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Spring 2010

## Review of *Fort Laramie: Military Bastion of the High Plains* by Douglas C. McChristian

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Scherer, Mark R., "Review of *Fort Laramie: Military Bastion of the High Plains* by Douglas C. McChristian" (2010). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2581.

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*Fort Laramie: Military Bastion of the High Plains.* By Douglas C. McChristian. Foreword by Paul L. Hedren. Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2009. 456 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.

In the annals of American westward expansion in the nineteenth century, few locations stand out more prominently than Fort Laramie in eastern Wyoming. During its almost sixty years as an active military post, the fort and the community that grew up around it bristled with the activities of the full array of iconic western figures, from fur traders and overland emigrants to Native Americans and the soldiers and government officials dispatched to deal with them, either through negotiation or military force. With *Fort Laramie: Military Bastion of the High Plains*, former National Park Service field historian Douglas C. McChristian breathes new life into the fort's dramatic, sometimes controversial, and always eventful history. Indeed, he makes a strong argument in defense of his claim that Fort Laramie became "the quintessential frontier army post, ranking as the most historically significant of them all."

Given the site's vital legacy, it is not surprising that Fort Laramie has drawn the attention of a number of historians, including Remi Nadeau and Paul Hedren (who furnished the foreword to this volume). While acknowledging and building upon those earlier treatments, McChristian offers a good deal more than the mere reiteration of familiar storylines. Drawing from an exhaustive variety of archival materials and secondary works that have only recently become available, he provides innovative analytical insights and rich new details that extend the story of the fort's impact beyond its nineteenth-century heyday and into the twenty-first century, where it remains one of the National Park System's most popular and oft-visited National Historic Sites.

At the broadest level of categorization, this is an institutional history—a form that can become ponderous in the wrong hands. McChristian, however, avoids the tedium often associated with the genre by mining his sources for instructive, and often poignant, human stories of the fort's administrators, commanders, and other inhabitants, who were often required to persevere against daunting economic, political, military, and environmental challenges. It is, of course, also true that biographers (or institutional biographers) can become so close to their subject that their interpretive objectivity suffers. For the most part, McChristian avoids this potential trap as well. While he freely acknowledges his deep personal and professional connection to, and affinity for, the Fort Laramie site, he remains willing to recognize the tragic consequences of some of the events that emanated from it. For example, given all that transpired in the aftermath of the notorious Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, few locations in the American West resonate with as many disturbing memories for Native Americans than this post that gave its name to that notorious agreement. McChristian's account does not ignore or avoid that uncomfortable truth.

Written in an engaging style, and enlivened further by a fine selection of maps and rare

photographs, this is a thoroughly researched and well-documented history of a fort that has earned its prominent place in the history of the American West. McChristian's work deserves an appreciative audience among both generalists and specialists in the field.

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