



No. 9**Fort Atkinson**

In the summer of 1819, Colonel Henry Atkinson led about 1100 soldiers up the Missouri River. Their mission was to establish a military post. The fort was needed to help keep English fur traders out of that unsettled part of America. Colonel Atkinson made a temporary camp at the Council Bluff in Nebraska. Explorers Lewis and Clark had met with the Indians there in 1804. Lewis and Clark reported that the place was a good site for a fort. Atkinson agreed.

The camp became a permanent post in 1820. Fort Atkinson was the largest and strongest military outpost beyond St. Louis. It was also the first fort located in what was to become Nebraska.

Fort Atkinson was the site of many "firsts." Indians had grown crops in this country for centuries. Ft. Atkinson was the first place in Nebraska where white people farmed. The first school, library, sawmill, grist mill (for grinding flour), and brickyard in Nebraska were all located at the fort. Soldiers and their families lived at this remote outpost from 1819 - 1827. Twenty-five more years passed before Nebraska was opened to settlement.



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Photo

THE MILITARY POST AT COUNCIL BLUFFS WILL BE ABANDONED AND THE 6TH REGIMENT OF INFANTRY WILL BE STATIONED AT JEFFERSON BARRACKS

This brief order was sent to Ft. Atkinson in 1827. By June 6th the last soldiers and their families left the fort. They were moved to Missouri.

Years later, settlers coming to the west bank of the Missouri River used the leftover bricks from the fort. They built chimneys for their houses with the bricks.

Time passed. A few people who were interested in our history tried to preserve the site. They put up a small monument in 1929. In the 1950s, archeologists began working at the site. They located building remains. They found items the



soldiers, traders, carpenters, masons, shoemakers, laborers, laundresses, trappers, hunters, and Indians who once lived at the fort had thrown away. They also checked old records for information about the fort. The diary of the sutler (store-keeper) James Kennerly told about everyday life at the fort.



Scissors, a hook, ox shoes and more were dug up at the site of Ft. Atkinson.



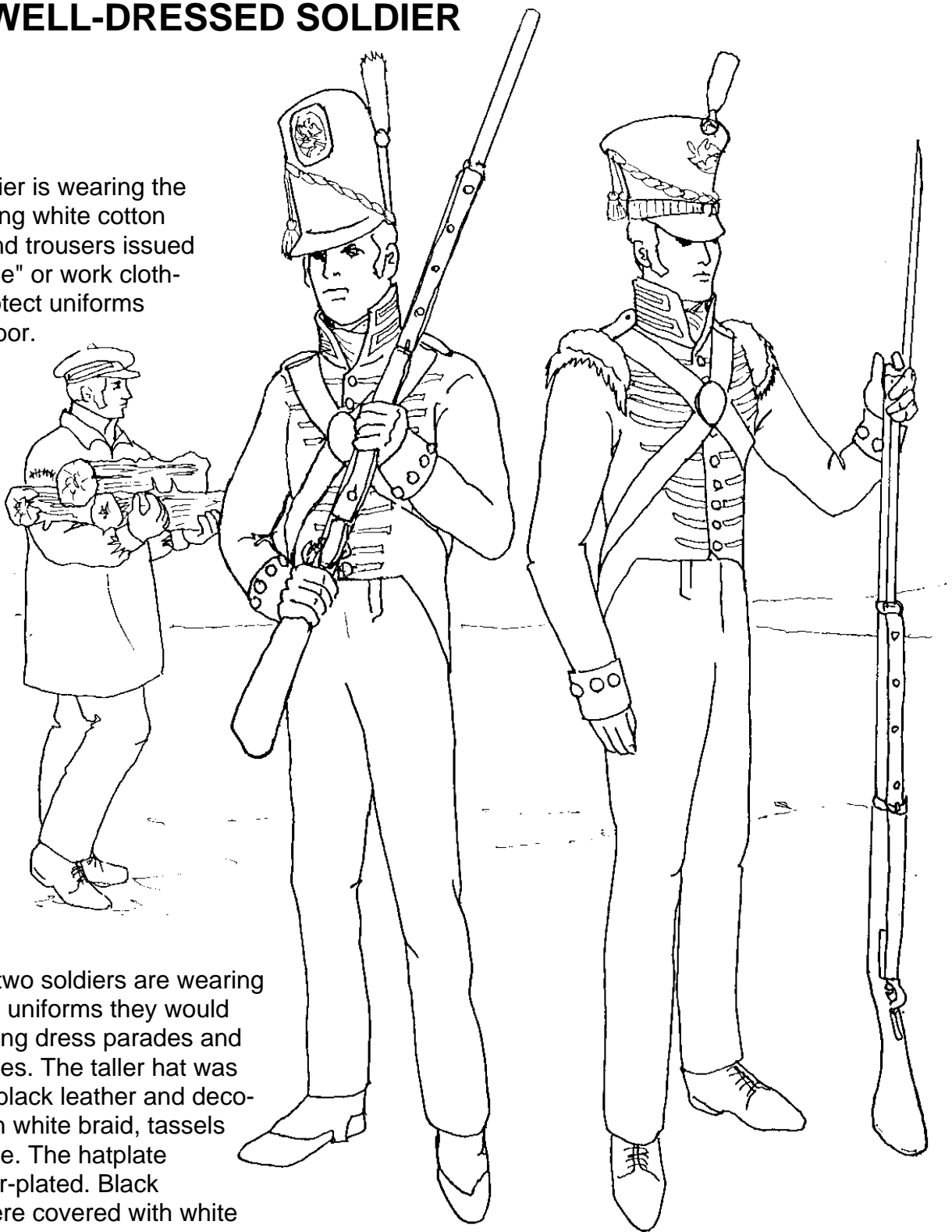
Today Fort Atkinson is a park operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The soldier's quarters, blacksmith shop, and other buildings were rebuilt. The buildings look just as they did in the 1820s. Research from archeologists and historians helped workers rebuild the fort. Today you can visit the park. You can learn much more about the fort and all its "firsts."



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Photo

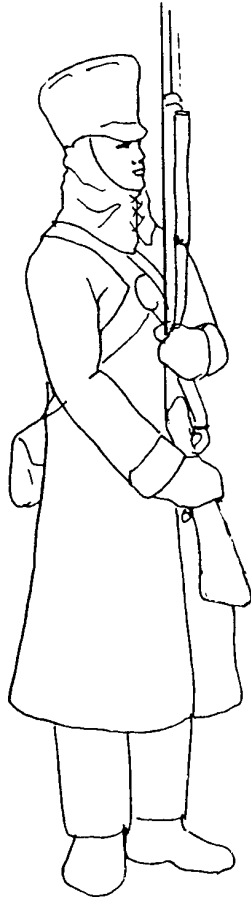
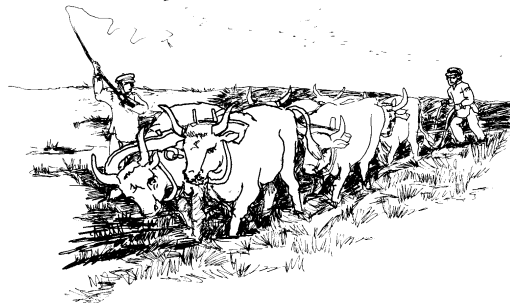
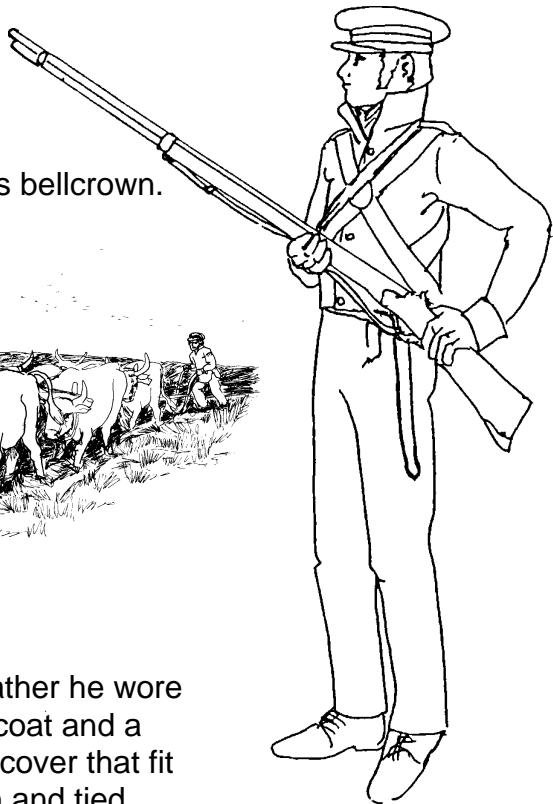
THE WELL-DRESSED SOLDIER

This soldier is wearing the loose-fitting white cotton smock and trousers issued as "fatigue" or work clothing to protect uniforms during labor.



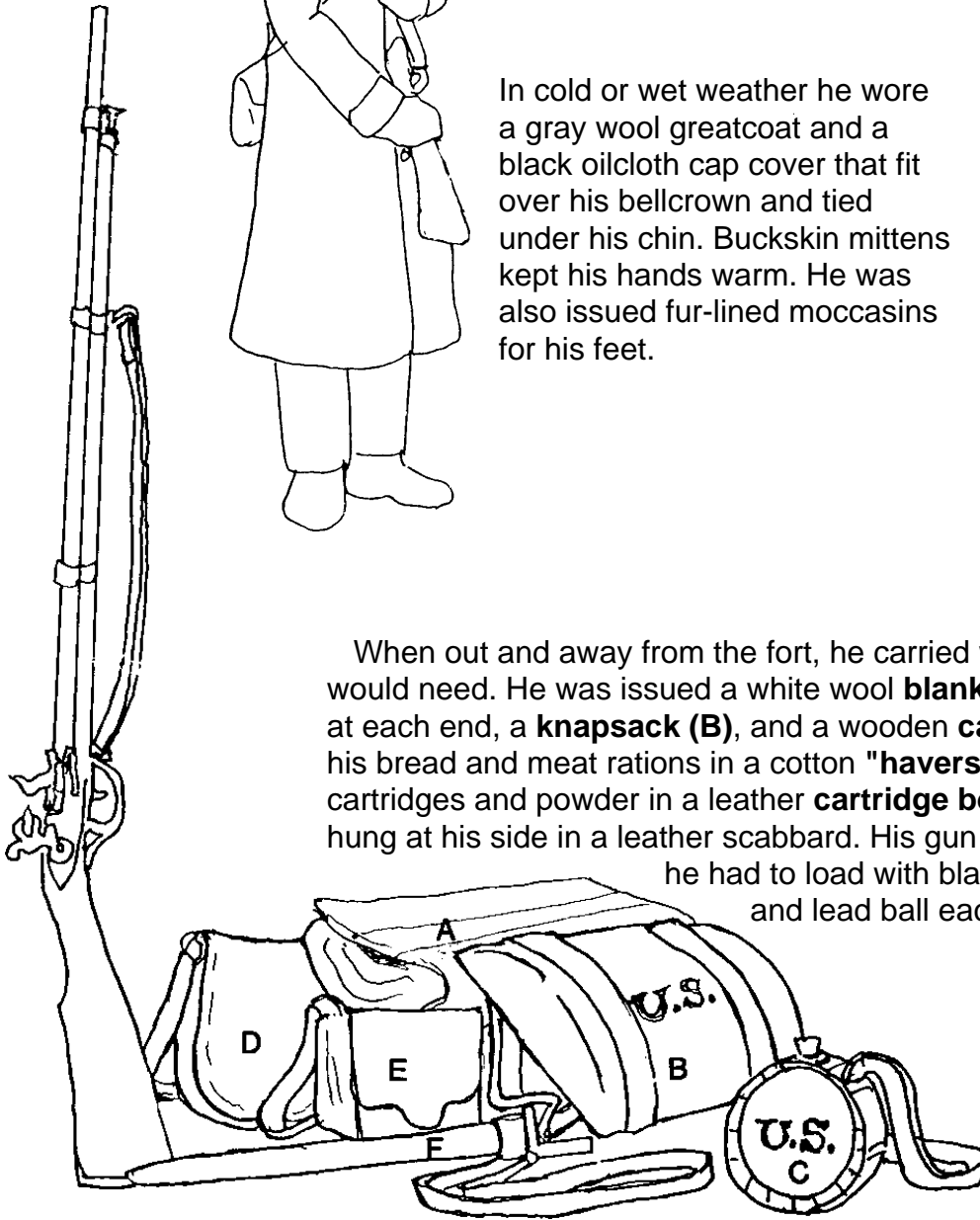
These two soldiers are wearing the dress uniforms they would wear during dress parades and ceremonies. The taller hat was made of black leather and decorated with white braid, tassels and plume. The hatplate was silver-plated. Black shoes were covered with white "gaiters" or "spats." The uniform on the right was used after 1821. The dress cap, called a "bellcrown" because it was wider at the top, was black leather with white braid and tassels, a red plume, and a silver hatplate. White shoulder "wings" were added, and black lace-up boots replaced shoes and gaiters. The coats were navy with white trim on the collar and silver buttons. The pants were either gray wool or white cotton or linen, depending on the season. White leather straps with a silver plate crossed the front of the uniform. Both uniforms were worn at Fort Atkinson.

His everyday or service uniform, also called a "round-about," was like his dress jacket but without tails. Winter jackets were gray wool; summer uniforms were white cotton. He wore a forage cap in place of his bellcrown.



In cold or wet weather he wore a gray wool greatcoat and a black oilcloth cap cover that fit over his bellcrown and tied under his chin. Buckskin mittens kept his hands warm. He was also issued fur-lined moccasins for his feet.

When out and away from the fort, he carried with him everything he would need. He was issued a white wool **blanket (A)** with a blue stripe at each end, a **knapsack (B)**, and a wooden **canteen (C)**. He carried his bread and meat rations in a cotton "**haversack (D)**" and his cartridges and powder in a leather **cartridge box (E)**. His **bayonet (F)** hung at his side in a leather scabbard. His gun was a **musket** which he had to load with black powder, cloth patch, and lead ball each time he fired.



Four steamboats were built to take the soldiers up the Missouri River. The shallow river was full of hazards and snags. Only one boat, the *Western Engineer*, reached the Council Bluff. The boat was 75 feet long. It could float in only 19 inches of water. The Missouri was the post's lifeline. Mail and goods from St. Louis could arrive in 15 days. Winter ice closed off the link to "civilization." The first boat upriver every spring was cause for celebration.



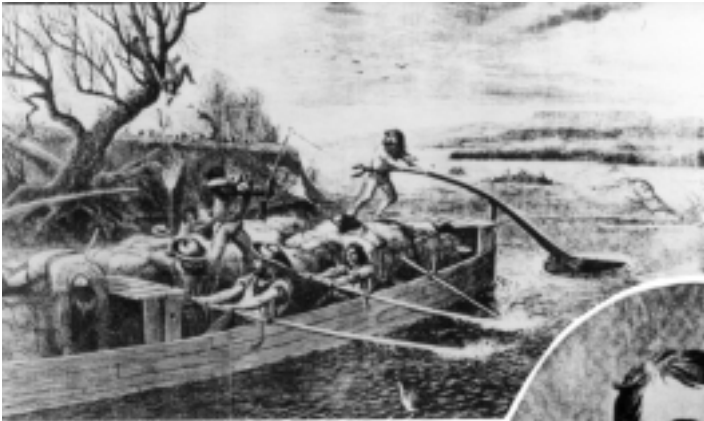
Colonel Henry Atkinson commanded the troops from the 6th Infantry and the Riflemen who went up the Missouri River. The fort was named in his honor.

Major Stephen Long commanded the Army Engineers who went with Colonel Atkinson. In the spring of 1820 Long and his men explored the Platte River west to the Rocky Mountains. They returned down the Arkansas and Canadian Rivers. They traveled through what is now Colorado and Oklahoma.





The army at Fort Atkinson made friends with the Indian tribes in the area. This peace council was held with the Oto tribe. The Oto lived nearby on the Platte River. Presents were exchanged at this meeting. A formal treaty of peace and friendship was signed.



In 1823 a company of fur trappers went up the Missouri River, headed for the Rocky Mountains. They stopped at an Arikara Indian village, in what is now South Dakota, to buy horses. The Indians attacked. Thirteen trappers were killed. The trappers raced to Ft. Atkinson for help.

Colonel Henry Leavenworth was then commander of Fort Atkinson. He took 200 soldiers to the Arikara village. The troops shelled the village with a cannon. The exploding six-pound shells injured just a few people. The Indians slipped out of their village and escaped. This was the only battle that soldiers from Fort Atkinson fought.

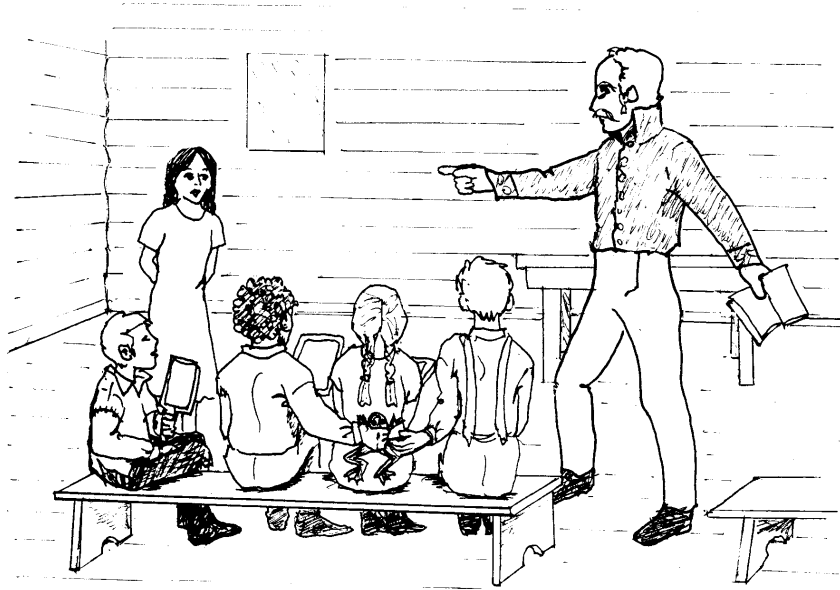


Officials from Mexico came to the fort in the summer of 1824. They accused the Pawnee Indians of stealing horses from Mexicans who lived near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Indian Agent Benjamin O'Fallon met with the Mexicans and Pawnee chiefs. Together they solved the problem.



EVERYDAY LIFE AT FORT ATKINSON

The fort was more like a pioneer settlement than a fort. No English traders ever came to Nebraska after the fort was built. The soldiers were mainly farmers, not fighters. One year the soldiers were so busy farming that they did not drill from September to December!



The first school in Nebraska was at Fort Atkinson. The teacher was a soldier. He was paid fifteen cents a day for each student. At the time, children usually went to school for just a few terms. Still, education was thought to be important. Soldiers got into trouble if they didn't send their children to school.



Many women lived at the fort. The wife of an enlisted man could live there if she worked as a laundress. A few unmarried women also worked in the laundry. Officers' wives did not have to work.

WORD SCRAMBLE

Learn more about everyday life at the fort. Unscramble the words below to finish the sentences.

- The soldiers were good farmers.
The first year they raised 9,000 bushels of **n c r o** **C**_____.

2,000 bushels of **e t p o a s o t** **P**_____.

5,000 bushels of **p r i s u t n** **T**_____.

Several tons of **a h y** **H**_____.
- The people entertained themselves with

r o h e s e c a r s **H**_____ **R**_____.

a d r c s m a e g **C**_____ **G**_____.

i l a d s i r b l **B**_____.

t h i g u n n **H**_____.

a t p i s e r **P**_____.

s c n a d e **D**_____.
- Books for reading could be found in the

s p t o r i l b y r a **P**_____ **L**_____.

Music at the fort was provided by the

t o s p n b a d **P**_____ **B**_____.
- At the sutler's store people could buy

s t g f i **G**_____.

o h l g c n t i **C**_____.

o c o c b a t **T**_____.

s y h e w i k **W**_____.

b e l e d i r a t t s e **E**_____ **T**_____.

i s s u d r e n **S**_____.

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