

Spring 2012

Drunk And Disorderly: The Origins And Consequences Of Alcoholism At Old Fort Hays

Ryan M. Kennedy
Fort Hays State University

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“DRUNK AND DISORDERLY:” THE ORIGINS AND CONSEQUENCES OF
ALCOHOLISM AT OLD FORT HAYS

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

Ryan M. Kennedy
B.G.S., University of Kansas

Date _____

Approved _____
Major Professor

Approved _____
Chair, Graduate Council

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to discover the causes and consequences of alcoholism at old Fort Hays. Unlikely to encounter Indians, soldiers longed for entertainment to fill the void of boredom in their lives. Serving as a regional supply center and railroad subsidy, Fort Hays deployed the majority of its soldiers as laborers, serving nearby Hays City, the railroad, and the fort itself. The tedious, routine-driven lifestyle enforced by Fort Hays commanders, in combination with feelings of frontier isolation, often led to resistance in the form of alcohol usage. Utilizing court-martial records, Post Orders, and soldier journals, this thesis argues that the barren circumstances at Fort Hays created an atmosphere ripe for alcohol abuse. Additionally, this study outlines the history of alcohol usage within American culture, the consequences of alcohol abuse in the frontier military, and the effects of excessive alcoholism on both military and Kansas temperance policies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most importantly, I would like to thank my parents, Kurt and Joni Kennedy, for their constant support and encouragement throughout my college career. I appreciated the support of all my friends and family as I worked to complete several on-going projects over the past two years. Special thanks to Dr. David Goodlett, my thesis advisor. His grammar expertise, general writing knowledge, and friendly help proved invaluable to me. I appreciate the hours of meticulous editing he devoted to the process. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Kim Perez and Dr. Raymond Wilson, each of whom served as an early advisor on the project, encouraging and stimulating my research. My thesis committee, including Dr. David Bovee, provided valuable suggestions necessary to complete the study. I am indebted to the entire Department of History at Fort Hays State University.

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INTRODUCTION

Reinvented after the American Civil War, the United States Army served a variety of purposes in the latter half of the nineteenth century. With westward expansion in full force, frontier soldiers awaited several new challenges. No longer fighting for preservation of the Union, soldiers helped prepare the West for the coming of “civilization.” Stationed in forts across the region referred to famously as “the Great American Desert,” the military helped protect, build, settle, explore, and “civilize” the West.

Established permanently on the western Kansas plains in 1867, Fort Hays protected the Smoky Hill Trail. Unlike the Santa Fe Trail, which facilitated trade, and the Oregon Trail, which transported settlers, the Smoky Hill Trail provided the most efficient route to the gold fields of Colorado. Unfortunately, however, the trail encroached upon well-established Indian hunting grounds. The Kansas prairie once harbored millions of buffalo, providing a food source for thousands of Indians. Therefore, tribes such as the Cheyenne, Sioux, Kiowa, Comanche, Pawnee, and others resented the interference of white men on the plains. To keep peace amidst this conflict, the government funded military installations such as Fort Hays.

Among the myriad of problems faced by soldiers at old Fort Hays, alcohol abuse was the most destructive. Though once considered the defenders of the American West, soldiers across the frontier settled into the role of common laborers. A result of unproductive circumstances, alcoholism developed as soldiers lost themselves in the bland routine of garrison life. Rather than addressing potential causes of alcohol abuse on

base, temperance advocates demonized the use of intoxicating liquor. This study examines the role of alcoholism in the frontier military using Fort Hays as a primary example. Though it contributed to general disorder at Fort Hays, alcoholism was largely the result of undue tedium, boredom, loneliness, depression, and other unfavorable circumstances.

After highlighting in Chapter I the early American passion for liquor and its effect on the military, Chapter II traces the changing role of a Fort Hays soldier. By studying the prototype of Fort Hays, Fort Fletcher, the transformation becomes evident. Utilizing government records, Chapter III delineates the causes and consequences of alcohol abuse in and around Fort Hays. Additionally, Chapter IV examines both military and Kansas alcohol policy, revealing the radical temperance policies implemented by the state of Kansas in 1881. Approaching from different perspectives, this study's organization highlights the causes and consequences of alcoholism at Fort Hays. When put in context with state, federal, and military alcohol policy, the implications of excessive drinking at Fort Hays become apparent.

To understand the origins of alcoholism at frontier forts, one must study the daily life of a soldier. A soldier's life at frontier military installations such as Fort Hays revolved around a strict schedule. From reveille to taps, every day of service began and ended according to a predetermined routine. For the most part, life at frontier forts was repetitious and devoid of excitement. For example, there is no evidence of a single Indian attack on Fort Hays during its twenty-two years of existence. Though white/Indian confrontations did occur, they proved rare. The majority of soldiers spent long hours

performing mundane tasks, replacing the lack of Indian danger with alternative forms of excitement.

Commonly referred to as “bug juice” by the military, alcohol played a large role in the lives of frontier soldiers. Once issued as a government reward for excellent service, alcohol abuse came to plague many forts across the West. At Fort Hays, a controversial 1870 Post Circular attempted to regulate the use of alcohol on base. The order offered soldiers up to three drinks (or shots) of alcohol per day to be consumed at the time of purchase.¹ Despite the order, soldiers smuggled additional alcohol into their barracks and frequently escaped to nearby Hays City to get drunk.² According to court-martial records, some of the most commonly cited offenses involved drunkenness or disorderly conduct due to the consumption of alcohol. To the surprise of many, the amount of alcohol consumed by the average person in the nineteenth century is similar to modern levels.³ Soldiers experienced a unique lifestyle that lent itself to alcoholism.

Contributing to a general lack of motivation, frontier military pay was less than desirable. Army privates earned only thirteen dollars a month, less than soldiers during the Civil War.⁴ Therefore, insubordinate soldiers punished with monthly pay

¹ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

² The author canceled the order by writing “not published” in the page margin, presumably due to outside pressures. It is unclear whether the order was enforced.

³ W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 232-233.

⁴ Don Rickey, Jr, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 126.

withholdings for alcohol related infractions experienced tremendous difficulties. Serving to compound the problem, soldiers had to purchase most personal items using their wages. For example, boots, grooming equipment, laundry, and tailoring services were regular costly necessities.⁵ Soldiers of higher rank earned higher salaries, but lesser paid privates represented the overwhelming majority of fort inhabitants.

University of Washington professor W. J. Rorabaugh examines early American drinking habits in his 1979 study entitled *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. In *The Alcoholic Republic*, Rorabaugh claims that the excessive drinking seen across America, especially between 1790 and 1840, culminated with a backlash of temperance activity. Rorabaugh focuses on both psychological and economical explanations for heavy drinking, explaining the power of anxiety and depression to lead to alcoholism. Most importantly, *The Alcoholic Republic* explains the origins of the nineteenth century temperance movement that affected the frontier military's drinking policy throughout the latter half of the century.

Despite the evidence of alcohol abuse at forts across the frontier, historians have seldom discussed the issue directly. By combining the experience at all frontier forts, historians have written a number of general histories of the life of a Western soldier. For instance, historian Jeremy Agnew, author of *Life of a Soldier on the Western Frontier*, summarizes clearly the overall experience of soldiers from the 1840s through the 1890s. Agnew provides a wealth of information about frontier soldiering, recognizing the range

⁵ Jeremy Agnew, *Life of a Soldier on the Western Frontier* (Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2008), 121.

of differences between individual forts. In such an expansive effort, however, many particulars about fort life must be ignored. Despite providing information regarding the realities of alcoholism, he discusses the consequences sparingly.⁶

Though better known as a civil rights activist (and father of the American historian Eric Foner), Jack Foner wrote one of the first comprehensive histories of the frontier military soldier. Written in 1970, *The United States Soldier Between Two Wars: Army Life and Reforms, 1865-1898* focuses on the reforms implemented by the military to better the life of a soldier. However, these reforms often failed, trapping soldiers in a rigid caste system worsened by the monotony of post life. Foner effectively outlines the intolerable living conditions that inspired alcoholic behavior and the resulting progressive reforms.⁷

The publisher of the *Hays Daily News* from 1958 to 1970, Leota Motz, wrote one of the first comprehensive histories of Fort Hays. Written around 1961, Motz compiled new information about the fort and its relationship to nearby Hays City. Despite her contribution, Motz perpetuated a romantic view of frontier fort life. Stating erroneously that “life at the fort had few dull moments,” she consistently glorified popular notions about the West prevalent throughout the mid-twentieth century. Rather than addressing possible explanations for alcohol abuse or its consequences, she chose to rationalize it as a part of the Western experience. In her publication, she described Hays City as a “wild, lawless, turbulent spot...the majority of its citizenry gunmen, women of ill repute,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jack D. Foner, *The United States Soldier Between Two Wars: 1865-1898* (New York City, NY: Humanities Press, 1970).

desperadoes, murderers and gamblers augmented by soldiers at old Fort Hays who came to town to ‘whoop it up’ when they had leave from military duty.’⁸ Additionally, her overstated estimation of “hordes of outlaw Indians...robbing and pillaging from railroad’s end to the Colorado line” reinforced ethnocentric beliefs that persisted throughout most of American culture at this time.⁹ In truth, the relationship between the government and the Plains Indians was complicated at best. To identify a single victim in the conflict, one must ignore large amounts of contradictory evidence.

Concerned mostly with the forts of Kansas, the frontier military historian Leo Oliva authored the best publication available on Fort Hays. *Fort Hays: Keeping Peace on the Plains* examines the establishment, defense, life experiences, and abandonment of the fort. Oliva’s study features a section on the life of a soldier, providing the best existing details about life at Fort Hays. However, his brief, general analysis lacks specific examples and details of everyday events and occurrences. Aside from briefly mentioning the role of alcohol in fights between soldiers, its contribution to army desertion, and the nearby whiskey ranches, he fails to examine the prevalence and abuse of alcohol on base.¹⁰ Despite hundreds of examples in the fort’s microfilm collection, historians have generally ignored the subject of alcohol at Fort Hays, as well as at other frontier outposts.

⁸ Leota Motz, *Old Fort Hays: 1867-1889* (Hays, Kansas: Hays Daily News, n.d.), 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰ Leo Oliva, *Fort Hays: Keeping Peace on the Plains* (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Historical Society, 1980), 63-67.

Soldiers' journals are the best sources for studying the problems surrounding alcoholism at frontier military posts. Several officers and privates wrote career-spanning diaries highlighting every aspect of their life on the frontier. These journals provide a glimpse into the reality of alcoholism at the forts. In addition to journals, government records such as court-martial hearings and Post Order collections provide valuable insight into the everyday functions of a fort. They reveal the procedural problems caused by alcoholism and the general atmosphere of disorder it promoted on base. These primary sources expose the true consequences of alcoholism in the frontier military.

To uncover the problems created by excessive alcohol usage at Fort Hays, it is also necessary to place the frontier soldier in context with early American drinking habits. Citizens of the "Alcoholic Republic," colonial Americans demonstrated a long lasting affection for alcohol. Naturally, drinking also became a widespread characteristic of soldiery. Modeled after the British army, known for its affinity for rum, the American military developed an early tolerance for drunkenness. By the time the government established Fort Fletcher, drinking was a major part of the army's culture.¹¹ Soldiering on the unsettled Kansas plains proved dangerous. Fort Fletcher was a less "civilized," less organized venture than its future incarnation, Fort Hays.

Alcoholism did not become a significant problem at Fort Hays until nearby Hays City was founded. After Hays City's establishment, the average soldier's role regressed from frontier escort to wearisome laborer, leading to a growing number of alcoholics, as well as general unrest. The various temptations available in Hays City led to increasing

¹¹ Fort Fletcher was the original name of Fort Hays. It was located southeast of the final location.

trouble for soldiers unhappy with the military lifestyle. As Hays City developed, so did Kansas alcohol policy. Inspired by the original Free State movement ideals, temperance advocates sought to cleanse cow towns and infamous frontier post cities like Hays of the sins of alcohol. The prohibition era sought to end decades of contentious drinking across the state. Forty years prior to the national prohibition amendment, Kansas led a national “experiment” to “civilize” its population through prohibition. Despite years of failed alcohol policy at forts across the state, army Post Canteens were the last legal drinking establishments in Kansas by the 1880s.

Affecting frontier soldiers across the West, alcoholism carried with it severe complications. Excessive alcohol consumption led to disobedience, desertion, fighting, health problems, class tensions, and general disorder at forts across the West. At Fort Hays, the court-martial records reveal that alcohol-related crimes occurred more than any other. Despite punishments such as the loss of up to ten dollars from a thirteen-dollar paycheck, solitary confinement, physical labor tasks, or discharge, the frequency of alcohol related crimes remained steady throughout the fort’s existence. The monotony and boredom of post life, coupled with unmotivated soldiers, hypocritical leaders, failed alcohol policy, and nearby temptations, led to an environment ripe for alcoholism. The alcoholic excesses of frontier establishments such as Hays helped instigate the progressive alcohol policy implemented by the State of Kansas in 1881.

The over twenty-two year history of Fort Hays is rich with famous people, stories, and legacies. Once home to Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer’s Seventh Cavalry, the famous Fifth Infantry, and the buffalo soldiers of the Tenth Cavalry, Fort

Hays' place in military history is well established. In addition to notable military leaders, legendary Western figures such as Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody also paid visits to the fort and its accompanying settlements. In pop culture, Fort Hays remains relevant through references and scenes such as those in 1990's *Dances with Wolves*, a popular film selected by the National Film Registry for historical significance. Such standard associations help inspire grandiose assumptions about life as a frontier soldier, most of which are without historical basis. In reality, Fort Hays soldiers suffered through monotony and other undesirable living conditions throughout their time in service. They craved excitement and entertainment, in various forms, to fill the void of boredom present in their lives. Though they played an important role on the American frontier collectively, soldiers struggled to find individual value amidst the grind of strict military scheduling and routine.

CHAPTER ONE

A “NATION OF DRUNKARDS:” EARLY AMERICAN DRINKING CULTURE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE FRONTIER MILITARY

In the early eighteenth century, Americans and Europeans generally agreed that spirits such as gin, rum, and brandy were nutritious and healthy. People viewed liquor as a cure-all substance, effective in treating colds, fevers, snakebites, frostbitten toes, broken legs, depression, tension, and various other ailments. Into the nineteenth century, Americans of all social classes, even slaves, drank in high volume, enjoying the ability of alcohol to promote a sense of camaraderie and happiness.¹ Eventually referred to as a “nation of drunkards,” Americans faced the reality of excessive alcohol usage across the colonies. Regardless of their concerns, several American founding fathers indulged in alcohol. For example, John Adams repeatedly drank a tankard of hard cider for breakfast every morning.² In 1770, the American colonies imported four million gallons of rum and distilled another five million. Alcohol in various forms became the cheapest and most plentiful beverage in America.³ With an often-limited water supply and an unwillingness to spend extra money on alternative beverages such as milk or tea, a drinking culture developed throughout the nation, and consequently, within the military.

¹ Rorabaugh, 25.

² Ibid., 5-6.

³ Ibid., 64.

On a visit to America, English journalist William Cobbett described alcoholism as a central part of American culture. Controversial for his radical anti-government viewpoints, Cobbett spent a substantial amount of time in America between 1792 and 1819. Writing from a pro-British standpoint, Cobbett explained:

It is not covetousness; it is not niggardliness; it is not insincerity; it is not enviousness; it is not cowardice; above all things, it is DRINKING....You cannot go into hardly any man's house, without being asked to drink wine, spirits, even IN THE MORNING....Even little boys at, or under, TWELVE years of age, go into stores and tip off their DRAMS.⁴

Another British traveler had similar concerns about America's drinking habits. He was unable to decide if Americans were diseased alcoholics or simply average drinkers. He suggested that many Americans "seasoned" themselves through years of heavy drinking, causing them to appear less intoxicated than an average drunk person.⁵

The American drinking culture, especially within the military, developed from the British. Similar to American soldiers, British soldiers at home and abroad had little difficulty obtaining intoxicating beverages. Sutlers, army wives, local citizens, taverns, and even superior officers sold liquor to enlisted men. Many times, British soldiers earned payment in liquor instead of money. During the Revolutionary War, General Charles Cornwallis gave his troops rum before battle to settle their nerves, as well as to celebrate victory. The British army issued soldiers about a gallon of rum a month,

⁴ William Unrau, *White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country: 1802-1892* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

rationed daily. Enlisted men preferred American rum due to its availability and affordability. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, most British soldiers were known as habitual drunkards.⁶ British temperance advocates blamed alcohol abuse for poor performance, morals, health, and discipline, themes that became common within the American army in the late nineteenth century.

Similar to American frontier soldiers, British soldiers lived a generally dull life. They often turned to alcohol as a cure for depression and boredom. When low on supply, some British soldiers resorted to raiding civilian homes to replenish. As officers became more concerned about alcohol's negative effect on discipline, they began to speak out more readily. In 1774, Lieutenant-Colonel John Pennington summed up his concerns about alcohol abuse in the British military. He said:

Drunkenness is a Vice of all others, the most brutal in its Nature, the most Ruinous in its Consequences, and unfits a man for every station and duty, it is the source of irregularity, from it Proceeds idleness, slovenliness, neglect of orders, and a total loss of all Military appearance, and character. It breeds disobedience, creates Mutiny, ruins health, and is destructive to the constitutions of men...it is the source of almost every crime the Soldier does in general Committ. Were there no drunkenness there wd. be but few Courts Martial in the Regiment. The Lieutenant Colo. holds in such abhorrence and detestation this unsoldierlike unmanly Vice, That he solemnly assures the Regiment he will never give his Pardon to any Person who hereafter be convicted of it.[sic]⁷

⁶ Paul E. Kopperman, "The Cheapest Pay: Alcohol Abuse in the Eighteenth-Century British Army." *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July 1996): 445-470.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

Similarly, Major-General James Wolfe observed, “Too much rum necessarily affects the discipline of an army. We have glaring evidence of its ill consequences every moment. Sergeants drunk upon duty, two sentries upon their posts and the rest groveling in the dirt.”⁸ In addition to officers, many clergymen also spoke out against alcohol abuse. In an advice column for soldiers, British moral reformer Josiah Woodward wrote:

Intemperance, wherever it prevails, destroys a Man’s Reason, Honour, and Conscience at once; and opens a wide Gap for any Sin or Folly, though never so monstrous and inhuman, to make its Entrance. It perfectly bereaves the brave Soldier of all that is great and noble in his Character. A very Child exceeds him in Strength, and an Idiot is his Equal in Discretion....And when his Senses return to him, it will be a matter of sore Reflection, to consider that he shamefully parted with his Manhood, his Honour, and his Innocence, for the inconsiderable Pleasure of a Little Drink.⁹

Though some leaders acknowledged alcohol as a problem within the military, the British battled an overwhelmingly alcoholic culture. Few British accepted the concept of alcoholism at all, let alone considered it a disease. The alcoholic tendencies of the British transplanted directly into colonial America and its military.

Between 1800 and 1830, the average American drank around 3.6 gallons of alcohol a year. Over the following one hundred years, however, alcohol consumption declined rapidly. Due to temperance movements, which promoted abstinence, and over time, legal prohibition, alcohol played a declining role in American society. Adjusting for a suggested forty percent underestimation due to the era’s incomplete data, the average

⁸ Ibid., 454.

⁹ Ibid., 451-452.

American consumed around 1.7 gallons of alcohol a year during Fort Hays' existence.¹⁰ This surprisingly low figure, comparable to modern drinking rates, did not represent the reality of the average frontier soldier.¹¹

Receiving little governmental support, the United States Army suffered an identity crisis following the Civil War. The days of high morale, unity, and patriotism had passed, leaving behind an era of neglect and public disinterest. Lacking training, motivation, numbers, and adequate financial support, frontier soldiers joined the military for a variety of reasons. Without patriotic motivation, soldiers used the army to provide themselves food, shelter, and other personal necessities. Immigrants, specifically German and Irish, joined the army due largely to a lack of alternative opportunities. Unskilled or financially distraught men from the East found respite through a guaranteed paycheck. Even criminals and fugitives operating under an alias often escaped into the armed forces. No matter their reason for joining, soldiers possessing an honest desire to defend the frontier against Indians proved rare.¹² Without motivation or a unified purpose, frontier posts became businesslike in nature.

Having little to offer in terms of recreation or entertainment, frontier military outposts harbored alcoholism throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. According to the elder Foner, "Even the best men sank into a dull apathy and became

¹⁰ Greg Austin and Ron Roizen, *How Good are the Conventional Estimates? Stalking the Origins of Historical U.S. per capita Alcohol Consumption Statistics*. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. 13 May 1993, <<http://www.roizen.com/ron/how-good.htm>>.

¹¹ Refer to Appendix A on page 77 for W.J. Rorabaugh's American alcohol consumption chart .

¹² Agnew, 11.

weary, discontented and demoralized. Many men who would have become good soldiers became disgusted with the service and sought an avenue of escape from the discomforts and monotony of their lives.”¹³ The military often failed to provide soldiers mental or physical stimulation, resulting in a state of boredom and loneliness. As one frontier soldier stated, “If an enlisted man frequents saloons and liquor stores, he does so in most cases more for the sake of company to relieve his mind from the oppressive, dull routine in the garrison.”¹⁴

In addition to nearby saloons and “whiskey ranches,” soldiers commonly purchased alcohol on base.¹⁵ Sanctioned by the army, the Post Sutler sold items not provided by the Post Quartermaster.¹⁶ On top of items such as razors, soap, tobacco, candy, and shoes, the Post Sutler also provided alcohol. A center of social activity, the Post Trader store featured games such as billiards and promoted an entertaining atmosphere for the frequently drunk soldiers. On paydays, the Post Sutler enjoyed a notable surge in sales as soldiers made use of their newly acquired paycheck.¹⁷

¹³ Foner, 29-30.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵ Whiskey ranches supplied alcohol to travelers, Indians, and soldiers. They typically operated near Indian agencies, forts, and trail stops.

¹⁶ The Post Quartermaster supplied men with equipment considered necessary for soldiery, such as uniforms.

¹⁷ Agnew, 112.

Soldiers commonly spent the majority of their paychecks on drinking and gambling. At around ten cents a shot, whiskey offered a cheap opportunity for entertainment. Many times, Post Traders purchased extremely large quantities of raw grain alcohol for the soldiers. To mimic the taste of whiskey, they added flavoring such as red pepper, ginger, molasses, tree bark, tobacco, and even ammonia, gunpowder, and turpentine. George Custer's wife, Elizabeth Bacon Custer (better known as Libbie) noted:

Plains whiskey is usually very rapid in its effect, but the stage-station liquor was concocted from drugs that had power to lay out even a hard-drinking old cavalryman like a dead person, in what seemed no time at all. A barrel of tolerably good whiskey sent from the States was, by addition of drugs, made into several barrels after it reached the plains.¹⁸

Despite some seemingly awful concoctions, heavy drinkers could consume around a quart of whiskey a day.¹⁹ In a letter to his wife, Custer confirmed, "You would be horrified [if you knew] the vast quantity of liquor drunk by the officers. Even some of the temperate ones dispose of one canteen full a day."²⁰

Though more commonly documented among lesser-paid privates, alcoholism pervaded higher ranks also. Many conflicts between ranks resulted from the conflicting expectations of officers and privates. In 1867, a soldier complained that "I have seen officers more than once too drunk to perform their duty, go unpunished when the poor

¹⁸ Elizabeth B. Custer, *Tenting on the Plains: With General Custer from the Potomac to the Western Frontier* (Santa Barbara, CA: The Narrative Press, 2003), 657.

¹⁹ Agnew, 174-175.

²⁰ Lawrence A. Frost, *General Custer's Libbie* (Seattle, WA: Superior Publishing, 1976), 177.

private would be fined and confined for the same offense, without fail.”²¹ Despite partaking in similar activities, officers and other enlisted men often drank at separate bars inside the Post Trader store. In her memoirs, Libbie Custer noted that “There is a separate room for the soldiers, so we see nothing of those poor fellows who never can stay sober.”²² In a position of authority at frontier forts, officers held themselves to different standards than enlisted men. For example, rather than submitting themselves to the punishments of an ordinary soldier, an officer could take sick leave to recover from a hangover after a night of drinking.

Under the leadership of drunken officers, many military operations suffered accordingly. In his 1867 journal, Captain Albert Barnitz complained of his officer, “He was drunk all the time that we were on the late expedition, and had to be hauled in an ambulance. He has been drunk for a week past, and having become sick in consequence, was sent up here by the surgeon for medical treatment. I might name a good many others who are addicted to intemperance.”²³ Soldier Charles Henry Veil spoke similarly of his officer, “Unfortunately without my knowledge, the colonel was on the drunk that day. After waiting some time, he finally appeared, but in such a sad state of intoxication as to be almost unable to stand upon his feet.”²⁴ Many times, however, both soldiers and

²¹ Foner, 67.

²² Custer, 237.

²³ Robert Utley Ed., *Life in Custer's Cavalry: Diary and Letters of Albert and Jennie Barnitz, 1867-1868* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 203.

²⁴ Herman J. Viola, Ed., *The Memoirs of Charles Henry Veil: A Soldier's Recollections of the Civil War and the Arizona Territory* (New York City, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 1993), 240.

officers were under the influence of alcohol. For example, historian Don Rickey recounted a situation where an entire group of soldiers and their commanding officer succumbed to only two invading bandits while on a nighttime drinking binge.²⁵ The problem of alcoholism among frontier soldiers spanned class and rank.

When alcohol became unavailable for any reason, soldiers went to great lengths to obtain it. In his memoirs, Corporal E.A. Bode recounted a soldier's state of affairs: "While in the lockup [for drunkenness] he would use all his ingenuity to obtain liquor, when out at work he would contemplate how to work without doing anything."²⁶ After spending time in the hospital for chronic diarrhea, Bode grew tired of seeing sick and dying men on a daily basis. As a solution, he decided to fake recovery, instead turning to a bottle of wine to fix his "shattered system." Bode hid the bottle under the folds of his bedsack, secretly indulging when the opportunity arose. To his surprise, someone stole the bottle (and every bottle he purchased afterward). After some time passed, a friend of Bode disclosed that the thief had been discharged. His friend explained, "The man thought [him] in such a low state of health that the wine would only be thrown away, consequently of more benefit to a living than to a dead man."²⁷ On a different occasion, before passing through Indian Territory, Bode recalled a man selling oranges for twenty-five cents. For a dollar, however, a soldier could purchase an orange filled with

²⁵ Rickey, 158.

²⁶ E.A. Bode, *A Dose of Frontier Soldiering: The Memoirs of Corporal E.A. Bode, Frontier Regular Infantry, 1877-1882* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-22.

whiskey.²⁸ Similarly, Seventh Cavalryman Andrew Flynn spoke of a Nebraska farmer selling watermelon to soldiers on base for ten cents. Unlike Bode's oranges, a dollar watermelon came loaded with up to *two* pints of whiskey.²⁹ Soldiers even resorted to purchasing reshaped tin cans disguised as a hymnbook. The Post Sutler sold the whiskey-filled "books" under the label of "bosom companion."³⁰

In addition to the various innovative concealment methods, capitalist-minded soldiers regularly used liquor as a trade commodity. When the liquor supply ran low, soldiers bartered clothing and military-owned equipment in exchange for a drink. Regardless of the consequences, they found ways to obtain alcohol. As stated by a soldier, there were "a thousand and one ways and means that a soldier will indulge in to get whiskey."³¹ Whether obtained through theft, various fruits, illegal trade, legitimate purchase, or even medical reasons, soldiers spent a great deal of time under the influence of alcohol.

Soldiers typically preferred whiskey to other types of alcohol because of price and availability. Coupled with a lower potency level, the price of hard cider, beer, rum, and other available liquors did not appeal to low income soldiers. At around twenty-five cents a shot, whiskey intoxicated soldiers quickly, especially when drinking stronger,

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁹ Rickey, 105.

³⁰ David M. Delo, *Peddlers and Post Traders: The Army Sutler on the Frontier* (Helena, MT: Kingfisher Books, 1998), 114.

³¹ Kevin Adams, *Class and Race in the Frontier Army: Military Life in the West, 1870-1890* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 117.

homemade varieties. Soldiers cared little about taste, worrying more about availability, price, and alcohol content. Historically, soldiers prefer whatever alcohol is cheap and plentiful; the British army preferred rum and several other armies favored gin.³² By the nineteenth century, whiskey was the most commonly available alcoholic drink in America.

In the 1800s, people commonly used whiskey as a “cure-all” remedy. Doctors suggested both internal and external usage, considering it a painkiller, sedative, digestive aid, antiseptic, and anesthetic. They recommended alcohol for the treatment of colds, influenza, malaria, and many other illnesses.³³ Ironically, some doctors recommended alcohol as a treatment for alcoholism. Such widespread medicinal usage contributed to alcoholism at forts across the West. Most of the era’s medical field believed sincerely that whiskey strengthened the heart and lungs, and doctors used it to treat rabies, chills, palpitations, fevers, kidney ailments, and general malaise.³⁴ To the modern eye, however, it is obvious that alcohol abuse undoubtedly contributed to illness at forts.

Resulting from a lack of vitamin C, scurvy was one of the most common illnesses threatening forts across the West. Deprived of this vitamin, men developed gum disease, lethargy, shortness of breath, and, in later stages, fever and neuropathy. Privy to a connection between scurvy and a diet lacking fruits and vegetables, men of several forts, including Fort Hays, planted gardens. Subject to unpredictable weather and harsh frontier

³² Kopperman, 445-470.

³³ Agnew, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

conditions, however, many gardens failed to produce on a consistent basis. In addition to a soldier's unbalanced diet, alcohol abuse certainly contributed to the development of scurvy. Though rarely if ever asserted by frontier historians or fort physicians of the nineteenth century, modern medical literature suggests a correlation between alcohol metabolism and ascorbic acid excretion. Though the physical mechanisms remain poorly understood, modern clinicians prioritize the potential diagnosis of scurvy in those suffering from long-term alcohol abuse.³⁵

With or without a prescription from a post physician, many soldiers used alcohol to treat physical and mental ailments. Lonely, tired, and frustrated, alcohol offered solace to distraught soldiers. By treating emotional problems with alcohol, men submitted themselves to the dangerous consequences of alcoholism. In the 1880s, an estimated forty out of every one thousand soldiers became hospitalized due to alcohol abuse. During this era, however, only severe cases of alcoholism garnered medical attention. Only those exhibiting extreme advanced symptoms, such as *delirium tremens*, qualified as medical alcoholics.³⁶ Combined with various psychological factors, alcohol abuse undoubtedly contributed to alarming suicide rates at forts across the West. Between 1879 and 1888, for example, almost eight percent of soldiers ended their own lives prematurely.³⁷

³⁵ Daniel Leger, "Scurvy: Reemergence of Nutritional Deficiencies." *Canadian Family Physician Journal*. (October 2008): 54 (10), 1403-1406.

³⁶ Popularly known as the "DTs" today, *delirium tremens* is an episode of delirium caused by severe alcohol withdrawal. Its medical nature and prevalence at Fort Hays is discussed on pp. 51 and 52.

³⁷ Rickey, 159-165.

Due to pressure from temperance movements and religious organizations in the early 1880s, the government attempted to end the embarrassment of military drinking. In March 1881, President Rutherford B. Hayes outlawed the sale of whiskey at military outposts.³⁸ Hayes intended originally to ban the sale of all liquor, but Post Traders launched an aggressive campaign to save wine, cider, and beer sales. With no civilian competition allowed, Post Traders wielded considerable power within the military. They held a monopoly over all items not provided by the Post Quartermaster. No longer able to sell whiskey by the drink or the bottle, they found alternative ways to cheat the system. Traders began selling pure alcohol as “essences, perfumes, patent medicines, and even ink.”³⁹ Post Traders adapted to the circumstances to continue making large profits through the sale of alcohol.

Despite the victory over temperance efforts in the early 1880s, religious and moral organizations targeted alcoholism at frontier forts throughout their existence. With little religious presence at forts, organizations such as the U.S. Army Aid Association of New York City, the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Military Post Library Association, and other temperance organizations worked together to provide mental and physical stimulation for soldiers across the West. Though one must question his affiliation and motives, one soldier claimed that:

³⁸ Foner, 28.

³⁹ Ibid., 79-80.

When I joined the troops in July, 1868, it was what is generally called a “hard crowd.” A sober man, until money and sutler’s credit was exhausted, was a *rare avis*. Scenes of drunken dissipation, now the exception, were the rule...But now, the guard reports...show but one solitary name of a member of our troops confined for drunkenness the past twelve months. This, I claim, has been caused by the success of our lodge of Good Templars.⁴⁰

Though in the minority, some soldiers spoke out against the use of alcohol on base. Disgusted by his Post Chaplain’s drunkenness, Private James B. Wilkinson considered alcohol “the curse of the army.”⁴¹ Similarly, a newly arrived Post Surgeon complained, “Army officers are my only companions and I do not like them at all. They all drink and gamble, smoke + chew + everything else!”⁴² While stopped at Fort Harker on the Smoky Hill Trail, traveler Thomas D. Heed complained of the widespread drunkenness and fighting on base. He claimed, “human life is not held at so high an estimate as it is in the older settled states.”⁴³

In his journal, *Ups and Downs of an Army Officer*, the frontier military officer George Armes mentions frequently the role of alcohol in his life. In January, 1867, Armes reported finding a man frozen to death in the middle of an icy river holding chickens in each hand. The man, a Private Sullivan, commonly snuck out at night to purchase whiskey from a nearby ranch. After his purchase, he would sometimes steal

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁴¹ Rickey, 156.

⁴² Adams, 69.

⁴³ Heed, Thomas Dougherty, b. 1832, Letter to his sister, Susanna Mercy Heed, Kansas Collection, RH MS P783, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, KS.

chickens to supplement the poor military cooking. Armes and his search party learned that Sullivan was too drunk to return home safely. He passed out in the river and froze to death.⁴⁴ Similarly, Armes recalled a burning odor throughout camp in December 1880. Upon arriving to inspect the kitchen, Armes' wife found the company cook passed out drunk on the floor. The steak, broiling in the oven, had burned thoroughly.⁴⁵ Stories such as these, common throughout the frontier military, highlight the frequency and seriousness of alcohol-related incidents at bases across the country.

No matter a soldier's location or rank, alcohol played a significant role in the lives of most of those involved with the frontier military. Due to frontier isolation, loneliness, and boredom, frontier military outposts harbored alcoholism in a unique way. Resorting to alcohol for entertainment, many soldiers sank into a state of drunkenness, worsened by the routine-oriented nature of their lives. Once alcohol became a part of their daily lives, it became difficult to remove it. Soldiers resorted to alcohol for comfort in an uninspiring world of tedium and boredom. The journals of soldiers and the evidence collected through official government records reveal the problem of alcoholism in the frontier military. Alcoholism promoted disobedience, desertion, fighting, health problems, class tensions, and general disorder at forts across the West.

⁴⁴ George Armes, *Ups and Downs of an Army Officer* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1900), 200.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 484.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM ESCORT SERVICE TO SUPPLY DEPOT: THE CHANGING ROLES OF FORT FLETCHER AND FORT HAYS ON THE WESTERN KANSAS PLAINS

Soon after the formation of the United States, Americans felt compelled to create a passageway to the Pacific Ocean. Overcome with the assurance of “manifest destiny,” the newfound American objective echoed across the continent. Opposition to this goal proved strong, however, as Indians felt the pressure of white encroachment. They resisted the American impulse to expand, leading to open hostility throughout the West and spawning over two hundred years of bloody conflict between white pioneers and various Indian tribes. Over time, the government assumed an active role in defending the American West. The military grew, creating posts such as Fort Hays to provide frontier stability and further the expansion of the United States.

Named for its hazy aura on hot summer days, the Smoky Hill River proved valuable to Indians, European explorers, and wayfaring Americans. As is evident from petroglyphs, recovered arrowheads, tools, and other artifacts, thousands of Indians resided in the river’s valley. The accompanying trail, used by Indians for centuries, followed the Smoky Hill River valley through present-day Kansas. Indians coveted the Big Creek/Smoky Hill River area for its abundant wildlife, natural protection, and usefulness as a land route. In the 1840s, the explorer, politician, and soldier John C. Fremont introduced the Smoky Hill Trail to Americans. Devoid of landmarks, the Great Plains required intimate knowledge for successful passage. Indian trails were

instrumental in assisting Americans across the “Great American Desert.”¹ Following a series of territorial disputes, the Treaty of Fort Laramie (1851) declared that the land surrounding the river belonged to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians.²

Around 1859, in their trek back East, discouraged California gold seekers verified a substantial amount of gold in the Rocky Mountains. In what was known as the “Pike’s Peak Gold Rush,” miners and prospectors began using the Smoky Hill Trail to reach the Denver goldfields. The route saved up to 110 miles compared to the Sante Fe Trail or Platte river routes.³ Despite passing through contested Indian territory, travelers reported only a small amount of hostility.⁴ Nevertheless, this smattering of intimidation prompted the government to send troops to protect the Smoky Hill Trail until the outbreak of the Civil War.

Following years of terrible distraction, Americans returned their focus west as the Civil War drew to a close. David A. Butterfield, the owner of a successful grocery and commission business in Denver, relocated to Atchison, Kansas in 1864. While in Kansas, Butterfield noticed the growing need for a transportation route across the plains. A wealthy and well-known entrepreneur, he secured a three million dollar investment from

¹ Donald J. Blakeslee, *Along Ancient Trails: The Mallet Expedition of 1739* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 1-3.

² Rodney Staab, “The Smoky Hill Route and Fort Fletcher” (Master’s Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1985), i.

³ Leslie Linville, *The Smoky Hill Valley and Butterfield Trail* (Colby, KS: Leroy Printing, 1974), 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-42. Most of the dangers were environmental. Traveling hundreds of miles across unfamiliar terrain proved exceptionally challenging.

various Eastern capitalists.⁵ By 1864, he was funding a mail and freight service on the Smoky Hill Trail.⁶ Known as the Butterfield Overland Dispatch, the service capitalized on increased traffic to the Rocky Mountain gold fields of Colorado.⁷

Embarking on an eight-day journey from Atchison to Denver, Butterfield Overland Dispatch travelers followed the ancient Smoky Hill Trail.⁸ Facing environmental and territorial hazards, each wagon train experienced a unique journey. After travelers began reporting cases of Indian harassment, the government again stationed troops along the trail.⁹ One of the troop stations, founded in late 1865, was Fort Fletcher. Located southeast of present day Hays, Kansas, Fort Fletcher, a precursor to Fort Hays, protected Butterfield Overland Dispatch travelers on the Smoky Hill Trail. Theodore H. Davis, travel correspondent for *Harpers Monthly* magazine, outlined a journey on the Butterfield Stage Line in 1865. He offered an initial perception of Fort Fletcher:

⁵ Ibid., 50-51.

⁶ Not to be confused with John Butterfield's freight and stagecoach companies that became American Express and Wells Fargo.

⁷ Refer to Appendix B on page 78 for the Butterfield Overland Dispatch route and mileage from Atchison to Denver.

⁸ The time of the journey depended on the number of mishaps. Ideally, it took eight days. In the case of Davis, it took fifteen days. The 592-mile journey provided few constants.

⁹ Alma Johnson, *Trail Dust...Over the B.O.D. through Kansas* (Detroit, MI: Harlo Press, 1974), 27-28. Damage may have been done by competing freight company workers disguised as Indians.

The first day in the Indian country we saw thousands of buffalo. The plains were dotted with circular cavities ten or twelve feet in diameter, known as buffalo 'Wallows'. During the afternoon we reached Fort Fletcher, newly established government post, garrisoned by a force of three hundred men, under the command of Colonel Tamblyn. The fort is in name only, as the post is yet to be built. A cottonwood grove, a sort of oasis in this treeless country, had been selected as a campground, which was not only picturesque but comfortable. From the Colonel we learned that the Indians were not troublesome, they had not committed any outrages for a few days past. This was encouraging, and we continued our journey, congratulating each other on the prospect of meeting friendly Indians.¹⁰

Their feeling of comfort proved short-lived, though, as the party's focus shifted to Indian hostility by sunset the same day when they were twenty-two miles west of Fort Fletcher. Approached by shadowy silhouettes around midnight, the party prepared for attack. The shadowy figures turned out to be distressed white men, escaped victims of an Indian attack further along the trail. Terrified, the party sent a messenger back to Colonel William Tamblyn at Fort Fletcher. A military escort arrived the next day, leading the party to another station located near "Monument Rocks" in Gove County in western Kansas.

Left with an escort of five cavalymen, the party's eventful voyage had only begun. Before reaching Denver, the group witnessed a man scalped alive, one hundred mounted Indians in pursuit, a burning doctor's ambulance, and several dead cavalymen.¹¹ Colonel Tamblyn's calculation that the Indians were peaceful was

¹⁰ Theodore Davis, "A Stage Ride to Colorado," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, July, 1867, 137-151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137-151.

disastrously wrong, exposing the unpredictable nature of a journey on the Smoky Hill Trail. The first trains of Butterfield Overland Dispatch Company wagons, one of which carried seventy-five tons of freight, reported no Indian interference.¹² As the company expanded, built relay stations, and experienced heavier traffic, however, the Indian presence became a major problem.

Renamed for Governor Thomas C. Fletcher of Missouri, Fort Fletcher began as “Camp Big Creek.” Operational on October 11, 1865, the fort was located around five miles south of present day Walker, Kansas. Commissioned by the government to protect Butterfield Overland Dispatch travelers, the fort acted as a relay station on the Smoky Hill Trail. Situated between Fort Wallace in far western Kansas and Fort Harker in central Kansas, Fort Fletcher was one of several routine stops on the Butterfield Overland Dispatch. The government instructed the military to promote a stable environment for safe western passage by assuming responsibility over travelers. To convey a sense of stability, the original camp had evolved quickly into a primitive frontier fort.

Founded after the rush of freight and stagecoach traffic had peaked, Fort Fletcher’s existence was a largely solitary one. Expecting a second rush of traffic to the gold fields, the military anticipated a serious workload. Envisioned as an oasis on the plains, Fort Fletcher was to include twenty infantry tents and forty large wall tents, all situated under the area’s towering cottonwood trees. Given the available timber in the area, though, pressure mounted to build permanent structures. Almost immediately, soldiers constructed around forty log cabins. Described by a commander as “comfortable

¹² Johnson, 26.

cabins about eight feet by ten feet,” the structures exemplified the military’s desired sense of permanency.¹³

Located on the high plains of western Kansas, Fort Fletcher existed in an atmosphere much different than today. Though estimates vary drastically, perhaps up to sixty million bison existed in the American West before white settlement.¹⁴ Thomas D. Heed, an 1867 Smoky Hill Trail traveler, reported expansive herds stretching as far as the eye could see.¹⁵ In 1868, General Philip Sheridan reported a ninety-mile-long herd of three hundred thousand buffalo near the area. In addition to bison, other game thrived in the unsettled West. Kansas species included prairie dogs, quail, jackrabbits, elk, deer, antelope, coyotes, wolves, fish, rattlesnakes, and prairie chickens, among others. Because of their abundance, soldiers found themselves spending several hours a day on the hunt.¹⁶ The animals provided supplemental food to travelers and soldiers who stopped at Fort Fletcher. In addition to soldiers and travelers, Indians also capitalized on the area’s plentiful game. Rather than using it to supplement their supply, they relied on it for survival. The convergence of white settlers, frontier soldiers, and Indians led to heightened conflict in the early days of Fort Fletcher.

¹³ Staab, 139-142.

¹⁴ James H. Shaw, “How Many Bison Originally Populated Western Rangelands?” *Rangelands* Vol. 17, No.5 (1995): 148-150.

¹⁵ Heed, Thomas Dougherty, b. 1832, Letter to his sister, Susanna Mercy Heed, Kansas Collection, RH MS P783, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas Libraries.

¹⁶ Staab, 143. Soldiers also found themselves spending significant time caring for animals. There were seventy horses and ninety mules at the fort.

After a long power struggle with Butterfield, the “Stagecoach King” Ben Holladay purchased the Butterfield Overland Dispatch Company in 1866. For around nine months, Holladay overcharged the public, holding a monopoly on transportation between the Missouri River and Salt Lake City, Utah. In similar fashion, Wells Fargo & Company purchased Holladay’s holdings in November 1866 to secure their own monopoly west of the Missouri River. With the Kansas Pacific Railroad progressing west, however, the stage line era’s days were numbered. Running 630 miles from Kansas City to Denver, the Kansas Pacific would transform transportation across the plains. By the time the “golden spike” was set at Promontory Point, Utah, on May 10, 1869, the transcontinental stage coaching business had effectively ended.¹⁷

Decreasing travel on the Butterfield Overland Dispatch lowered the demand for a military presence on the trail. Operational for only a year, the government terminated Fort Fletcher in late 1866. However, after Fort Fletcher closed, the government reinforced military operations in the area. Reestablished a half mile northeast, the newly named Fort Hays anticipated the railroad’s arrival. In agreement with General Winfield Scott Hancock’s demands, the government renamed the fort after Alexander Hays. A Union general in the Civil War, Hays had died in Virginia’s famous Battle of the Wilderness.

With the Butterfield Overland Dispatch out of commission, Fort Hays depended on the railroad to justify its existence on the Plains. Charting a course fourteen miles north of the Smoky Hill Trail, the Union Pacific railroad’s new plan pressured the

¹⁷ Johnson, 31-34.

military to relocate Fort Hays again. Incidentally, the heavy June rains of 1867 flooded the Big Creek valley and destroyed the original fort, forcing the issue. In May 1867, General Hancock ordered the official relocation of Fort Hays fourteen miles north to its present location. At this location, the fort could better service the railroad's interests. Additionally, Hancock viewed Fort Hays as a potential base for his expanding Indian wars.¹⁸

Each individual fort in Kansas carried its own set of unique challenges and experiences. For example, soldiers at Fort Larned, approximately sixty miles south of Fort Hays, faced greater exposure to the Plains Indians. Several Indian chiefs, including Black Kettle and Satanta, appeared at Fort Larned, eventually leading to General Hancock's destruction of a nearby Cheyenne and Lakota village; in 1867, Hancock, along with Custer's Seventh Cavalry, burned the village to demonstrate the military's power. Constructed on the Smoky Hill Trail, rather than the heavily traveled Santa Fe Trail, and positioned on a major railroad, Fort Hays offered a less dangerous environment. Despite Hancock's provocations, Fort Hays acted more as a railroad supply depot than a war base.

Though Hancock expected Fort Hays to operate as an Indian war base, soldier exposure to Indians proved surprisingly low. During the days of the Butterfield Overland Dispatch, Indian exposure and conflict had been more likely. Fort Fletcher's soldiers traveled great distances in unsettled Indian country, escorting civilians across the Plains. However, by the time Fort Hays was established, the white presence on the Kansas plains

¹⁸ Jerry B. Ramsey, "Fort Hays: An Analysis of the Federal Government's Military Activities on the Kansas Plains" (Master's Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1972), 24-25.

had become a reality for various Indian tribes. Relatively isolated, Fort Hays soldiers helped develop the area for permanent white civilization and prosperity, and, as the fort grew more structurally advanced, it attracted more settlers to the Hays City area.

With the federal government involved in several other on-going projects, it was unable to devote serious resources to the construction of Fort Hays. Early in the process, civilians helped build a large portion of the base. Original orders directed the construction of a temporary post because of the shortage of building supplies and skilled workers in the area. Surveyors chose the site because of the area's plentiful grass, adequate drainage, and high ground to carry odors away with the wind. Once plans changed to erect a permanent base, Fort Hays grew rapidly. Men constructed four barracks, each one hundred and eighteen feet long by twenty-four feet wide, nine officer's quarters, married soldier quarters, storehouses, stables, a bakery, and several other structures. The first guardhouse, a stockade building, was replaced by the limestone structure still standing today.¹⁹ Built around a parade ground, Fort Hays resembled a small city more than a stereotypical fortress. The days of high risk and heavy activity passed, leaving behind an era of small-scale urban development and progress.

Growing at a fast rate, Fort Fletcher and Fort Hays ushered in civilization to the area. Soldiers at Fort Fletcher risked their lives accompanying travelers and mail coaches on the Smoky Hill Trail, promoting stability in the area. Though Fort Fletcher soldiers drank alcohol, their high level of activity and frontier isolation prevented the widespread alcoholism seen at Fort Hays. Operating in an "urban" environment, Fort Hays soldiers

¹⁹ Ramsey, 54-59.

played a more meager role. Soldiers adjusted to their new lifestyle, allowing a strict, labor-oriented routine to become the norm. Increasingly drawn to Hays City and its emerging attractions, alcoholism became a common theme among working soldiers.

CHAPTER THREE

A “FORTRESS OF SIN:” ALCOHOLISM AT OLD FORT HAYS, 1867-1889

Epidemic throughout Fort Hays’ existence, drunkenness affected directly and indirectly the lives of all enlisted soldiers. After the fort relocated near Hays City, alcohol abuse became widespread as the city offered new temptations for enlisted men. However, the proximity of a developing frontier community also led to a growing number of “absent without leave” court-martial convictions. Nearby saloons, featuring gambling, prostitution, and other potential indulgences, became an attractive alternative for soldiers embittered by the grind of military scheduling.

To enforce a sense of routine, normality, and efficiency, frontier military leaders preferred strict scheduling. In November 1866, at the original fort location, a First Lieutenant G. W. H. Stouch released a daily schedule for Fort Hays soldiers. Though the schedule varied from fort to fort, the following represented a typical weekday for a frontier soldier:

6:45 AM—1st Call to Reveille

7:00 AM—Reveille (Stable Call immediately after Reveille)

7:05 AM—Breakfast Call

7:30 AM—Sick Call

7:45 AM—Fatigue

8:00 AM—Water Call

8:50 AM—1st Call to Guard Mount

9:00 AM—Guard Mount

9:30 AM—Practice Call

10:30 AM—Recall from Practice

11:30 AM—Recall from Fatigue

11:45 AM—Dinner

12:00 PM—Orderly Call

12:30 PM—Fatigue

2:00 PM—Practice Call

3:00 PM—Recall from Practice

3:45 PM—Water Call

4:00 PM—Recall from Fatigue

4:55 PM—1st Call for Retreat

5:00 PM—Retreat

7:25 PM—1st Call for Tattoo

7:30 PM—Tattoo¹

After sunrise reveille, a soldier's day involved a series of "call and respond" activities. Emil Bode noted that breakfast marked a peak of enthusiasm in an otherwise bland day of hard work. He claimed that "The quickest move of the day [was] to the mess hall, answering the cowbell for breakfast."² Though the mess hall was infamous for providing

¹ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

² Bode, 17.

salty, unappetizing meals, with soldiers carrying low expectations concerning food quality, the meal remained a morning highlight.

Dating back to its beginnings as the impermanent base of Fort Fletcher, Fort Hays suffered from a lack of quality food and supplies. Although its position along the Kansas Pacific Railroad allowed for more efficient transport than many other Kansas forts, Fort Hays remained poorly supplied. While stationed at Fort Hays, Custer alleged that his regiment's hard tack had been prepared at the beginning of the Civil War.³ After traveling long distances, much of the post's food arrived in poor or rotten condition. Daily menus consisted of unappetizing salted pork, fried mush, or stew, served with strong black coffee.⁴ To upgrade, soldiers often spent their wages on better quality food and supplies from the Post Trader's Store, further limiting their monthly pay. Considering the circumstances, some soldiers appreciated the army's efforts to provide quality meals. As John Billings remarked, "In spite of unwholesome rations, whose existence no one calls in question...I think the government did well...to furnish the soldiers with so good a quality of food as they averaged to receive."⁵ Nevertheless, most soldiers spoke poorly of military meals. In 1870, Post Surgeon Abel F. Mechem explained why many soldiers preferred to purchase food from local merchants:

³ Oliva, 57.

⁴ Rickey, 39.

⁵ John Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life: 1887* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 110.

The articles on the list of subsistence stores are inferior with very few exceptions, so inferior that they would not be considered merchantable by experienced purchasers. Similar stores kept for sale at the traders and in the vicinity of the post at Hays City are very much superior in quality. Whether this inferiority depends on defective storage, long keeping in the store, or the inexperience and carelessness of the purchasers, the following can be certainly remedied. At this post all are comparatively independent of the commissary department, being able to purchase from the stores in the vicinity.⁶

Therefore, to the delight of local businesses, soldiers often depended on operations independent of the military.

Aside from meals and short breaks, a soldier's day consisted of tedious, routine-oriented activities. After breakfast, for example, soldiers often checked into fatigue duty, which demanded an assortment of non-military tasks such as gardening, construction, digging, or cleaning. Due to the harsh scheduling, the repetitive nature of fort life, and unpleasant tasks such as fatigue duty, Captain Albert Barnitz complained that "The fact is I am sick and tired of this tread-mill life. I am weary, weary, weary, with never a moment to rest! Not the veriest [sic] convict in a prison is more unfortunately and unhappily situated than an officer of cavalry at this lovely Post."⁷ With newly arriving entertainment at Hays City, many enlisted men lost the will to submit to such a strict, demanding lifestyle.

⁶ Ramsey, 74.

⁷ Utley, 128.

After the move to the final fort location, “absent without leave” charges rose significantly. As a result, the post enforced temporary restrictions on visits to the Post Sutler. On February 18, 1868, General Order Seven required soldiers to obtain special permission from the Officer of the Day before visiting the Post Sutler. Likely placed to curb the amount of drinking and reduce the urge to escape to Hays City, this order marked the first of many drinking policies established at the new post. Similarly, fort commanders heavily restricted soldiers from visiting Hays City for any reason. For example, on Election Day 1870, no soldier could visit Hays City without written permission. A group of soldiers patrolled all day to arrest anyone leaving the fort without authorization.⁸ Soldiers on trial for “absence without leave” usually pled guilty and faced various punishments, including harsh pay cuts and hard labor sentences.

Soldiers found excessively drunk on duty also faced charges for conduct “prejudicial to good order and military discipline.” As the fort grew, court-martial hearings became more specific. With an increasing number of alcohol-related infractions came more creative punishments. Hearings precisely outlined wrongdoings and consistently punished the wrongdoers. For example, fort records indicate that Private Joseph Pickett “did get drunk and behave in a very rough and boisterous loud manner” in February 1868. Charged with absence and poor conduct, the court-martial sentenced him to twenty days of hard labor under guard supervision and issued a twelve-dollar

⁸ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

withholding from his monthly paycheck.⁹ Since privates earned only thirteen dollars a month, a twelve-dollar monthly withholding effectively eliminated their entire paycheck.

Combined with alcoholism, inadequate living conditions and poor nutrition facilitated disease at Fort Hays. However, with access to a post surgeon and general medical care, soldiers weathered most widespread illness. For example, the cholera outbreak of 1867 claimed around thirty victims at Fort Hays, only a fraction of the casualties reported in nearby areas. Treating otherwise life threatening conditions, such as scurvy and dysentery, the post surgeon provided surprisingly good care. Without receiving medical care, the lives of many frontier soldiers would have been in greater danger.¹⁰ During the cholera outbreak of 1867, Post Commander Captain Henry C. Corbin reported that bad whiskey sold outside of the fort could be spreading illness. He ordered the 38th Infantry to seize all liquor sold by merchants outside of the fort.¹¹ With alcoholism already threatening the health of soldiers, medical personnel worked with enlisted men to prevent further ailment.

Fort records indicate an outbreak of scurvy within military ranks in April 1868. To combat the problem, the post issued soldiers a daily ration of five ounces of potatoes, one ounce of mixed vegetables, pickles, and sauerkraut. Curiously, in the same month, the Post Hospital experienced problems with alcohol smuggling. Private James Wilson

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ben Peeler, "The Best of All Possible Care: An Examination of Scientifically Progressive Medicine in Hays from 1867 to 1918" (Masters Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 2008).

¹¹ James Drees, "The Hays City Vigilante Period, 1868-1869" (Masters Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1983), 11-12.

went on trial for providing bottles of liquor to men in the sick ward. Wilson “did endeavor to induce them to drink” and was found intoxicated with several patients. Additionally, the Post Hospital cook in charge of hospital supervision participated in the binge. Found drunk with Wilson and the patients, he was also court-martialed. The trial found Wilson guilty of poor judgment, but cleared him of any criminality. The Post Hospital cook lost five dollars from his monthly pay.¹² Not yet medically associated with alcohol or dehydration, the fort scurvy outbreak likely festered due to excessive alcohol usage.

After weighing the pros and cons of military life on the Kansas prairie, a staggering number of soldiers deserted. In 1867 alone, almost twenty-five percent of the United States military deserted nationwide. For example, Custer’s Seventh Cavalry lost over half its men during his time in command.¹³ After deserting, though, soldiers commonly rejoined elsewhere at their own convenience. Corporal E.A. Bode, who was stationed at various locations across the West, observed that “men came, enlisted and deserted.”¹⁴ He jokingly referred to this tactic as “French leave,” in which soldiers would come and go as they pleased.¹⁵ Featuring a monotonous daily schedule, inadequate entertainment, low pay, poor supplies, disease, and an isolated location, Fort Hays offered little appeal to those who might ponder desertion or abandonment.

¹² United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

¹³ Oliva, 61.

¹⁴ Bode, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

In addition to an increase in absence and drunkenness, the rate of military desertion also rose in the early days of Fort Hays. In late May, 1868, the fort compensated civilian O.J. Warren sixty dollars for the capture and return of two deserted soldiers.¹⁶ Soldiers deserted the military for a number of reasons. Colonel W.B. Hazen, an eventual Fort Hays commander, blamed desertion on the quality of soldiers recruited in the East. As he put it, “No squad of recruits enlisted in New York leaves the city without containing faces familiar to the old city detectives...We enlist men...without knowing their names, residences or anything whatever about them. Is it strange that a third of our Army deserts each year?” Others believed that soldiers enlisted for free transportation to the West. One officer remarked that “in a detachment of 100 recruits, at least one-fourth of them enlist for that purpose.” In reality, a combination of factors led to national desertion numbers as high as 14,068 out of 54,138 men.¹⁷ At Fort Hays, 457 out of 865 enlisted men deserted in 1867 alone.¹⁸ Difficult to catch, deserted soldiers did not often face punishment from the army. The countless motivations for desertion undoubtedly intensified under the influence of alcohol.

In addition to common soldiers, regimental band members earned a notoriously disruptive reputation. Hired to provide music for ceremonies, public concerts, dances, patriotic celebrations, and other daily functions, regimental bands helped boost morale at Western posts. Although subject to the same hardships as soldiers, bandsmen often

¹⁶ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

¹⁷ Foner, 6-7.

¹⁸ Oliva, 61.

received preferential treatment from their superiors.¹⁹ On January 25, 1869, ten members of the Fort Hays regimental band went missing overnight. On trial separately, each member lost five dollars out of his monthly paycheck for escaping to Hays City, presumably for drinking and entertainment.²⁰ Two months later, musician Nicholas Reed went on trial after failing to deliver a scheduled performance for the Post Adjutant's office. For being too drunk to play his instrument, the court-martial led to the sentencing of Reed to hand labor for a month.²¹ Other enlisted men commonly lost more than ten dollars from their paychecks, along with a possible labor sentence. Bandsmen took advantage of their preferred status to earn their rowdy reputation through heavy drinking and frequent court-martial visits.

Non-commissioned officers also enjoyed preferential treatment at forts across the country. In an effort to enforce the differences between rank, an 1869 Fort Hays order required soldiers to "invariably salute any body [sic] they know to be an officer whether he be in uniform or not." Tired of men pleading ignorance on the subject, the order warned of serious punishment for any future violators.

¹⁹ Thomas Railsback, "Military Bands and Music in the Frontier West, 1866-1891" (Master's Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1978), 103.

²⁰ Bandsmen made thirteen dollars a month, earning an annual dollar raise for the first five years. Upon fifth enlistment, a bandsman earned twenty-one dollars a month. Chief Musicians made sixty dollars a month.

²¹ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

Though held to different standards, officers did face occasional trouble at the fort. For example, Corporal Rufus Russell lost his rank for “drunk and disorderly” conduct. The court-martial dropped all of his charges not related to alcohol, blaming all infractions on drunkenness.²² After committing these infractions, an average private would expect to face comprehensive punishment. Despite unequal treatment, drunkenness spanned both class and rank within the military. Libbie Custer remembered a cooperative failure in a journey from Fort Hays:

Two of the officers and an escort of ten mounted men, going to Fort Harker on duty, accompanied our little cortege of departing women. (wives were ordered to leave Fort Hays because of Indian danger). At the first stage station, the soldiers all dismounted as we halted, and managed by some pretext to get into the dugout and buy whiskey. Not long after we were again en route I saw one of the men reel on his saddle, and he was lifted into the wagon by the teamsters, who fortunately were sober, and the troopers' horses were tied behind the vehicles, and we found ourselves without an escort, (in dangerous Indian country).²³

As alcohol-related infractions increased at Fort Hays, punishments became more creative. Especially disruptive soldiers earned solitary confinement or extreme labor sentences. With Indians unlikely to attack, the post used the new stone guardhouse as a prison. After breaking into a woman's quarters, one private spent five days confined in the dark, dirt-floored guardhouse. If a soldier managed to avoid the solitary confinement penalty, other labor-oriented charges sometimes waited. After several alcohol-related

²² Ibid.

²³ Custer, 256-257.

incidents in March and April 1869, soldiers faced innovative charges. The garrison court-martial sentenced one man to two days of guard duty while carrying a forty-pound log on his back from reveille to retreat. In another case, a man lost fourteen dollars from his monthly pay and had to perform hard labor while carrying a fifteen-pound weight on a fifteen-pound chain attached to his left leg.²⁴ As the fort evolved, this brand of punishment became common.

Facing volatile Kansas weather, activity at Fort Hays slowed during the winter months. Less likely to drink or venture to Hays City, criminal activity decreased along with the temperature.²⁵ Winter crimes often consisted of indoor fighting and unauthorized visits to the kitchen or hospital. By the spring and summer months, however, the level of drinking, and desertion, rose considerably.²⁶ As drinking picked up again in April 1870, a order attempted to control the alcohol problem. The order prohibited the sale of liquor on Sundays, as well as the sale of liquor before reveille or after retreat, and limited each soldier to three drinks a day for consumption at the time of purchase. The order included hard cider and malt liquor, drinks that commonly escaped the label of hard alcohol. The order instructed the Post Trader to record individual purchases of liquor for reference in trial. Curiously, however, this order never received official publication. Though recorded as an official government document, the author canceled the order by writing “Not

²⁴ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

²⁵ There were sixty-two cases of frostbite between 1867 and 1873.

²⁶ Kansas summers also provided challenges. During extreme heat, reveille began at 5:15 AM. Enlisted men had permission to wear straw hats to combat the uncomfortable conditions caused by heat and heavy uniforms.

published” on the page margin.²⁷ Outside pressures presumably forced the order’s cancelation. Similarly, in 1866, Lt. G.W.H. Stouch, commander of Fort Fletcher, attempted to enforce alcohol policy. In Special Order Number Three, Stouch declared that “Hereafter the sutler of this post will be allowed to sell only (2) drinks of whisky a day to each enlisted man at the post, viz., one in the fore noon and one in the afternoon.”²⁸ Despite its official publication, soldiers largely ignored this order as the fort faced a period of rapid change, including two relocations and intense structural development. Limitations on alcohol faced harsh criticism from soldiers and the powerful Post Sutler.

In his memoir, George Armes wrote of an experience with the influential Post Sutler at Fort Hays. On October 17, 1867, Armes wrote:

This has been a gay day. Lieutenant Amick and Lieutenant Fisher had a horse-race. Lieutenant Amick won \$400; I won \$18 on his horse. The Officers of our post had a lively time at the sutler’s last night. Lieutenant Lebo, Captain Graham, Lieutenant Bodamer and the party that remained there most all night drank eighty-seven bottles of wine. Such customers are very profitable to Mr. Wilson, our genial and enterprising sutler.²⁹

Taking advantage of a cornered market, the Post Sutler (later known as the Post Trader) made considerable profit selling alcohol. In mid-1872, fort records indicate that the Post Trader sold beer for five dollars a keg, fifteen cents a glass, or twenty-five cents for two

²⁷ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Armes, 253-254.

glasses.³⁰ Offering an impressive supply of liquor, the Post Trader harbored social gatherings and entertainment. Payday was especially lucrative for the Post Trader. Jennie Barnitz, wife of Captain Albert Barnitz, explained, "Pay day for the privates & a trying day it is to Officers. I wish it did not come so often as it does...The men are almost unmanageable as soon as they have a dollar."³¹ E. A. Bode confirmed:

Payday was always a holiday and duly celebrated by all concerned. Buying necessary articles, spending foolishly, or on whiskey and gambling, the money was generally invested and nothing left for most, than the hope of another payday. If one or more were unlucky enough to have their pay taken by a court-martial there was always a dollar or so left to gamble with, trusting their luck for drinks.³²

The Post Trader often enjoyed the benefits of a soldier's hard work. After long, tedious days of work, soldiers craved entertainment no matter the cost. Bode further described the excitement of payday:

Oh what excitement. Long rows of gambling tables were prepared for the event, everything busy and boiling. The afternoon came, everybody was paid. Here were the men standing behind tables shouting 'up she comes, down she goes, a one, four and six, and bet there!' The habitual gamblers luring a few suckers and greenies into a chuck-a-luck game; further on a faro and keno game in full blast, while in a corner twenty-one and monte played by an anguished looking crowd with feverish eyes on the card which would make them five or twenty dollar richer or poorer...In this way our soldiers passed their payday until

³⁰ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

³¹ Agnew, 169.

³² Bode, 62.

all the money was gone, satisfied that their luck was against them.³³

On May 24, 1870, Marcus Reno, the controversial Major of the 7th Cavalry, took over as Post Commander at Fort Hays. A career military officer, Reno played a significant role in the Battle of Little Big Horn six years later. A heavy drinker and outspoken critic of Custer, Reno would earn significant blame for the failure at Little Big Horn. Underestimating the size of the famous Lakota/Cheyenne village, Reno failed to push the Indians toward Custer. Second-in-command to Custer, Reno's forces planned to approach the village from the south as Custer came from the north, surrounding the Indian warriors. Unfortunately for Reno, the Indians engaged his forces, rather than fleeing as expected. The Lakota/Cheyenne pushed Reno's men into the timberline, ruining Custer's grand strategy and resulting in the infamous "Last Stand."

Many historians believe that Reno's drinking led to poor leadership and decision-making at the Battle of Little Big Horn. Reno struggled with alcoholism, damaging his reputation both before and after his failure during Custer's "last stand." Responding to charges of excessive drunkenness, Reno ordered a Court of Inquiry to defend his reputation in 1879. Many considered the trial a whitewash, as the court failed to sustain any charges. One soldier under the command of Reno stated that "My impression at the time was that he was a little under the influence of whiskey or liquor."³⁴ However, most of the testimonies proved more neutral. Another soldier claimed that "He was, in those

³³ Ibid., 19.

³⁴ Ronald Hamilton Nichols, *In Custer's Shadow: Major Marcus Reno* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 282.

days when almost everybody drank, what was called a moderate drinker and I never saw him drunk.”³⁵ Regardless of testimony in his defense, Reno did drink heavily throughout his military career. Whether it affected the defeat at Little Big Horn might never be known. Reno’s “anti-Custer” reputation, which began while commanding Fort Hays, resulted in a permanently tarnished legacy of alcoholism and failed leadership.

Despite Fort Hays soldiers taking orders from an intoxicated commander, excessive drinking remained a punishable crime at the fort. However, there were discrepancies in alcohol policy depending on the particular officer. On November 16, 1870, court-martial records indicate that Sergeant George Krager went on trial for neglect of duty. Krager confined a prisoner “without observing or paying any attention whatever to the physical condition of said prisoner.” Investigators found that the received prisoner was “in a state of beastly intoxication” and that Krager had neglected to report the severity of the prisoner’s drunkenness. Krager received ten days of arrest in company quarters. Following the court-martial documentation, however, the Post Commander wrote that he “feels it to be his duty to take exception to it as being in his opinion rather mild. This is in view of the fact of an increasing disposition on the part of some Non-Commissioned Officers to shield men charged with drunkenness.”³⁶ Though Krager’s sentence stood, the Post Commander highlighted the differences of opinion on the seriousness of drunkenness.

³⁵ Ibid., 127.

³⁶ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

By late 1870, crimes at Fort Hays began receiving more detailed documentation. Rather than simply accusing late, overly drunken soldiers with being “absent without leave,” separate charges involving alcohol consumption became common. For example, Private Lawrence McDermott faced charges for “Drunkenness to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.” He was described as “under the influence of intoxicating liquor to such an extent as to be entirely unfit for any duty.” Records also began to indicate the exact times men went missing. If found drunk in the morning (after being declared missing between reveille and taps), a soldier earned the presumption of having adventured to Hays City for the night. For instance, Private Ralph Jenkins was “so drunk in his Company Quarters as to be unfit for the performance of any duty whatever.” The court-martial sentenced Jenkins to five days in the guardhouse with nothing but bread and water.³⁷

Lost between the shuffle of daily life and fort development, by 1870 the “Indian problem” was becoming less of a factor. On November 10, 1871, Colonel W.B. Hazen outlined the new Indian policy at Fort Hays:

Non-commissioned Officers commanding guards on the line of the Kansas Pacific Railroad between this Post and Fort Wallace will at all times make every effort to find out if Indians are in the neighborhood of their respective stations. To this end they will inquire of citizens visiting their stations, and coming from [ill.] off the railroad, if they have seen Indians or any signs of them. If Indians have been seen they will ascertain the tribe to which they belong, their number, whether peaceable or hostile, the direction in which they are traveling and wheregoing, and if accompanied by women and children. Peaceable Indians

³⁷ Ibid.

will not be troubled or will they permit citizens to interfere with them. They will by the first opportunity report to this Commanding Officer of this Post any information they may obtain about the movements of Indians. Indians will not be permitted in or around the stations but will be kept at a respectable distance.³⁸

Considering the majority of soldiers remained on base while on duty, the passive Indian policy outlined by Hazen demonstrates the lack of involvement average soldiers had with Indians. In fact, between 1867 and 1884, the Post Surgeon's office reported only one arrow wound.³⁹ On the other hand, the Post Surgeon's office reported twenty-two cases of *delirium tremens* between 1867 and 1873, nine cases in 1873 alone.⁴⁰

Marked by severe hallucinations and body tremors, *delirium tremens* is the most severe form of alcohol withdrawal. Modern medical research indicates that delirium tremens is usually triggered in patients consuming more than half a bottle (750 mg) of spirits a day. The patient shows symptoms of convulsions, disorientation, confusion, hallucinations, and general insanity. Since the *delirium tremens* are a life threatening condition, modern medicine encourages several days of hospital care, often in a psychiatric ward.⁴¹ In only six years, Post Surgeons reported twenty-two cases of *delirium tremens* at Fort Hays. Around one in twenty soldiers received medical care for delirium tremens in 1873 alone. This number reflects the seriousness of alcohol abuse at

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Seventy-seven gunshot wounds were recorded, but over half of them occurred between 1867 and 1868. Many were the result of fighting between fellow soldiers and civilians.

⁴⁰ Ramsey, 112-113.

⁴¹ Jonathan Seckl, *Delirium Tremens*, University Department of Psychiatry, Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Scotland. British Medical Journal Publishing Group: Volume 298, January 7, 1989.

the post. Hardly considered an illness, alcoholism only received treatment in its most extreme forms. Physicians reported only eight cases of “chronic alcoholism” throughout Fort Hays’ existence, demonstrating the unwillingness to label alcoholism as a disease. Other potential symptoms of alcoholism, including bronchitis, received isolated treatment. By neglecting to attack the source of the problem, the health of Fort Hays soldiers deteriorated. It is clear that alcoholism posed a greater threat to Fort Hays soldiers than Indians did between 1867 and 1889.⁴²

Though the threat of an Indian attack at Fort Hays proved minimal, white/Indian contact did occur. Fort Hays took several Indian prisoners throughout its existence and possibly contributed, indirectly and directly, to the demise of Plains Indian culture. The frontier forts of Kansas dealt with Indian policy on a daily basis, affecting the lives of thousands of local tribesmen. For example, nearby Fort Larned operated as the headquarters for the Kiowa-Comanche Indian Agency. Despite the era’s unflattering depictions of Indian culture, frontier establishments, including Fort Larned and Fort Hays, battled their own internal problems. Known as the “local disease” by physicians, one-third of Fort Larned’s officers and one hundred and ten of its enlisted men were diagnosed as alcoholics between 1872 and 1873. Since the beginning of the fort’s medical records in 1868, the number rose steadily. Contact with frontier forts such as Larned and Hays exposed Indians to the dangers of alcoholism. Known to destroy Indian

⁴² Refer to Appendix C on page 79 for a chart of reported illnesses at Fort Hays. Note that physicians did not commonly report alcoholism as a disease. Instead, they treated conditions such as *delirium tremens* as separate disorders.

as efficiently as any other method, alcohol posed a serious cultural threat to Indians throughout Kansas.⁴³

Many historians view the self-destructive alcoholic tendencies of Indian tribes as a form of protest against federal prohibition. It remained illegal to sell Indians liquor from the 1830s to the 1950s. Kansas historian William Unrau explained the influence of white drinking on Indian culture in his book *White Man's Wicked Water*. Unrau concludes:

The conclusion that American Indians drank because non-Indians drank warrants some additional comment, if for no other reason than Indian drinking viewed as a matter of learning may appear too simplistic. But if we keep in mind that, with a few exceptions, the first Americans had no experience with alcohol prior to the Columbian invasion, and that savage instinct, moral deficiency, or some innate craving for the product of grain distillation offered as reasons for Indian drinking—temperate or otherwise—are clear racist constructions and thus provide no sensible insights into the problem, we are left with the possibility of one culture accommodating another with significant and, perhaps, lasting results.⁴⁴

The rampant level of alcoholism present in and around Fort Hays undoubtedly contributed to Indian drinking habits. Though the level of conflict between whites and Indians at Fort Hays proved lower than at other forts, such as Larned, the drinking culture embraced by frontier soldiers negatively affected Indians across the country. In addition to the personal consequences of heavy drinking, Indian tribes also faced devastating

⁴³ Unrau, ix-xi.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

social and economic consequences. Whites encouraged Indian drinking habits by encouraging the illegal liquor trade, especially during the prohibition era.⁴⁵

Whether motivated by alcohol or not, sex also posed a threat to the health and legal standing of soldiers at the fort. With a small chance of finding female companionship, some soldiers resorted to hiring a prostitute. Aside from laundresses (often serving as undercover prostitutes), the fort allowed few women onto the property. Soldiers sexually targeted women working at the fort. For example, Private Daniel Reynolds, while intoxicated, broke into a sergeant's quarters seeking sexual relations with a servant girl. According to court-martial records, Reynolds "did forcibly seize and handle roughly the servant girl." For raping the girl, breaking into a sergeant's quarters, and creating a noise disturbance, the court-martial sentenced Reynolds to a loss of all of his pay and clothing allowance for a month. In addition, Reynolds faced thirty days of hard labor, each Sunday spent in solitary confinement.⁴⁶ Because of potentially strict punishment and few available women, men often pursued women outside of Fort Hays.

With Hays City nearby, soldiers at Fort Hays enjoyed greater access to prostitution and women than soldiers stationed at isolated forts. By 1869, the Kansas Pacific Railroad had passed Hays City by, leaving the settlement almost entirely dependent on commerce with Fort Hays' soldiers. Without railroad traffic, Hays City shrank from over three thousand residents to only three hundred. The dependence on soldier capital lasted until the latter half of the 1870s, when agriculture took root in the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

area. Between 1867 and 1873, the majority of Hays City's business success depended on saloons and prostitution houses built for area soldiers.⁴⁷ As the *Hays City Railway Advance* explained, "The large fort which stands as sentinel over the plains, and is the starting point of all active military operations, fronts the southern boundry [sic] of our town. The government trade in itself is immense, and our city will have the benefit of it for years."⁴⁸ A *Junction City Weekly Union* correspondent described the settlement as "a row of saloons on the Kansas Pacific Railway...Having visited the place, we should call it the Sodom of the plains." Many visitors considered Hays City a "fortress of sin."⁴⁹

Though not as famous as Kansas cow towns such as Dodge City, Wichita, or Abilene, Hays City outperformed them in violence, prostitution, and general unwholesomeness. Surprisingly, Dodge City, Wichita, and Abilene never recorded more than five murders in a single year. On the other hand, Hays City reported thirteen murders in 1869 alone, almost one third of them involving soldiers.⁵⁰ The *Lawrence Kansas Daily Tribune* documented an outsider's perspective in November, 1867:

Hays City is really under martial law, the town being policed by soldiers from the fort; and, what makes it trebly obnoxious to some, the soldiers are colored. They certainly have the credit, however, of maintaining quiet and generally good order throughout the day and night; that is, quiet for a frontier town. Of course there is drinking, and consequently drunkenness, for how could it be otherwise,

⁴⁷ The board of county commissioners granted around thirty-seven liquor licenses in 1870. Saloons, brothels, and billiard halls represented the vast majority of Hays City businesses.

⁴⁸ Drees, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

where nearly every business house in town has a bar in one corner of the establishment? Of course there is gambling, and money is lost, pockets are sometimes picked and occasionally a man is knocked down; but, on the whole, Hays City gives more security to life and property than most towns peopled by men who have left home and Christian influences far away.⁵¹

Vigilantism contributed greatly to violence in the city. When soldiers and civilians clashed, vigilante committees helped determine the most favorable solution to violence. These committees allowed men like “Wild” Bill Hickok to thrive as volunteer lawmen, often acting against the interests of soldiers.⁵²

In addition to vigilantism, race also contributed to violence in Hays City. Popularly known as “buffalo soldiers,” black soldiers played a major role within the United States military toward the end of the Civil War. Stationed at Fort Hays between 1867 and 1871, the buffalo soldiers of the 38th Infantry and 10th Cavalry fueled a great deal of conflict in and around the fort. The 38th Infantry often worked within city limits, exposing the soldiers to the higher availability of alcohol and other temptations. Many of these soldiers began their career at Fort Hays, heightening their susceptibility to alcoholism and poor behavior. In February 1868, a General Order sent a picket guard on patrol to arrest loud, drunk, or escaped men. This came in response to members of the 38th Infantry escaping drunk the month before. On a separate occasion, a member of the 38th Infantry provided a patient at the Post Hospital a bottle of liquor. The patient sneaked

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵² Ibid., 28.

out of the hospital and got drunk in a nearby ravine.⁵³ On assignment in Hays City, many buffalo soldiers at Fort Hays fell victim to alcoholism. In addition, these men faced intense racial discrimination outside of the fort, sometimes resulting in violence or murder. In August of 1867, over half the Fort Hays garrison belonged to black regiments.⁵⁴ Their presence was controversial, especially when on duty in Hays City.

By late 1871, Fort Hays offered church services, a reading room, and a school for soldiers and children. However, these advances, combined with the recent abolition of the Post Sutler position and more families on base, did not result in lower drinking numbers. Alcohol-fueled crimes continued to occur on a frequent basis, prompting a Post notice in early 1872. The notice stated that “It has come to the notice of the Commanding Officer that the enlisted men of the Garrison are in the habit of visiting Hays City without permission. The attention of the Company Commanders is called to this irregularity.” The notice came after several alcohol-related court-martial hearings, including an incident in March 1872 that reported an enlisted man allowing working prisoners to get drunk. The accused private also allowed a prisoner to conceal a bottle of whiskey back into the guardhouse. Oddly, in his defense, the private claimed innocence because the bottle of liquor he provided to the prisoner was actually gin, not whiskey. Not humored, the court-martial felt compelled to alter the charge, eventually sentencing the private to a loss of ten dollars and thirty days of guard duty, with the first ten in solitary confinement. Two

⁵³ James Leiker, “The Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Hays” (Masters Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1992), 90-91.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

months later, a “grossly intoxicated” Fort Hays sergeant George Williams got into a fight with an enlisted private. After the fight, he entered the band’s kitchen, presumably to drink. As a result, the sergeant lost his rank, returning to private.⁵⁵

Between 1867 and 1884, the Fort Hays garrison averaged around 248 men per year.⁵⁶ No matter their numbers, diversity, or leadership traits, the heavy usage of alcohol remained a constant. Soldiers witnessed first-hand the transformation of the American West. In only twenty years, Fort Hays soldiers witnessed the conclusion of the Indian Wars, the end of the stage line business, the coming of the railroad, the completion of the railroad, and the development of white civilization by means of Hays City. Due to their secondary, isolated role, however, soldiers struggled to find a collective purpose. More often than not, soldiers used alcohol to alleviate the tedium of fort life. As the West progressed, the alcoholic nature of the frontier military became an embarrassing reality for both local and federal government. By the late 1870s, a powerful temperance movement had begun both in the State of Kansas and within the military.

⁵⁵ United States National Archives, *Records of Fort Hays, Kansas: U.S. Army Post, 1866-1889*, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays State University, Hays, KS, microfilm.

⁵⁶ Ramsey, 112-113.

CHAPTER FOUR

A “SECOND EMANCIPATION:” MILITARY ALCOHOL POLICY AND THE BEGINNING OF TEMPERANCE AND PROHIBITION IN KANSAS

Opposition to military drinking mounted in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1862, the controversial Union Commander George McClellan suggested that if “all the officers unite in setting the soldiers an example of total abstinence from intoxicating drinks, it would be equal to an addition of 50,000 to the armies of the United States.”¹ During the Civil War era, the Post Sutler was often the scapegoat for heavy military drinking. The government attempted to abolish the position in 1866 by hastily replacing it with a comparably franchised Post Trader. By 1870, the Post Trader was selling liquor to both soldiers and area residents.²

When dealing with liquor policy, the military had operated under the slogan of “condone and control” up until 1881. However, on February 22 of that year, General William Tecumseh Sherman delivered an order that officially prohibited the sale of all intoxicating liquors to soldiers. With approval from President Hayes, General Order Number 24 drastically altered the role of the Post Trader. After hearing of the order, Post Trader John London of Fort Laramie wrote, “All the Officers here...say that the order can’t stand, that it would be destruction of all discipline if it did not break up the army; the soldiers will have liquor, and will desert to get it. The restriction will seriously affect

¹ Unrau, 7.

² Ibid.

the profits of my business and I am much concerned about it.”³ Despite the presidential decree, its enforcement varied from fort to fort. Isolated forts commanded by intemperate officers tended to ignore the order, while more populated, urban posts obeyed it. Due to immediate, harsh protests against Hayes’ decree, Post Traders won the right to continue serving cider, wine, beer, and ale.⁴

Having served rations of rum, brandy, and whiskey to soldiers just prior to the Civil War, the military’s new liquor policy inspired great controversy. Soon after the 1881 order abolished hard liquor sales, the army began experimenting with new ideas for soldiers’ entertainment. The Post Exchange combined the features of a reading room, recreation room, general store, and restaurant. The Exchange provided amenities for soldiers that the government did not. The government appointed sutlers or traders to work as the storekeeper, allowing them to serve beer and light liquors in a separate room known as the Post Canteen. The military created the Post Canteen in response to the negative consequences of the 1881 ban on hard liquor sales. As a military reverend explained:

It was a time when pay-day meant absence from the post of almost half the command; when men were robbed by dive-keepers on all sides, and when they were imprisoned in the Guard House by the score for drunkenness. Liquor saloons were in abundance at the gates of every post; vile liquors and sometimes vile drugs were given out over the bar, and

³ Delo, 191.

⁴ Ibid., 199.

all the abominations annexed to such places were put in the pathway of the young men of the Army.⁵

Soldiers argued that it was “unfair to impose total abstinence upon enlisted men while others were under no such restriction.”⁶ After the military implemented the Post Canteen, many noticed an immediate improvement in soldierly behavior. The Superintendent of West Point Military Academy, Colonel Albert Mills, verified that:

During the first year of the Exchange at Fort Custer, Montana, from records made at the time, I can state that the number of enlisted men confined in the Post Guard House for offences following over-indulgence in drink, was reduced between seventy and seventy-five per cent. Payday was no longer noticeable by great increase in the Guard House prison.⁷

Despite its apparent success, the military abolished the Post Canteen in 1901. As with previous alcohol policies, the decision met intense criticism. Major Louis Livingston Seaman, a surgeon in the American military and a veteran of the Spanish-American War, wrote an article defending the Post Canteen in 1903. Along with Secretary of War Elihu Root, Seaman advocated the Canteen’s restoration for the benefit of the common soldier.

From the perspective of a concerned doctor, Seaman’s article highlighted multiple reasons for the Canteen’s return. He asserted that the military’s main motive in abolishing the Canteen centered on its unflattering name, suggesting that the name drew bad attention, embarrassing the military. Had the military simply changed the Canteen’s name

⁵ Louis Livingston Seaman, “Why the Army Canteen Should Be Restored.” *The North American Review*, Vol. 176, No. 554 (Jan., 1903): 81.

⁶ Foner, 80.

⁷ Seaman, 82.

to the “Soldier’s Club,” its function would have been preserved. Seaman argued that the Canteen represented a less objectionable saloon that reduced overall drinking due to direct military supervision. In addition to lowering the desertion rate and improving soldier morale, he also claimed that:

The Post Exchange as it existed in 1900 was the most rational compromise that the ripe experience of the ablest officers of the Army could devise,--it was not abused in the camps; it has been the soldier’s friend, often saving him from disgrace and disease worse than death. In abolishing it, one might say that Congress in ‘killing a mouse, resurrected a monster.’⁸

Along with the entire nation, the military failed to find a balance between prohibition and intemperance. Any campaign to reduce military drunkenness had to overcome both the alcoholic culture of the military and the belief that liquor was useful to the army.⁹

As the military debated its alcohol policy after the Civil War, the state of Kansas began the development of one of the most radical prohibition platforms in American history. Ironically, in 1884 a military Post Exchange was the only place to purchase alcohol legally in the state. Written into the Kansas state constitution in 1880, alcohol prohibition produced a significant economic downturn in cities such as Hays. Though a few adapted, all Hays saloons closed. For example, the legendary “Tommy Drum Saloon,” a staple of downtown Hays, switched to selling lemonade and cigars. The former owner of the Gem Saloon became the Fort Hays Post Trader to make up for lost

⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁹ Kopperman, 445-470.

profit in alcohol sales. Combined with the garrison reduction of 1884, the loss of alcohol sales to soldiers caused dire economic conditions in Hays.¹⁰

According to the late Kansas historian Craig Miner, Kansas prohibition and Republicanism finds its roots in the alcoholic excesses of the Kansas territorial and cattle-trade era.¹¹ Despite its connection to early Kansas economic growth, military drinking also contributed to shifting attitudes about alcohol across the state. What began as an American social custom had transformed into a major social and political problem by the mid-nineteenth century. Though national anti-alcohol efforts culminated in 1920 with the 18th Amendment to the constitution, the state of Kansas was decades ahead. Forty years earlier, Kansas became the first state to write prohibition into its constitution.

Free Staters who swore upon the values of freedom, religion, education, and temperance founded the state of Kansas. Famous for populating the state in the 1850s in their fight against slavery, the New England Free State movement brought Puritan values to Eastern Kansas. Established in 1854, the New England Emigrant Aid Company systematically transported New Englanders to the territory. In the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a rush of emigration took place to shift the balance of power out of pro-slave hands. However, along with their abolitionist ideas, the Free State movement also endorsed a drastic moral code, unsuited for later settlements such as Hays.

¹⁰ *Hays Daily News*, April 5, 1984.

¹¹ Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2002), 56.

In 1855, a New England Emigrant Aid Company circular claimed that “the traffic of intoxicating liquor scarcely exists in any one of the towns founded with the Company’s assistance [Lawrence, Topeka, and Manhattan, among others] and any attempt to introduce it will be resisted by their citizens.”¹² Women, many of whom took particular interest in early temperance efforts, petitioned laws “to prevent the manufacture and importation for sale or use as a beverage...of any distilled or malt liquors.” Temperance advocates viewed Kansas as an experiment, claiming “everything is new...we are laying the foundation of a new society.”¹³

In the mid-1850s, Free Staters began to associate liquor with Missouri pro-slavery acts, such as the first sacking of Lawrence in 1856. The English journalist Thomas Gladstone encountered the gang of border ruffians in Kansas City the day after their raid. He described them as “still reeking with the dust and smoke of Lawrence, wearing the most savage looks, and giving utterance to the most horrible imprecations and blasphemies...[I looked] at these groups of drunken, bellowing, blood-thirsty demons who crowded around the bar of the hotel, shouting for a drink.”¹⁴ In response to the pro-slavery attacks, many Free Staters targeted Missouri trading posts, intending to destroy their liquor supply. By the time William Quantrill and his gang famously raided Lawrence, the Free State faction had firmly aligned with the temperance movement. For instance, the radical abolitionist John Brown, famous for the brutal Pottawatomie

¹² Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 15-16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

Massacre, was known not to drink. This enabled opponents to stereotype the pro-slavery faction. As a Free State newspaper, the *Herald of Freedom*, declared, “Temperance and Freedom go hand in hand, while whisky and slavery are fit companions.”¹⁵

By the 1870s, evangelical leaders fully embraced the temperance movement. Eastern Kansas cities with high levels of liquor consumption became targets for “moral cleansing.” For example, Leavenworth, whose nearby fort encouraged drinking in the city, clashed with a high number of temperance advocates. The movement evolved from a Free State platform issue to an evangelical Christian ideal. In October 1879, the Kansas State Temperance Union incorporated; further expanding temperance ideals and officially affecting State alcohol policy by means of religious ideals.¹⁶

In 1878, John Pierce St. John landed on the Republican ticket for Kansas governor.¹⁷ Though he did not run as a vocal prohibition advocate, his strong personal beliefs helped him pander to the temperance crowd. After his election as governor in Kansas, St. John helped pass the state prohibition amendment with a final vote of 92,301 to 84,304. All twenty-one counties that voted against the amendment were located in Western Kansas. Safe from New England religious influence, many Western Kansas communities displayed heavy Roman Catholic and Lutheran influences, with Irish, German, and Eastern European ethnicities. Though many early historians assumed that prohibition came in response to the disorderly conditions of Western Kansas cow towns,

¹⁵ Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas*, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-36.

¹⁷ At the end of his political career, he ran for president as the Prohibition Party candidate, losing the election handily to Grover Cleveland.

many of the State's roughest populations (Dodge City and Hays, for example) voted against the amendment overwhelmingly.¹⁸ The German population in Ellis County came to Kansas as Republicans, but voted Democrat to oppose the prohibition amendment. Only ten percent of Ellis County Catholics supported the amendment in 1880.¹⁹ Despite geographical and cultural disagreement, Governor St. John proclaimed in 1881 that:

We now look to the future, not forgetting that it was here on our soil where the first blow was given that finally resulted in the emancipation of a race from slavery. We have now determined upon a second emancipation, which shall free not only the body but the soul of man. Now, as in the past, the civilized world watches Kansas, and anxiously awaits the result.²⁰

By the time the prohibition amendment passed, the population of Kansas had expanded exponentially. The recorded population of 107,206 in 1860 multiplied nearly ten times to 996,096 by 1880.²¹ The state landscape varied both politically and culturally. The efforts to "cleanse" Kansas of alcohol resonated better in some areas than others. Even after the prohibition amendment's approval, overall prohibition sentiment grew slowly into the twentieth century. Prohibition proved dangerous, controversial, and difficult to enforce. In fact, the wettest decade of the Kansas prohibition era occurred in the 1890s, paving the way for progressivism.

¹⁸ Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas*, 60-62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

²¹ Huber Self and Stephen White, "One Hundred and Twenty Years of Population Change in Kansas," *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, 1903, Vol. 89, No. ½ (1986): 10-22.

Due to populist politics and progressive beliefs, influential leaders such as “Sockless” Jerry Simpson, Mary E. Lease, and Carry Nation attempted to lead Kansas into a new era, overcome with societal confidence. However, the state renaissance had mostly negative consequences on the national level. Kansans developed a poor image, increasingly viewed by Easterners as cranky, poor farmers. According to Bader, this negative image, worsened by both the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, persists to this day.²²

Despite multiple decades of populist/progressive reform, Kansas remained divided over the prohibition issue. In August 1932, the mayor of Hays became the president of the Anti-Prohibition Society of Kansas. Additionally, the *Kansas Repealist*, a popular anti-prohibition publication, began in Hays. A self-proclaimed center of the “wet” movement, Hays led the movement to repeal the Kansas prohibition amendment after the “national experiment” failed. *Kansas Repealist* writer Bill Clugston called the Kansas Anti-Saloon League “the most corrupt, intolerant, unintelligent organization ever put together under the cloak of a holy cause.” Anti-prohibition leaders claimed that Kansas drinking levels proved higher than neighboring wet states. The mayor of Topeka called Kansas prohibitionists “the most merciless crew that ever scuttled human freedom. In no other state was the relentless fanaticism of the Kansas dry ever matched.”²³ Not repealed until 1948, prohibition lasted longer in Kansas than in any other state.

²² Robert Smith Bader, *Hayseeds, Moralizers, and Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 11-15.

²³ Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas*, 219-220.

Prohibition served as a roadblock toward modernization, distracting Kansans from growing national stereotypes. Even after prohibition's repeal in 1948, temperance organizations fought against unregulated alcohol and other related "sins," such as the lottery, dog racing, and slot machines.²⁴ The state prohibited on-premises alcohol sales until 1987 and has yet to ratify the 21st Amendment to the United States Constitution. To this day, Kansas enforces strict liquor laws, prohibiting the sale of beverages containing over 3.2% alcohol content in supermarkets and convenience stores. Nineteen counties continue to prohibit on-premises liquor sales containing over 3.2% alcohol. Kansas prohibited Sunday liquor sales until 2003 when the State Supreme Court ruled the ban unconstitutional. Many local communities continue to outlaw Sunday sales. For over one hundred years, alcohol policy has been at the center of Kansas political discussions. As poet Maxine Oliver wrote in her "Ode to the Kansas Legislature" in 1985:

It really made us stop and think,
You spend all those hours arguing "liquor by the drink"
(which was voted down—but what do voters know?)
And discussing whether we could play—bingo!
Then, when the session was almost past
You got down to "trivial" things at last,
Bills on health care—and education—
New highways—and less taxation.²⁵

Similarly, John W. Carlin, governor of Kansas from 1979 to 1987, explained to Kansans in 1984:

²⁴ Miner, 380.

²⁵ Ibid., 383.

There is no doubt but that we can compete with other states and that we are a forward-looking, growth oriented state. However, we do not always communicate that message to outsiders...Let me state clearly, that liquor by the drink will not guarantee immediate and large scale business investments in the state. Nor is it the only thing standing between us and progress. But it is a powerful symbol that contributes to a stereotype of our state that is not accurate...We are now in a cycle of exporting our best talent to other parts of the country and world because that's where the opportunities are...We have learned from past experience that prohibition will not stop consumption. We must accept that people will drink.²⁶

The restrictions on alcohol consumption in Kansas are a direct result of the alcoholic excesses of the nineteenth century. Kansas was a melting pot of civilization, attracting immigrants, cattle drivers, Easterners, farmers, blacks, laborers, and politicians from across the country. As a result, policy became confused and often dramatic. Facing drought, dust, and depression, Kansans endorsed populist and progressive ideals, further confusing the political and social identity of the State. The drinking culture, evident in places like Fort Hays and Hays City, fueled radical temperance movements supported by an evangelical base largely foreign to Western Kansas culture. Kansas temperance policies rapidly advanced, leaving military bases as the only legal drinking establishments in the state by 1880. Despite its influence on radical state alcohol policy, Fort Hays remained immune to local restrictions until its close in 1889.

²⁶ Miner, 385

CONCLUSION

By the twentieth century, the American military's focus had shifted away from the Western frontier. America industrialized rapidly, leaving the Indian War era behind. However, many of the military's traits and traditions survived. The stereotypes of a "macho" American soldier intensified, inspiring a standard image that favored a soldier's use of cigarettes and alcohol. Constructed partly during the Indian Wars on the Western frontier, this image remains relevant to this day. Its roots lie in the unfavorable conditions of military servitude, potentially detrimental to human psychology for centuries.

According to a 2005 survey completed by the department of defense, almost twenty-seven percent of American soldiers regularly partake in heavy drinking. Among soldiers between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, almost thirty-six percent drink heavily.¹ By comparison, a separate study concluded that only 9.5 percent of civilians participated in heavy drinking in 1991, compared to fifteen to twenty-one percent of army soldiers between 1980 and 1992.² The disparity between military and civilian drinking levels is historically consistent. The army considers this a severe problem, advising soldiers to drink responsibly and to seek help if exhibiting the traits of an alcoholic.

¹ Michael Custer, "Health, Readiness, Even Life at Risk from Heavy Drinking," *U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine*, <http://www.armymedicine.army.mil/hc/healthtips/13/201002soldierdrinking.cfm> (accessed March 28, 2012).

² Faris R. Kirkland, "Substance Abuse" *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., Oxford University Press 1999. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Fort Hays State University. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t126.e0891> (accessed March 28, 2012).

In September 2010, researchers conducted interviews with 51,078 army reserve soldiers returning from deployment from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The interview found that soldiers deployed for over seven months were more likely to develop alcoholism and depression than those deployed for six months or less. Additionally, the study found that soldiers deploying two or more times were more likely to develop alcoholism and depression than those who deployed only once.³ Another study, citing 1,010 soldier questionnaires, concluded that military binge drinking is more likely to occur among the younger, the socially unstable, and those involved in combat operations.⁴

Today, military bases sell alcohol to soldiers and civilians for up to thirty percent less than non-military retailers. Due largely to the extreme discount, alcohol remains one of the hottest selling items at the army Post Exchange (PX). With alcoholism again on the rise within the military, debate has resurfaced over the sale of alcohol to soldiers on a domestic base. With alcohol illegal for soldiers on deployment, some also question its appropriateness at a domestic military base. Recently, in March 2012, an American soldier was charged with seventeen counts of premeditated murder against Afghani

³ T Allison-Aipa, C. Ritter, P. Sikes, & S. Ball. "The impact of deployment on the psychological health status, level of alcohol consumption, and use of psychological health resources of postdeployed U.S. army reserve soldiers." *Military Medicine*, 175(9), 630-7.

⁴ R.G. Lande, B.A. Marin, A.S. Chang, & G.R. Lande, "Survey of alcohol use in the U.S. Army." *Journal of Addictive Diseases*, 2008; 27(3):115-21.

citizens. Investigators found alcohol at the suspect's base, prompting additional national discussion over alcohol abuse within the military.⁵

Since the formation of the United States, military leaders have debated the role of alcohol within the army. It is undeniable that the army has harbored alcoholism for over two hundred years, but scholars continue to ask the classic question of "which came first." Does the army attract a brand of person more susceptible to alcohol abuse or does the army create conditions that universally foster it? It seems that the answer can be found through the evidence collected at Fort Hays. Through its twenty-two years of existence, Fort Hays created conditions ripe for alcoholic behavior. Despite its proximity to one of the most notorious cow towns in Kansas, the fort maintained drinking levels much higher than that of civilians. The conditions created at places like Fort Hays inspired the kind of excessive drinking discouraged by later temperance movements. Though the federal government officially closed Fort Hays on November 8, 1889, the alcoholic culture once fostered there remains targeted by both state and military officials today.⁶

⁵ Barbara Starr and Chris Lawrence, "Investigators Probing Whether Alcohol a Factor in Afghanistan Shootings," CNN, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/13/military-presents-probable-cause-finding-to-further-detain-afghan-shooting-suspect/> (accessed March 28, 2012).

⁶ Ten years later, the state of Kansas assumed ownership over the lands, agreeing to honor a congressional bill that required the creation of an agricultural experiment station, a normal college, and a public park. The first classes at Fort Hays State University took place in the old fort hospital. Today, four original fort buildings, including the 1867 blockhouse, stand on the premises maintained by the Kansas State Historical Society.

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APPENDIX A

ABSOLUTE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION PER CAPITA OF TOTAL POPULATION

AND DRINKING AGE POPULATION, U.S. GALLONS, 1770-1930¹⁶⁴

YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION	DRINKING AGE POPULATION
1770	3.5	6.6
1785	3.3	6.1
1790	3.5	5.8
1795	3.6	6.2
1800	3.7	6.6
1805	3.6	6.8
1810	3.7	7.1
1815	3.6	6.8
1820	3.6	6.8
1825	3.7	7.0
1830	3.9	7.1
1835	2.8	5.0
1840	1.8	3.1
1845	1.0	1.8
1850	1.0	1.8
1855	1.1	2.0
1860	1.3	2.1
1865	1.2	2.0
1870	1.3	1.9
1875	1.2	1.8
1880	1.1	1.9
1885	1.3	2.0
1890	1.4	2.1
1895	1.4	2.1
1900	1.4	2.1
1905	1.6	2.3
1910	1.7	2.6
1915	1.6	2.4
1920	.6	.9
1925	.6	.9
1930	.6	.9

¹⁶⁴ W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*, 232-233.

*Despite potential inconsistencies, Rorabaugh's drinking estimates remain the most reliable. Years in bold refer to period Fort Hays was active. "Total Population" column refers to Americans of all ages, "Drinking Age Population" refers to Americans of the legal drinking age.

APPENDIX B

THE SMOKY HILL TRAIL ROUTE: FROM ATCHINSON TO DENVER, 1865

STATION	MILES
Fort Riley	116
Junction City	3
Chapman Creek	12
Abilene	12
Solomon River	10
Salina	13
Spring Creek	15
Fort Harker	14
Buffalo Creek	12
Hick's Station	15
Fossil Creek	15
Forsythe's Creek	11
Fort Fletcher	11
Louisa Creek	12
Bluffton	14
Downers	13
Castle Rock Creek	9
Chalk Bluffs	12
Monument Rocks	13
Smoky Hill Spring	11
Henshaw Creek	25
Pond Creek	11
Willow Creek	14
Blue Mound	9
Cheyenne Wells	13
Duboise	24
Grady's	11
Coon Creek	25
Hogan	11
Hedinger's Lake	9
Big Bend of Sandy	13
Bijou Creek	12
Kiowa Creek	9
Ruthton	9
Cherry Valley	16
Denver	14
TOTAL DISTANCE	592

APPENDIX C

SELECTED MEDICAL CASES REPORTED AT FORT HAYS

1867-1884¹⁶⁵

MEDICAL CASE	FREQUENCY
Abcess	17
Amputation	6
Arrow Wound	1
Asthma	6
Bayonet Wound	1
Boil	89
Bronchitis	150
Burn	19
Catarrh	448
Cholera	48
Chronic Alcoholism*	8
Conjunctivitis	65
Contusion	225
Convulsions	2
Delirium Tremens*	22
Diarrhea	648
Dysentery	16
Frostbite	67
Gonorrhoea	37
Gun Shot Wound	77
Headache	72
Inebriation	49
Insanity	1
Intermittent Fever	61
Laryngitis	133
Neuralgia	93
Pneumonia	6
Rheumatism	169
Insanity	1

¹⁶⁵ Jerry B. Ramsey, *Fort Hays: An Analysis of the Federal Government's Military Activities on the Kansas Plains* (Master's Thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1972), 112-117.

*The numbers provided by Ramsey, gathered from Fort Hays medical records, should be viewed with great scrutiny. The recorded diagnosis of twenty-two cases of *delirium tremens* compared to only eight cases of alcoholism proves the reluctance of surgeons to label alcoholism as a disease. Military doctors ignored the source of the problem, chronic alcoholism, instead focusing on related symptoms.