

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received SEP 10 1980

date entered

NOV 10 1980

## 1. Name

historic Fort Dilts (Preferred)

and/or common Fort Dilts State Historic Site

## 2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Rhome \_\_\_\_\_  vicinity of congressional district 1

state North Dakota code 38 county Bowman code 011

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name State Historical Society of North Dakota

street & number Liberty Memorial Building

city, town Bismarck \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state North Dakota 58505

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds

street & number Bowman County Courthouse

city, town Bowman \_\_\_\_\_ state North Dakota

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title ND Cultural Resources Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1979 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of North Dakota

city, town Bismarck \_\_\_\_\_ state North Dakota 58505

## 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

Fort Dilts was the site in 1864 of an extended siege of a circled wagon train by Sioux Indians. A six and a half foot high defensive fortification of sod and compacted earth was thrown up around the wagons after the train circled up at a commanding position near the summit of a ridge of hills. The fortification was roughly circular, with bastions on the north and south and an opening on the west. Approximately 300 feet in diameter, the fortification now exists as a low grass-covered ring with a shallow trench along the exterior side. Ruts cut into the native sod by the heavy wagons of the train are visible to the east of the earthwork and extend into the interior of the fortification.

Eight military marble headstones on the site commemorate soldiers of the escort who died in defense of the wagon train. Three headstones located along the northwest quarter of the ring represent three soldiers interred under the fortification wall. Five other headstones just outside the northern perimeter of the fortification commemorate soldiers who were killed in the siege and buried at unknown other locations. The headstones were provided by the Department of the Army and were placed on the site in 1933. A monument of local petrified wood and scoria was constructed just west of the ring in 1952 by area residents. A flagpole erected at an unknown date stands to the northwest of the fortification.

The site has been maintained as a State Historic Site since 1932, and has been secured by fencing from cattle and other depredations since that date. Two wooden privies are within the fenced area but to the northwest of the fortification. No known disturbances have taken place along or within the fortification itself, and the site retains its vast unbroken vistas of surrounding territories.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1864

Builder/Architect

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

In the summer of 1864, while the United States was still in the throes of civil war, emigrant wagon trains crossed the northern Great Plains to the mountains of western Montana and Idaho. Gold had been discovered in sizable quantities in those mountains, and a considerable interest in going to the gold fields had arisen in residents of the northern states and particularly in Minnesota Territory, then the westward limit of organized frontier settlement. Two routes to the gold fields were available: boat travel down the Mississippi and then up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, or overland wagon train from St. Paul to Montana. River travel was time-consuming, at times dangerous, and could be quite expensive if whole families and their belongings were to be transported.

The overland route posed problems of supply, protection, and navigation because the wagon trains would necessarily travel a distance of more than a thousand miles through territory that was virtually unmapped and unoccupied except for large numbers of Indians. The best information available on the overland route of the beginning of the 1860's were maps and notes of an 1853 exploring expedition led by Isaac Stevens, who was seeking an acceptable northern route for a transcontinental railroad. Steven's route generally ran from St. Paul northwestward across what is now central Minnesota and North Dakota to Fort Union, a fur trading post on the Missouri River, then westward along the Missouri and Milk Rivers to Fort Benton. Wagon trains successfully followed this route, and one more northerly, in 1862 and 1863 without major incident with the Indians of the region.

In the autumn of 1862, however, the Indian menace to the wagon trains and the white occupants of Minnesota increased when members of several bands of Sioux conducted wide-spread acts of hostility in what became known as the Minnesota Massacre. In the following three years major military campaigns against the Sioux were conducted by Colonel H. H. Sibley and General Alfred Sully in areas through which the wagon trains would pass. Indians in what are now central and western North Dakota who had not taken part in depredations were provoked to hostility by indiscriminate attacks by the military units.

Amid this climate of hostility and gold fever, Captain James Fisk led a wagon train out of Minnesota in early July, 1864. Fisk had led trains over the usual Stevens route in 1862 and 1863 after being appointed military superintendent of emigration on that route. The 1864 train was very late in making its start westward, and Fisk determined that the train would take a more direct westerly route. The train left Fort Ridgeley and traveled along the Minnesota River and overland to Fort Rice on the Missouri River in what is now south-central North Dakota. Fort Rice was then

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

UMT NOT VERIFIED

# 10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreege of nominated property 8.26 acres

Quadrangle name Marmarth 2 SE (Preliminary)

Quadrangle scale 7.5'

UMT References not available see continuation sheet.

A 

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 Zone Easting Northing

B 

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 Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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## Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet.

## List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kurt P. Schweigert, Architectural Historian

organization State Historical Society of North Dakota date August 1, 1980

street & number Liberty Memorial Building telephone (701)224-2672

city or town Bismarck state North Dakota 58505

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national     state     local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title ND State Historic Preservation Officer

date August 21, 1980

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

date 11/6/80

Attest:   
Chief of Registration

date 11/3/80

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NOV 10

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 1

under construction and was serving as the base camp for the Sully campaign of that year. Fisk discovered that the main Sully force had departed to the northwest toward the Little Missouri River Badlands about three weeks before the Fisk train arrived at Fort Rice.

After obtaining a military escort of fifty men, Fisk departed Fort Rice and followed Sully's trail along the Cannonball River for about 80 miles. At a point where Sully had turned his troops northward to intercept a band of Indians, Fisk turned the train to the south and west on a course that he hoped would skirt to the south of the dreaded badlands and shorten the distance to the mouth of the Bighorn River.

On September 2, 1864, ten days after Fisk left Sully's trail, the train was attacked by a party of Hunkpapa Sioux near Deep Creek in what is now Slope County, North Dakota. Two trailing wagons were cut off by the Indians and, although the military escort repulsed the attack, nine whites were killed and three more were seriously wounded. After a sleepless night the train broke camp and continued westward, leaving a loaf of strychnine-soaked bread at the campsite. The Sioux, who were on a hunting expedition and who later demanded a ransom of food for release of the train, found and devoured the bread. Some days later a scout for the train reported having found the bodies of several Indians, which had been partially eaten by wolves.

The wagon train continued westward for two days under continuous attack by a growing Indian force until September fourth, when the wagons were formed into a corral on a commanding ridge top. Within the day a six and one-half foot high wall of earth and sod was built around the circled wagons. The Indian attacks continued unabated for several days, and three more men died and were interred under the walls of the fortification. Among the dead was Corporal Jefferson Dilts, a scout for whom the location was named. A contingent of ten men left the fort during the night of September 4-5 to summon aid from Fort Rice.

The Hunkpapa Sioux, who had skirmished with Sully's force at least twice in the previous weeks, continued their attacks for several days and then offered to parlay the freedom of the train for food and other goods. The Indians also offered to release a white woman they had captured some weeks earlier, in exchange for a large amount of goods. When Fisk offered a smaller ransom, the Indians refused the offer because they believed a better bargain could be struck at Fort Rice. The woman begged Fisk to secure her release at any price, but she remained in captivity until released at Fort Sully on the Missouri River in December, 1864.

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date entered NOV 10 1980

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

After sixteen days of confinement in the fortification, the Fisk train was rescued by a detachment from Fort Rice. Although Fisk and some of the emigrants wished to proceed westward, the train was refused further military escort in that direction. The train then returned to Fort Rice without further harassment by Indians and was disbanded.

The fortification area of Fort Dilts has not been disturbed since 1864, except for placement of military headstones for the soldiers buried under the wall. The site retains its unbroken vistas and the feeling of vastness or desolation that greeted the emigrants of the Fisk wagon train. Fort Dilts may be the only site of a classic Indian attack on a wagon train crossing the Great Plains which retains visible evidence of the incident and which remains virtually unaltered since the attack. Because of the unique history of Fort Dilts and the representative relationship of the site to the broad themes of Indian-White warfare, trans-plains emigration, and the gold rush of the 1860's, it is recommended that Fort Dilts be designated a National Historic Landmark.

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date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 3

Collins, Ethel A., "Pioneer Experiences of Horatio H. Larned" Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. 7 pp. 1-58.

"Expeditions of Captain James L. Fisk to the Gold Mines of Idaho and Montana 1864-1866" Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. 2. No. 1 pp. 421-442 (Bismarck, 1980).

Kelly, Fanny, Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians (Hartford, Conn. 1873).

Mattison, Ray H. ed., "The Fish Expedition of 1864: The Diary of William H. Larned," North Dakota History, Vol 36, No. 3 (Bismarck, 1969).

Report of Captain James L. Fisk to Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant General, U.S.A., Washington, D.C., January 13, 1865; National Archives (63F 1865 NARG 94).

White, Helen McCann. Ho! For the Gold Fields; Northern Overland Wagon Trains of the 1860's (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1966).

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Continuation sheet

Item number 10

Page 4

Site is located at approximately  $46^{\circ}16'43''$  North Latitude,  $103^{\circ}46'33''$  West Longitude.

Verbal boundary description and justification.

Beginning at a point S  $89^{\circ}56'$  W one hundred ninety four (194) feet and N  $0^{\circ}04'$  W Thirty Three (33) feet from the south east corner of Government Lot No. Three (3), of fractional section No. Two (2) in Township No. One Hundred Thirty-two (132), of Range No. One Hundred Five (105), West of the Fifth (5th ) Principal Meridian, thence running N  $0^{\circ}04'$  W. six hundred eithy three and nine tenths (683.9) feet thence N  $89^{\circ}48'$  W. five hundred twenty-five and one tenth (525.1) feet, thence S  $0^{\circ}04'$  E six hundred eighty six and three tenths (686.3) feet, thence N  $89^{\circ}56'$  E five hundred twenty five (525) feet to the place of beginning containing eight and twenty six hundredths (8.26) acres, be the same more or less.