers and in the process lined the pockets of his military faithful. 105

More concretely, the Fort furnished the settlers with communications and the necessities of life. Telegraph lines and a Post Office were available because of the Fort. The post store fulfilled the need for a place to purchase needed commodities.

Mail service was inaugurated on a full scale early in 1883. The route ran from Junction City by Fort Maginnis to Maiden. 106 A winter and spring obstacle to regular mail service could be seen in the spring run off. 107 This occasioned much aggravation both for the settlers and the military. The following article is illustrative:

We believe the poorest mail service in the US is that running between Maginnis and Custer Station. The teams are ill fed and consequently feeble. But half the proper number of horses are used. Mail matter is, we are informed, frequently left behind in inclement weather, or when the roads are in bad condition. We hope the contractor will do

105. Ibid., May 23, 1885, p. 5.
106. Rocky Mountain Husbandman., February 1, 1883, p. 6.
The situation was eventually rectified when a bridge was built which spanned the Musselshell River. The telegraph line ran from Fort Maginnis to Junction City and was easily kept in repair as it followed the stage road.

The post store operated by Broadwater, McNamara and Company offered the settlers a variety of materials which included groceries, dry goods, drugs and medicines, hardware and cutlery, furniture, wagons and farm machinery also tobaccos and cigars. The store kept four to five clerks busy in fulfilling customers' needs.

Religious services were provided for troops and civilians, though not at regular intervals, by passing missionaries and priests who would often stop and conduct religious services for these people. At one time, religious services conducted by one of the officers were planned for every Sunday. Whether or not this became a reality is unknown.

To be very specific, the Fort did serve in a social capacity and, in so doing, afforded both the military personnel...

108. *Fergus County Argus*, June 23, 1887, p. 3.
and the civilians the opportunity of making friends with one another, which, in the long run, showed the settlers another side of the personality of the troops garrisoned here. These soldiers of the U. S. Army underwent many hardships in order to be the forerunners of an expanding nation.
Chapter VII

Disestablishment

After ten years of service to settlers and pioneers the fort was finally abandoned July 10, 1890. Company A, 20th Infantry, left Fort Maginnis for station at Fort Assiniboine, Montana, May 28, 1890. Troop A, First Cavalry, left the Fort for temporary duty in Yellowstone Park, May 31, 1890. The remaining force, Troop L, First Cavalry under the Commanding Officer, J. Q. Adams, withdrew to Fort Custer, Montana, taking station thereat. 114

The discontinuance of the Fort came as no great shock to the people of the area for they were aware of the situation as early as April of 1890, when the following appeared in the local newspaper:

The Secretary of War to-day issued an order directing the troops from the following posts to be withdrawn as soon as the department commanders concerned can provide suitable accommodations elsewhere: Fort Maginnis, Montana ... The respective department commanders are to report to the adjutant general of the army the dates when the posts can be abandoned, with a view to necessary arrangements for reservations, with buildings and other improvements, to be received by

114. Ibid., P. 192.
the Department of the Interior for Indian school purposes or for disposal. 115

Nevertheless, the settlers of the locality were reluctant to give up the Fort and petitioned the Secretary of War for its continuance. They stated that the country side was still being harassed by Indians, but more important economically the farmers of the district would be without a ready consumer. 116 Their supplication was in vain, and shortly afterwards bills announcing the sale of quartermaster's stores, garrison equipage, ordnance stores, medical stores, etc., of Fort Maginnis appeared in the community newspaper. 117

Next the problem of what to do with the reservation arose. Late in 1890, Senator Power of Montana introduced a bill (34348) to provide for the disposal of the Fort Maginnis reservation under the homestead and mining laws acts, for educational and other purposes. 118 This bill was referred to the Committee of Public Lands. However, it seems the bill died in committee for no further mention of the reservation appears until 1894 when the reservation was transferred to the custody of

115. Fergus County Argus, April 17, 1890, p. 2.
116. Ibid., May 8, 1890, p. 2.
117. Ibid., May 29, 1890, p. 3.
118. Congressional Record, XXI, Fifty-First Congress, 1st Session, 1890, p. 9143.
A definite settlement of the reservation came in 1895, when the Fifty-Third Congress passed the following:

That the Governor of the State of Montana is hereby empowered and authorized to select and enter of the public lands contained within the boundaries of the abandoned Fort Maginnis Military Reservation in Fergus County, State of Montana which are free from any settlement or other right or claim at the date of selection, not exceeding in all two sections, on which are situated the buildings heretofore used for military purposes; that the lands and water rights so selected and entered, with the building thereon, are hereby, granted and donated to the State of Montana for the maintenance of a soldier's home, or for public purposes: Provided, that the entry and selection of lands in the provisions of this act shall be construed as being in part satisfaction of the grant of lands..., of the Act of Congress of February 22, 1839. 120

At present, the great bulk of land where the Fort was situated is owned by the State of Montana. In regard to the reservation proper, nearly all of the land is owned by individuals. There are some portions of it that are still public domain land. 121

120. Fifty-Third Congress, Session III, Chap. 139, 1895, p. 938.

121. Interview at the State Land Office, and a letter from the Fergus County Clerk and Recorder, February 13, 1953.
Conclusion

In surveying, thus briefly, the history of Fort Maginnis, I have not attempted to supply an absolute, clear cut definition of what a fort was or was not. Each fort in Montana was clearly a separate entity. Each requires individual treatment by the inquiring historian in order to draw a clear picture. Each was also a part of a unity. From my own experience, I can say with all honesty, it is a most rewarding quest.

The Fort of the Musselshell and Judith Valleys spent itself serving the imperative needs of the inhabitants of the specified region, and, more broadly, the Fort affected an area stretching from the Missouri River to the Yellowstone River. Its effect in promoting settlement and expansion and, at the same time, providing protection was instrumental in populating the area. For a period of roughly ten years, it served and served well its purpose. Although it did not achieve astounding popularity in a military vein, it nevertheless functioned as a most effective force.

Historians, who have written briefly on Fort Maginnis, stress greatly the fact that coercion, both political and verbal, may have been used in causing its establishment. I share this opinion. But foremost in my mind has always been the fact that the Fort was brought into existence and served its specific purpose well. To me, this is the equalizer.
Finally, after having done research on a specific institution in Montana History, I am inclined to conclude that much of Montana's vast history lies hidden in her archives. The unveiling most certainly should be, can be, and I pray will be accomplished.
Appendix

Commanding Officers of Fort Maginnis

1. Captain Daingerfield Parker, 1880-82, seventy-five enlisted and five officers. a
2. Captain J. G. MacAdams, 1883-84, two-hundred and thirty-one enlisted and eighteen officers. b
3. Colonel Baker, 1884. c
4. Captain J. G. MacAdams, February 23, to April 3, 1884. d
5. Major B. B. Keeler, April 3, to July 3, 1884. e
6. Colonel Green, July 3, to December 18, 1884. f
7. Captain McGregor, December 18, 1884, to April 16, 1885. g
8. Major B. B. Keeler, April 16, to June 11, 1885. h
9. Colonel Bates, June 11, to July 16, 1885. i

b. Ibid., 1883-84, I, pp. 64-65.
d. Ibid., February 23, 1884, p. 1.
e. Ibid., April 3, 1884, p. 5.
g. Ibid., December 18, 1884, p. 1.
h. Ibid., April 16, 1885, p. 5.
i. Ibid., June 11, 1885, p. 4.

11. Lt. Col. Leslie Smith, 1836-'38, one-hundred and thirty-one enlisted and eleven officers.

12. Captain J. H. Patterson, 1889-'90, one-hundred enlisted and ten officers.

13. Captain J. Q. Adams, 1890, Troop L.

---

j. Annual Report of the Secretary of War 1885, I, p. 34.

k. Ibid., 1886-'87, I, p. 8; 1887, I, p. 90; 1888, I, pp. 80-81.

l. Ibid., 1889, I, pp. 98-99.

m. Ibid., 1890, I, p. 192.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Newspapers:
1. Fergus County Argus, 1887-'90.
2. Fort Benton Record, 1875-'90.
3. Helena Daily Herald, February 11, 1876.
4. Rocky Mountain Husbandman, 1876-'83.
5. The Benton Record, March 1, 1875.
6. The Benton Weekly Record, November 6, 1880.
7. The Mineral Argus, 1884-'86.
8. The River Press, 1881.

Papers:
1. Hauser Papers, 1880-’81, Montana State Historical Society. *
2. Letters to Major Maginnis, Montana State Historical Society. *
3. Papers on Fort Maginnis, Montana State Historical Society. *
4. Papers on the Abandonment of Fort Maginnis, Montana State Historical Society. *
   * All these works unpublished

Books:
Government Printing:


Secondary Sources

Books:


Letter:

1. A letter from the County Clerk and Recorder of Fergus County, Montana, February 13, 1953.