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Review of *Fort Robinson and the American West, 1874 - 1899*, by Thomas R. Buecker.

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Fort Robinson and the American West, 1874-1899. By Thomas R. Buecker. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1999. Maps, illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xxvii + 265 pp. \$40.00.

The Army established Fort Robinson near the source of the White River on the Pine Ridge in northwestern Nebraska in 1874. The post saw active service in the best known war between the United States and Plains Natives, the Sioux War of 1876, and was the site of the death of Crazy Horse. It also witnessed the tragic Cheyenne outbreak of January 1878, the bloodiest episode in the post's history. This book, the first of a projected two-volume study, covers these events and the next two decades, during which the United States emerged as an imperial power.

The period abounded with symbolic juxtapositions. 1876 marked Custer's defeat on the Little Big Horn and the centennial exhibition in Philadelphia. The next year featured the railroad strike in Chicago, while Fort Robinson troops protected settlers from angry tribesmen

not resigned to reservation life. And the early 1890s brought to the Pine Ridge in the wake of the Wounded Knee massacre the last great frontier military campaign, followed in less than four years by the widespread strike against the Pullman Company. Both validated the usefulness of the railroad and telegraph in the deployment of troops, but the Pine Ridge campaign announced the end of a military era, while the Pullman strike augured times to come.

In the White River valley, the arrival of the railroad and substantial civilian settlement characterized the transition in the mid-1880s. The railroad, the availability of land, and the military presence attracted ranchers and townspeople. The town of Crawford emerged from this boom as Robinson's nearest civilian neighbor, beginning what Buecker calls a career of "peaceful coexistence, occasionally marred by ugly incidents typically found in civil-military communities."

In the new age, Fort Robinson troops occasionally quelled strikes and protected corporate property. But its main function was tied to the fading era, and Buecker concentrates on this Indian-fighting mission. He also emphasizes the post's structural and administrative history, providing great detail on its management, supply, and construction.

The author focuses on a Plains fort's daily life and work. What sets his work apart from other traditional fort histories, with their emphasis on small unit operations, garrison routine, and structural evolution, is Buecker's obvious affection and respect for the place and for the officers who served there. Tom Buecker has been the curator of the Fort Robinson museum for nearly twenty years; his book is a historian's love song to his work and his fort.

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