

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 10 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Fort Caspar

AND/OR COMMON

Same (and earlier known as "Platte Bridge Station")

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

14 Caspar Road

CITY, TOWN

Casper

STATE

Wyoming

CODE

56

COUNTY

Natrona

CODE

025

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" 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

(Fort Caspar Commission) City of Casper

STREET & NUMBER

City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Casper

STATE

Wyoming

82601

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

County Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

Natrona County Court House

CITY, TOWN

Casper

STATE

Wyoming

82601

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Wyoming Recreation Commission, Survey of Historic Sites, Markers and Monuments

DATE

1967 (1973 revised)

FEDERAL

STATE

COUNTY

LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Wyoming Recreation Commission, Historic Division

CITY, TOWN

Cheyenne

STATE

Wyoming

82002

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☐ GOOD  
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☒ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED  
☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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#### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"The dominant structure throughout the 1858-1867 period was Guinard's Platte Bridge. 13' x 1,000' timber structure, held on piers of cribbing filled with stone. Cribbing still visible on surface along with other surface evidence.

Guinard had a small residence and store near the south end of the bridge. This was expanded to house the telegraph station in 1861.

The precise nature and location of the 1858-1859 army buildings are not known, and require further historical and archeological research.

Precise ground plans and drawings cover the 1863 period structures which housed the telegraph station garrison. These, along with archeological data formed the basis for the reconstruction of the 1863 structures completed in 1939 at a cost of \$56,500 of federal and local money. It is worth note that most of the 1863 structures were in use through most of the life of the post, though some were modified or changed in use.

During 1865-1867 the army expanded the post considerably. Excellent plans and elevations along with materials lists and specifications cover this construction period. These buildings were of log construction, with plank floors and roofs of puncheons, covered with clay. Millwork and hardware were freighted in for these structures. Month-by-month construction reports on these structures are at hand.

At its peak of development the post included over two dozen substantial buildings and additional lesser outbuildings. Most of the area occupied by the 1865-1867 structures is little disturbed archeologically.

At the peak of development the post housed from three hundred to four hundred men, one of the largest garrisons in the West."

## 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1858-1867

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fort Caspar is already an enrolled district in the National Register of Historic Places. There is no question concerning the historic significance of the place; the question is whether or not errors were made in establishing the boundaries of the district as written (and delineated on the accompanying map) in that original nomination that is now a part of the National Register.

It is the belief of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer that mistakes in those boundaries have indeed been made. In consequence and in accord with The National Register Program, Volume 2, How to Complete National Register Forms, Appendix 4, Changes and Revisions to Properties Listed in the National Register - Boundary Changes, this new property nomination is now submitted with the intention that it should supplant the old nomination form. However, since the old nomination has been accepted, the only changes that will be made in its forms and explanations are in the map delineating the boundaries, the geographical data defining those boundaries, the photographs depicting conditions existing with reference to certain areas of historic terrain and the following paragraphs pointing out the cause of errors and provisions for correction.

There are two errors in the boundaries as established in the original nomination: one is in the north boundary, one is in the south boundary; one is an error of omission, one is an error of inclusion.

Approved August 12, 1971 the nomination for enrollment of the Fort Caspar district in the National Register of Historic Places designated boundaries which simply reflected a status quo situation wherein the City of Casper's Fort Caspar Commission was charged with administration of a perfect rectangle constituting sixty acres of restored (1930's) buildings of Fort Caspar, a place which grew in various stages--and in various dimensions and angles--throughout frequent changes of circumstances on the historic western frontier. Latter-day developments, also inclosed, include two to three residences on small plots of private land and such publicly-owned properties as parks, roads and a segment of a through highway and its bridge crossing the North Platte River. Bordering on the southern boundary is the city-owned water plant operated by the City's Board of Public Utilities. This Board has on former occasions, the last time as recently as just prior to the district's National Register enrollment, trespassed onto and into grounds of the historic area--effecting significantly adverse results.



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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

That latest of trespasses concerned preparations for the construction of a large, modern water plant and the existence of a terrain feature having something the appearance of an arroyo but actually being a prehistoric channel of the North Platte River. Since historic time that old channel had cut across lands on which Fort Caspar was built and which were eventually divided into water plant and historic district tracts. The Board of Public Utilities, making ready for its new plant, bulldozed debris from old structures, concrete and other rubble, into the channel and so leveled off a site for the plant and surrounding landscape architecture. Having formed from past experience scant respect for the historic district and the Fort Caspar Commission, and having gathered an excess of debris, the Board simply had this excess bulldozed on down the channel, far onto the historic district, tearing up and covering evidence of former fort buildings and vestiges of other cultural values in that process.

The Board then went on to construct a large new water plant building, its northern face extending along a line that is the common boundary between the water plant lands and the historic district. This plant was started previously but completed subsequently to enrollment of the historic district in the National Register.

As may be surmised from the foregoing account, these two agencies of city government had not been on the best of terms and had not been informing each other regarding their separate plans. Evidently the enrollment of the Fort Caspar historic district in the National Register of Historic Places didn't, at first, make any great impression on the Board of Public Utilities. However, one result of that circumstance finally forced itself upon the member's attention. Comprehension must have dawned with a shock when they realized that, particularly as involved potential developments making use of federal funding assistance, they could no longer encroach with impunity on what was now a National Register of Historic Places district. The shock had to have been all the greater since, without informing the Fort Caspar Commission, the costly new water plant had been engineered and constructed in minutest detail to provide for future expansion to the north. Their plan, then past any revocation, was to provide for expansion across the boundary in what was meant to be a further instance of an already customary procedure--encroachment into the historic district. Adding immediacy to what otherwise would only have been a long-range problem for the Board is the fact that, despite the newness of the present facility, demands from the city are growing so fast that expansion is again a matter of proximate time.

Under this aura of semi-urgency the Mayor and the City Manager directed the Board and the Commission to jointly study the problem and asked the State Historic Preservation Officer to provide a consultant to assist in that study. First, a

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAY 10 1976
DATE ENTERED	

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

thorough review was made of all contributing circumstances and conditions. It was this review which established that mistakes had been made in choosing boundaries for the historic district as described and delineated in that nomination resulting in enrollment of Fort Caspar and environs in the National Register of Historic Places.

The most serious of these mistakes occurs along the northern boundary. The fundamental statement of the entire original nomination, appearing as the first sentence under the Present and Original Physical Appearance heading is: "The dominant structure throughout the 1858-1867 period was Guinard's Platte Bridge." So what has happened regarding this bridge and the present National Register of Historic Places enrolled district named Fort Caspar? Why the bridge has been excluded from the district, that is all that has happened!

In correction, by means of this nomination, the mid-section of the northern boundary has been extended northward, as shown on nomination map forms and in photograph forms, to include all the location of the historic Platte River Bridge.

Since the original nomination is devoid of any details, some explanation of the importance of that bridge follows. Until sometime after Lt. Caspar Collins was killed, July 26, 1865 in a skirmish with Indians at the northern approaches to the bridge, that bridge and its entire accompanying establishment--military post, stage station, pony express station, telegraph station--was only known, both officially and commonly, as Platte Bridge Station. Afterward it was deemed appropriate by means of official Army orders to rename the station Fort Caspar in honor of the heroic Lieutenant. The reason for using his given name was that there already existed a Fort Collins (in Colorado)--named, incidentally, for the young officer's father who, during Civil War years, was Colonel of the 11th Ohio Cavalry with headquarters at Fort Laramie.

This bridge built by Louis Guinard crossed a large and swift river. It was a river always in flood stage, from high mountain snows melting in the late spring and early summer, when seasonal trains of overland emigrants necessarily had to cross it. The bridge, then, was undoubtedly the key man-made structure located along a very extensive segment of the Oregon Trail; the fort was secondary, in fact the strategic reason for establishment of the fort at its southern approach was to protect first the bridge under construction and then the completed bridge. Otherwise the duty of patrolling contiguous sections of the trail could have been discharged as satisfactorily from any one of several possible headquarters locations.

It should be understood that the North Platte River--presently harnessed by dams and reservoirs to provide water for irrigation, power, industrial and recreational developments--is no longer the wild, free-flowing stream that it was during years

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 4

of Oregon Trail emigration. Now it is confined during all seasons of the year to its main channel; then, during spring and summer floods it covered, in depths varying from inches to several feet, wide flood plains.

Historic Platte Bridge was more than one thousand feet long and about thirteen feet wide. It was supported at regular intervals by piers of stone filled log cribbing. These extended from the very portals of the most northerly building of the Fort--the telegraph station--across a flood plain more than two hundred yards wide, then on through the comparatively narrow, swift and deep main channel to end with a shorter abutment and final cribbing against the more steeply rising northern bank. Now, about one hundred and ten years beyond the useful life of a structure which served a very important role in the nation's territorial fulfillment, it is still possible to stand within confines of Fort Caspar and count the soil and plant encrusted stone mounds, formerly piers of Platte Bridge, extending across the old flood plain--now growing grass and shrubs--to the actual channel presently confining the river's waters during all seasons of the year. All evidence of piers within that channel is seemingly gone or else hidden by currents of swirling water, but the final stones marking the northern abutment are still evident.

The northern boundary of the district, as herein set forth, includes within the district all evidence of historic Platte Bridge formerly excluded.

The second mistake concerns the southern boundary. That boundary was set well to the south of any reconstructed Fort Caspar buildings and, as has already been explained, any evidence of cultural values existing just to the north of where that boundary passes Casper Board of Public Utilities water plant have been destroyed by repeated bulldozing and other disturbance of the terrain. This nomination excludes approximately 3.46 acres of such disturbed lands from the historic district by altering the southern boundary as follows: commencing on the present southern boundary at a point near the northwest corner of the new water plant thence north for 301.7 feet, thence east for 500 feet, thence south for 301.7 feet and back on to the former boundary line. A map provided in the proper section of this nomination delineates this boundary change exactly; photographs depict the immediate area and present conditions of the terrain.

It needs to be reiterated that most of the damage to this part of the historic district was done prior to acceptance of the nomination and enrollment of the district in the National Register. Obviously, a careful study to establish satisfactory lines might have resulted in a similar jog in the original boundary to that described above. On the other hand, at the time of the original nomination it wasn't really important whether that 3.46 acres be included or excluded, its inclusion wasn't the serious type of error that failure to include the Platte Bridge within the northern boundary proves to have been.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 10 1976

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 5

Regardless of such hindsight, the joint study by the Board of Public Utilities, the Fort Caspar Commission and the consultant for the State Historic Preservation Officer brought out the fact that the Board considered it absolutely necessary to exclude the 3.46 acre tract from inclusion in the historic district. The Historic Preservation Officer's consultant pointed out that excluding any part of any National Register property from the enrolled boundaries was a very difficult thing to do. He advised the Board that the new water plant, although admittedly under construction before the historic district was enrolled in the National Register, was still a visual intrusion on that historic property; he further advised the Board that in his opinion the construction of the envisioned addition extending into the historic district, on the 3.46 acre tract in question, would constitute little if any more visual intrusion than that part of the plant which already existed. He counseled that the course of procedure most likely to prove successful was to convince the Fort Caspar Commission and the City Council of the need to transfer this small tract of land to the Board of Public Utilities in order to fulfill the city's future need for more water. Then, without attempting to remove the tract from inclusion within the National Register historic district, to seek, through procedure under Sec. 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, approval to construct the water plant addition. He thought such approval had a very good chance of being granted.

But the Board of Public Utilities was apprehensive; its members wanted an outright solution and they made a counter suggestion. They proposed that the attempt should be made to remove the 3.46 acre tract from inclusion in the historic district under the following provisions:

1. That if successful the tract, valued at \$49,000, be transferred from the Fort Caspar Commission to the Board of Public Utilities.
2. In return the Board of Public Utilities will establish a fund to purchase for the Fort Caspar Commission, as soon as each one shall become available, the following properties:
  - a. Purchase or lease from the Izaak Walton League a 2.38 acre tract of land on which the south approaches of the historic Guinard or Platte River Bridge is located.
  - b. Purchase of the three separate privately-owned lots, and improvements thereon, presently located within the historic district.

Everyone, including the Historic Preservation Officer's consultant, agreed that, providing it could be realized, this was the best possible solution for all parties concerned. The Board and the Commission have drawn and signed a contract covering the above stated provisions and the Mayor of the City of Casper has also signed it.

The pony express had a station here in 1860-1861.

The Pacific Telegraph built through here, crossing on the bridge itself in 1861, and Western Union operated a station here until mid-summer, 1867.



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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 6

As his part in helping to bring about a hoped for solution that would greatly enhance the originally enrolled Fort Caspar district, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer submits this new nomination.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE--As set forth in the Original Nomination of Fort Caspar.

"Fort Caspar derives its primary significance from the concentration of a host of important events and activities at this point through the fortunes of topography. Some of these are:

Fur trade caravans passed this point regularly each season during the peak of that trade in the region. Some used this ford to cross the North Platte.

Most travelers to California and Oregon, 1842-1862, traveled past here, and used this crossing.

The Mormons used this crossing, 1847-1867, and operated a ferry and a supply depot here as needed.

The Platte Bridge here was built in 1858, and in use until late 1867. A competitive bridge 5 miles downstream was built by John Richard in 1853 and destroyed by the Army in January and February of 1866.

The transcontinental mail route passed here in 1851. The stagecoach line used the route and the bridge 1858-1862.

The pony express had a station here in 1860-1861.

The Pacific Telegraph built through here, crossing on the bridge itself in 1861, and Western Union operated a station here until mid-summer, 1867.

The Army garrisoned the site 1858-1859, and again 1862-1867. The Platte Bridge Fight of July 26, 1865 took place here.

The left wing of the Connor Expedition of 1865 crossed the river here to move north against the Indians.

The N. B. Sweitzer Expedition of 1867 used this as one of its supply depots.

The post was the jumping-off place for the Bridger Trail to Montana from 1863-1868.

Clearly Fort Caspar was one of the really primary crossroads of westward expansion, ranking close to such famed spots as Fort Laramie, Independence, and St. Joseph in significance."

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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DATE ENTERED	

CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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ADDENDUM NUMBER 1:

Major Bibliographical References

"Letters Received in the H. A. Department of the Platte," RG98 NARS

"Returns, Ft. Caspar," Roll 189, Microfilm Pubs. NARS

"General and Special Orders, Platte Bridge 1858-59" RG 393 NARS

"Post Quartermaster Letterbook 1866-67" RG 393 NARS

"Letter & Telegram books, 11th Ohio Vol. Cav." RG 98, NARS

Agnes Wright Spring, Caspar Collins, U. of Nebr. Press, 1969.

O. W. "Bill" Judge, Old Fort Caspar, Ft. Caspar Commission, 1969.

Alfred J. Mokler, Fort Caspar, Prairie Publishing, Casper, 1939.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CONTINUATION SHEET    Geographical    ITEM NUMBER 10    PAGE 1

ADDENDUM NUMBER 2:

Geographical Data

A	1 3 3 8 8 3 9 0	4 7 4 3 5 3 5	B	1 3 3 8 8 3 9 0	4 7 4 3 1 5 0
	Zone Easting	Northing		Zone Easting	Northing
C	1 3 3 8 8 1 6 0	4 7 4 3 1 5 5	D	1 3 3 8 8 1 6 0	4 7 4 3 2 1 6
E	1 3 3 8 8 0 5 0	4 7 4 3 2 1 0	F	1 3 3 8 8 0 5 0	4 7 4 3 1 5 0
G	1 3 3 8 7 6 2 0	4 7 4 3 1 6 0	H	1 3 3 8 7 6 2 8	4 7 4 3 5 5 0
I	1 3 3 8 7 9 3 0	4 7 4 3 5 4 0	J	1 3 3 8 7 9 5 0	4 7 4 3 6 9 0
K	1 3 3 8 8 0 9 5	4 7 4 3 5 4 0	L	1 3 3 8 8 0 9 2	4 7 4 3 6 9 0

6. Additional Information, Fort Caspar Nomination - a new nomination providing for some adjustments in the historic district's boundaries.

The request was that confirmation by an accredited archeologist be given to the statement, starting with the third paragraph, page 4, Statement of Significance, covering the destruction of historic values in the area to be excluded from the historic district as originally nominated to and enrolled in the National Register. Fortunately the State Archeologist, Dr. George Frison, had an opportunity to examine this property. His report, in letter form, is attached hereto.

7