Soldiers, Sutlers and Cultural Ambassadors: The Transplantation of Culture in the Wyoming Territory from 1865-1890
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At the conclusion of the Civil War, the American public once again turned its attention to westward migration. After several years of construction, the transcontinental railroad met up in Promontory Utah in 1869. The coming of the railroad brought new work opportunities to the west and facilitated the construction of several new settlements. Settlements such as Laramie and Cheyenne in the Wyoming Territory were created as planned communities to support the railroad. The resulting boom in migration and settlement construction created a growing need for security in the western territories. The end of the Civil War brought with it thousands of trained soldiers to assist in the settlement of the West. The struggle to replace the disbanding Civil War units coincided with the establishment of Forts along the Bozeman trial and the resulting war with Red Cloud. In 1866 hostilities culminated in the Fetterman fight, and the deaths of Captain Fetterman and his entire unit. Over the course of the next 25 years sporadic conflict between natives and federal forces continued in varying degrees. The end to the majority of hostilities occurred in late 1890 when the Wounded Knee Massacre left hundreds of native civilians dead. Although Reconstruction was a time of general change in the West, the increasing amounts of federal troops also contributed to the transplantation of culture in these areas.

There has been a large amount of literature dedicated to the settlement of the West, and role of military personnel in the West. Robert M. Utley’s work focuses on the military campaigns of this time period, and the facts of the military history of the Indian Wars. Utley argues for a balanced view of soldier’s actions against natives at this time of both the good and the bad. This encompassing take on the military allows Utley to act as an excellent source of background information in the Indian wars. Historian Gilbert A. Stelter discusses this time

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3 Utley, Frontier Regulars, 1-3.
period in a different fashion. Stelter focuses on the formation of Cheyenne as a city in the first years after the Civil War to act as a case study involving the role of railroads and military forts in town development during this period.\(^4\) His argument hinges around the idea that the combination of the Union Pacific Railroad, and Fort D.A. Russell allowed for Cheyenne to expand into an early frontier city. Allison K. Hoagland addresses the layout of military forts in the Wyoming Territory during this time period. Hoagland used the layouts of these forts to suggest a cultural connection between eastern villages and military forts in the west.\(^5\) The cultural connection of forts to the east is critical to recognizing overarching patterns of cultural transplantation during this time. Similar to Hoagland, Alan Culpin also addressed social constructions in the military at this time. However, the focus of Culpin’s article is centered on what leisure time activities were enjoyed by soldiers in the Wyoming Territory.\(^6\) These activities are important to establishing broader cultural trends within military personnel at this time. Finally, W.N. Davis Jr. focuses on the history of sutlers in Territorial Wyoming forts, with an emphasis on William A. Carter of Fort Bridger.\(^7\) Although each of these sources identifies a topic within the military role in westward expansion in Wyoming Territory, none of them address the comprehensive implications of military cultural transplantation.

During the post-Civil War era, the influx of soldiers had a dramatic effect on the western culture of the Wyoming Territory. The soldiers who traveled to the Wyoming Territory at this time did not only build forts that resembled an eastern village styled construction. Nor did they operate within a cultural vacuum within their military posts. Rather, these men and their families

transplanted their way of life into the new western setting through a broader sense of culture. The cultural changes included not only architecture, but also belief systems of right and wrong, and different eastern past times. The transplantation of culture through the military was divided into three socioeconomic groups. The first group comprises enlisted soldiers and their families. These men represent the lower classes of American society, and show the culture of the vast majority of soldiers. Secondly, sutlers answered the call to provided economic support to the rapidly growing military population within the territory. Sutlers, later post traders, were men who were given monopoly trading rights with the fort’s military inhabitants, and local populations. Post traders represent the role of middle class business owners in the settlement and cultural development of Wyoming. Finally, the experiences of officers show the cultural contributions of the upper class in the settlement of Wyoming. The difference in roles that each of these groups played allows for a more complete view of western cultural change at this time. Although the three groups represent three separate classes, commoner/lower class, economic/middle class, and upper/aristocratic class, their narratives blend into a shared cultural experience. Each perspective is different, but the common theme throughout highlights the transplantation of eastern ideas to the West.

In the pre-Civil War Wyoming Territory, several characteristics highlight the general trend of cultural assimilation of settlers to native traditions, rather than transplantation of their own customs. William A. Carter was a sutler/post trader at Fort Bridger who recorded accounts of the early fort. The original Fort was simply one L-shaped building with no windows, no doors and a basic stock room. This small structure was missing one critical element that became intertwined with western forts later, the stockade. Carter wrote, “Bridger didn’t need a stockade

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8 Description of old Fort Bridger, Box 7, Folder 2, William A. Carter Papers, Collection Number 03535, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
around his house. This seems plausible, for why should Jim Bridger who had an Indian squaw and was a brother to every tribe of Indians in the country build a stockade to hide himself."9 The importance of this description is in the fact that Jim Bridger had integrated himself in with the local tribes so well that he did not need protection. Image 1 provides an 1850 depiction of what this fort looked like under Bridger.10 Carter also described a neighboring trade post owned by Big Bill. This post was built with a stockade and placed in a strategic position to protect against any possible Native American attacks. However, Carter stated, “He made friends even with the Indians for he would run races with the going bucks and engage in wrestling matches with them.”11 Although Big Bill felt the need to prepare against hostile Indian attacks, he still became friendly with them through cultural integration. The integration that was exemplified by these two examples would begin to decline following the Civil War.

In the wake of the Civil War, enlisted men began to bring about the end of cultural assimilation with native peoples within the Wyoming Territory. The experiences of enlisted men differed from those of the officers as much socially as they did in the duties they performed. These were the men who lived in the roughest areas of the forts and had the least amount of luxury afforded to them. Historian Alan Culpin writes, “It is the ordinary soldier who lays the groundwork, does the dirty details, and caters to the whims of the officer.”12 The enlisted men of the army would not have been allowed the same advantages in living conditions and social functions that officers were allotted. One such enlisted man, James S. McClellan made mention of this difference in his journal. After what McClellan described as the “Cannon Fight” on the
Powder River a funeral was held. Five enlisted men were buried at this funeral, but a dead officer was taken back east to his family. The common man view of the enlisted soldiers provides a more grassroots view of the cultural transplantation in the Wyoming Territory. Examples of the transplantation of culture amongst enlisted men come through both personal accounts in the form of journals, and analysis of popular pass-times amongst soldiers during this time.

McClellan obtained the ranks of corporal and sergeant when he wrote his personal journals. The descriptions contained in the journals primarily focus on everyday routine and day to day tasks. However, there are some important hints of cultural transplantation that appear during the course of his entries. For example, during the above mentioned battle on the Powder River, McClellan killed a hostile Indian and approached the body. Rather than follow native culture and scalp the enemy, McClellan chose to allow an allied native scout to take the scalp instead. McClellan wrote, “I could not scalp him as it looked so bad for a white man to commence to mutilate the dead in that way.” Although McClellan himself refused to scalp the enemy, he later described returning to the kill to find a white scout scalping other enemy casualties. The difference in behavior described in this account is clearly linked to cultural implications. McClellan refrained from scalping because he believed it was wrong for a white man to participate in native practice. In other words, McClellan transplanted his own ideas about the morality of scalping from his eastern upbringing to the western frontier. McClellan’s beliefs exemplified the new culture of the military, in opposition to the old trappers and the local scouts, such as the man whom McClellan witnessed scalping the slain warrior. McClellan also provided sketches of several plains forts in his tours of duty. One such illustration is of Fort Fred Steele

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15 McClellan, *Journals*, 29
which is depicted in image 2.\footnote{McClellan, Journals, 26. Image 2.} This village structure shown in this illustration was common across many of the forts at this time. Hoagland states, “Without any overtly defensive purpose, these forts evoked an image not of military might, but of a village community.”\footnote{Hoagland, “Village Constructions,”222.} These village forts appeared in contrast to eastern stockade forts, and also the single building forts of the early territorial days. McClellan’s sketches provide a view of what he found interesting on the frontier, and perhaps the depiction as a village shows McClellan’s own recognition of the similarities between the fort and a normal eastern township.

Beyond these personal accounts of soldiers, there are also hints of cultural transplantation present in soldiers’ leisure time activities. Image 3 presents a string band poster for Fort Bridge and acts as a primary example of the culturally-influenced activities that these soldiers participated in.\footnote{United States Army, Infantry String Band, Fourth, “Musical Evening Entertainment. Given by the fourth U.S. Infantry String Band. At the Post Hall Fort Bridger Wy. Ter. December 31 1875. Fourth Infantry Press,” The Newberry Library, http://www.americanwest.amdigital.co.uk/Contents/SearchDocumentDetails.aspx?Documentid=2134&sectionid=3340&imageid=40779&previous=2&pageindex=1&prevpos=2134.} The presence of a string band amongst these soldiers shows a clear link to their own home cultures rather than the adoption of western activities. This movement towards transplanted leisure time entertainment supports the idea of an overall cultural transplantation amongst these men. Beyond concerts there were also several leisure time activities of a more informal nature that support cultural transplantation. Most of these activities focused around the soldier’s time in the forts. Culpin writes, “A variety of amusements were enjoyed which included dancing, theatricals, musical performances, card playing and drinking parties, horse racing, storytelling and reading and writing letters.”\footnote{Culpin, “A Brief History,” 99.} These leisure time activities can be clearly linked to eastern culture, but there are a few items that link to western cultural practices. Card playing drinking and horse racing all have roots in both western and eastern culture. However, the other
activities listed clearly are transplanted to the West from their soldier’s origins. Although the soldiers do not explicitly state that they are bringing these practices from their eastern homes, the nature of these activities suggests a cultural transplantation. The soldiers leisure activities provide a rare cultural insight into the lives of enlisted men from this time, and highlight the ideals they brought with them to the West.

While the eastern village-styled forts began to emerge across the Wyoming Territory, a new market for supplying these villages increased massively. Leaving the war-torn economies of the east behind, businessmen were now able to turn their attention to maintenance of freight lines through the western territories. The men who fulfilled the economic needs of the expanding military presence were known as sutlers. Sutlers were given the opportunity to open up a general store that filled the gap between soldier’s needs for personal items and the necessities supplied by the military quartermaster. Although these men were not actually members of the military companies they provided goods to, they do represent a shift in economic culture from the trapper trade post model to a much more eastern approach. This shift can be tracked through the changing of the title of the positions from “sutler” to “post trader.” This change signifies that these western businessmen were no longer the simple camp followers that the title sutler implies. Rather, post traders were now businessmen associated with a steady location and a member of a complex military based economy.

One such post trader that exemplifies this trend towards established eastern business practices was James K. Moore. Moore acted as the post trader at Fort Washakie near what would become the Wind River Indian Reservation. Moore’s experiences detail the highly political nature of work that post traders conducted during this time. The first example of politicking in

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the post trader line of work comes from a letter of recommendation from the U.S. treasurer W.M. Selden for James to receive the sutler’s contract at Fort Washakie. Selden’s letter seems to imply that post trader contracts were at least partially issued under the patronage system that was prominent in eastern politics. The massive scale of the post trader business appears in a letter Mr. Moore’s friend Fred just a few years after taking over the post. In this letter Moore insisted that Fred’s order of 10,000 pounds of flour must be a mistake and assumes that he means 100,000 pounds. The large amount of flour required by this order speaks volumes about the scale of the post trader business at this time. Moore then asked that Fred put in a good word with a certain Mr. Baker in order to assist him in receiving more contracts. The need to make connections in order to secure contracts at first seems puzzling, due to the fact that these post traders were given a monopoly over selling to troops in a particular fort. However, an examination of this letter reveals more details about the new economic culture of post-Civil War Wyoming Territory. Moore wrote, “I have generally had the freighting to this and until last year was given the preference over other bidders.” This statement shows that the military began to allow for more competition amongst the post traders, mirroring the eastern styled free market approach. The new focus on competition allowed a post trader to expand their enterprises beyond the soldiers within one fort and assist in territory-wide development.

In addition to the expanding economic influences shown within the records of James Moore’s business operations, his personal requests and collection of photographs also reveal important cultural details. For example, on June 2nd, 1880 Moore sent a request to A.S. Day in

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23 Letter of Recommendation, Box 5, Folder 7, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
24 Letter to Fred, Box 5, Folder 7, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
25 Letter to Fred, Box 5, Folder 7, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
Evanston for a servant that can cook wash and iron for him and his family.\textsuperscript{26} In another letter from June 19\textsuperscript{th} of the same year to Capt. R.A. Torry, Moore describes how he has recently hired bookkeepers in order to help make payment more punctual.\textsuperscript{27} Both of these letters demonstrate aspects of transplanted culture within the new frontier business class. Moore’s correspondences demonstrate that he had grown his small fort based trading post into a major company that warranted eastern book keeping practices. Also, his family has achieved great enough success that they are willing to hire an outside source to perform labors within the house. Both of these letters highlight economic successes within the post trader business that allow the Moore family to bring a greater amount of eastern customs with them to their new western home. Although not an actual member of the military, the link that Moore shared with the military ties his transplantation in with the greater narrative of military cultural change.

The photographs in Moore’s papers also demonstrate transplanted culture in this area. Image 4 shows Fort Washakie in the late 1880’s.\textsuperscript{28} In this image the fort is undiscernible from any standard eastern town. The layout of the town is spread out in a manner similar to what a town would be. Also, there are what appear to be shops in the center of the fort with farm buildings lining the extremities of the location. Image 5 was taken inside the fort and shows a portion of the officers’ quarters and the surgeon’s quarters.\textsuperscript{29} These buildings expand the eastern similarities beyond the layout of the fort, to the architecture of the fort’s buildings. The quarters featured in this photograph bear distinctly eastern rounded pillar exteriors, windows, and

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\textsuperscript{26} Letter to A.S. Day, Box 5, Folder 7, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
\textsuperscript{27} Letter to Capt. R.A. Torry, Box 5, Folder 7, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
\textsuperscript{28} Fort Washakie Photo, Box 1, Folder 2, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
\textsuperscript{29} Officers’ Quarters Photo, Box 1, Folder 1, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
\end{flushleft}
porches. Finally, image 6 shows buildings at some hot springs near the fort. These buildings functioned as bath houses for both the officers and the enlisted men stationed at the fort. The buildings near the hot springs demonstrate that bathing was a strong priority for the soldiers stationed at Fort Washakie. Each of these photos features elements of eastern culture in fort layout, building style, and even social priorities from the bathhouse. Taken together these images and letters provide a visual representation of the transplantation of culture on a more social level amongst post traders. The eastern township designs that were documented photographically by James K. Moore and his personal correspondences both show elements of eastern cultures in the Wyoming Territory. Post traders acted within the catalyst of the military presence in the Wyoming Territory. Forts acted as ready markets for these traders, and provided a substantial jumpstart to commerce within the Wyoming Territory.

Different from both the economically-focused sutlers and the common enlisted soldiers, officers provide the greatest view into the changing Territorial Wyoming culture during this time period. When the village style forts were being designed and built it was the officers who were in charge of the construction. Hoagland writes, “The village nature of western army posts reflected the proclivities of the commanding officers, since no specific directives guided a fort’s construction.” Due to the lack of directions for fort building, officers were able to input their own design ideals in the construction of forts. Officers also lived in different circumstances that allowed them to transplant a greater amount of culture to the western posts. Besides being in command of the other men, officers were also more likely to be married than enlisted men, and they made a substantially larger salary than the average soldier. An example of the disparity

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30 Hot Springs Bath House Photo, Box 1, Folder 1, James K. Moore Family Papers, Collection Number 00051, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.  
32 Culpin, “A Brief History,” 91.
between enlisted men and officers comes from the hunting experiences of General Custer during an expedition in 1867. Custer was nearly killed by a bull buffalo after chasing a group of antelope. Hunting was not unique to officers, but the fact Custer brought his personal bugler and pack of private hunting dogs distinguishes him from enlisted soldiers. The possession of greater wealth amongst officers allowed them to indulge in more luxury items, even in remote frontier posts.

Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron and his family provide an excellent example of the transplantation of culture amongst officers through their emphasis on education, and descriptions of their favorite leisure time activities. Thaddeus and his wife maintained a strict standard of education for their children, even while they were living in the forts. When their son Hazen attempted to hide outside in order to avoid a school lesson his mother Cynthia wrote to Thad that she gave him “a good whipping.” However, the Caprons not only educated their son, but also their daughter Elo. In another letter, Cynthia described Hazen’s studies as geography and arithmetic, while the younger Elo was learning letters. Hazen’s education continued even beyond simple lessons with his mother according to a later letter between Thaddeus and Cynthia. In this letter Cynthia describes how she told Hazen to pay $1 for lessons to prepare for possibly attending an eastern university. The emphasis on education is almost certainly transplanted from the Capron family’s origins in New York. This emphasis on education existed amongst other officers and their families throughout the Wyoming Territory. Culpin writes, “The first school in Wyoming was conducted at Fort Laramie in 1852 by the Reverend Richard Vaux, post

33 Culpin, “A Brief History,” 105.
34 July 17, 1876 Letter, Box 2, Folder 18, Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron Family Papers, Collection Number 0694, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
35 July 17, 1876 Letter, Box 2, Folder 18, Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron Family Papers, Collection Number 0694, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
36 Jan 30 1884 Letter, Box 2, Folder 18, Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron Family Papers, Collection Number 0694, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
chaplain, for the children of the officers.” These examples point towards a growing culture of education based around the officers of the military in Wyoming Territory at this time. This emphasis on education is critical in the social development of Wyoming away from a frontier state to a state with a class of professionals and educated citizens.

Thaddeus and Cynthia’s correspondences also reveal several social attributes that point towards cultural transplantation. In celebration of the fourth of July in 1876, Cynthia described a picnic that was taken by the families in the fort, “Mrs. Burt asked me and said there were so few and I knew them all. It was not like a picnic event in the city.” Her description is significant because it directly states that the picnicking practice was something they transplanted from eastern cities. These dinner activities were common across officer’s families in several different forts. It was common practice for officers and their families to participate in several different Christmas parties/dinners within the fort’s community. In another letter to Thaddeus, Cynthia described that the women were creating a commemorative scrapbook for the men and officers under Custer’s command. The actions these women took all points to their desire to maintain old eastern customs in their new homes in the west. Hoagland writes, “Army women clung to their roles as guardians of the home and purveyors of culture. All these accounts highlight the efforts of officers’ wives to domesticate their quarters, and provide cultured entertainment.” This description of officers’ wives contributes to the underlying theme of the greater cultural influence exerted by military officers at this time. Image 7 provides a visual example of these

37 Culpin, “A Brief History,” 103.
38 July 3, 1876 Letter, Box 2, Folder 18, Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron Family Papers, Collection Number 0694, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
40 July 19 1876 Letter, Box 2, Folder 18, Thaddeus Hurlbut Capron Family Papers, Collection Number 0694, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
In this late 1800’s photograph the officers and their wives line up for a picture before playing a game of croquet. This seemingly eastern scene takes place in Fort Bridger with the military buildings prominent in the background. This image supports the writings of Thaddeus and his family, along with other historians, that the officers proved to be the driving force behind cultural transplantation in military forts.

Although the trends found in this research point to a transplantation of eastern culture as opposed to adoption of native/western culture amongst the military other questions still remain. For example, what was the extent to which western cultural practices were brought back to eastern areas by soldiers who returned home after their tour of duty in the west? After the idea of the frontier began to die there developed a romanticized version of the old west that is apparent in later films and books. This question discusses whether or not soldiers aided in this development of the modern view of the old west, and to what extent was there cultural back and forth between the frontier and the east. Also, what about soldiers allowed them to transplant their culture on a larger scale than previous pioneers? The soldiers who began to flood the territory after the Civil War brought a new wave of eastern culture than previous soldiers had not. This question focuses around whether the larger numbers of soldiers brought about change, or if the Civil War fundamentally changed western soldiers. Overall, this research calls into question the nature of the frontier, and the experiences of the settlers who lived there. The trend seems to show a movement towards bringing culture with the settlers to their new homes, rather than a traditional view that they developed a unique western culture. Although there were certainly both transplantations and new cultures developed, the exact relationship between the two should be

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examined. However, the questions raised by these topics lie outside the scope of this essay to address.

The experiences of these three groups are all unique, but closely connected to one another in the theme of their cultural experiences. From beginnings of trade posts owned by culturally assimilated trappers and traders to eastern villages allowing for the transplantation of culture. The key force behind this change of cultural ideals can be clearly linked to the military through the experiences of the previous listed groups. Enlisted soldiers did not have the same large scale influence as rich economic post trader or upper class officers, however they allowed for the mass transplantation of culture through perceived “white” actions. Also men such as Robert Dunlap Clarke and James S. McClellan provide journals with descriptions of day-to-day affairs. Sutlers and post traders were not actual members of the military, but they did mark the economic cultural transformation that was undergone in the west following the Civil War. These men began to bring eastern finance and consumer culture to the west under the facilitation of the military. Finally, the officers in the military at this time provided the driving force for cultural transplantation at this time. These men not only designed eastern village styled forts, they also brought families who would help maintain their eastern customs. The officers’ leadership positions allowed them to facilitate the implementation of familiar cultural practices in the western forts. Each of these group’s contributions helped establish a transplanted culture in the west, but the impact of this cultural movement is not so simple. Although cultural change may never be as widely known as the military history presented by Utley, it is equally significant. With every picnic and Christmas party the myth of the old west as a separate cultural entity vanished. The mixed trapper native culture exemplified by the experiences of Fort Bridger was replaced by the driving force of cultural transformation. One must only compare the images of
pre-Civil War Fort Bridger to later fort designs to understand the extent of the cultural movement. The cultural changes of these men and of the Wyoming Territory as a whole marked the end to an old system, and the start to something completely different.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


William A. Carter Family Papers. Collection Number 03535, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
Secondary Sources


Image 4:

![Image 4](image4.png)

Image 5:

![Image 5](image5.png)

East end of Officer’s Row
Surgeon’s Quarters.
Image 6:

Image 7: