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VISITORS GUIDE

FORT MCKAVETT

STATE HISTORIC SITE

Fort McKavett, Texas

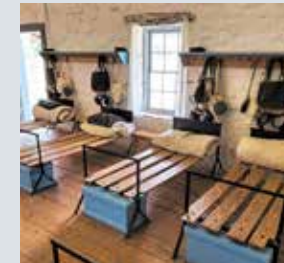


TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
REAL PLACES TELLING REAL STORIES

Welcome to Fort McKavett State Historic Site, overlooking the spring-fed waters of the San Saba River in Texas' scenic Hill Country. Before Europeans arrived, this area had long been home to various Native American groups. Spanish missionaries arrived in the 1750s and the U.S. Army in 1852. Today, Fort McKavett is one of the best preserved and most intact examples of a Texas Indian Wars military post.

A COMMANDING POST

The site is a natural setting for a frontier post that was established, in part, to help guard the upper San Antonio-El Paso road. The limestone hilltop commanded distant views in all directions and the springs provided a dependable source of drinking water. Soldiers quarried stone on site and cut native pecan and oak trees used for some of the fort's construction. The abundant game supplemented Army rations, but isolated forts were not self-sufficient. Materials and supplies including tobacco, whiskey, and livestock forage were hauled by wagon from San Antonio.



SOLDIERS AND SETTLERS

The fort's garrison of 350 to 500 men usually consisted of half an infantry regiment, a regimental headquarters, and two or more cavalry

companies. It served as a supply base for western Texas, as well as a location for testing new weapons and equipment.

Every morning, the bugle call of "Reveille" began the day. Breakfast was often bacon, coffee, beans, and dried fruit. Everyday life followed a routine of daily drills on the parade grounds, area patrols, and escort duties. Although the fort was established as a deterrent, engagements with Native Americans and outlaws occurred sporadically. More often, soldiers engaged in routine activities including hauling water from the creek, maintaining the buildings, loading and unloading supply wagons, tending the post gardens, and caring for livestock.

Although combat was a small part of the frontier soldier's life, Fort McKavett troops participated in several major Indian campaigns including Mackenzie's and Shafter's raids into Mexico, and at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon during the Red River War in 1874.

Portions of all four African American Army regiments, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, were stationed at Fort McKavett at some point during the Indian Wars.



Because of their bravery, tenacity, and appearance, Native Americans applied the honorable term "Buffalo Soldiers" to the troopers. The first Medal of Honor awarded to an African American soldier after the Civil War was earned by Sgt. Emanuel Stance of the Ninth Cavalry while stationed at Fort McKavett for freeing a captive child, preventing an assault on a wagon train, and capturing 15 horses.

Women played an important supporting role in frontier life. Officers often brought their families with them and the Army allowed one laundress to be hired for every 19 soldiers. Although their numbers were small, their influence was immeasurable. They promoted cultural activities such as dances and plays, and often the presence of just one lady on a post could lessen discipline problems.

As with many frontier forts, a town sprung up nearby to support the fort. In return, the fort offered protection for the town. After the final withdrawal of the military in 1883, nearby settlers occupied the Fort McKavett buildings.

WALKING GUIDE



1 HOSPITAL BUILDING
Construction on the Fort McKavett hospital was completed January 27, 1873. Today, the hospital building

houses the museum, museum store, research library, staff offices, and restrooms.

2 DEAD HOUSE

The Dead House was the building that served as the morgue. The bodies of deceased soldiers were kept here until they could be buried in the post cemetery.

3 SINKS

Outhouses, or sinks, were located behind most buildings for privacy and outside for sanitation. Cleanliness was emphasized by the Army. Soldiers emptied and washed the metal pans under the sinks daily.



4 SCHOOL HOUSE

A school was established at Fort McKavett in 1874 after Army regulations required that school houses be built for the education of the soldiers and their families. Local children attended school in this building until 1956.



5 LIEUTENANTS ROW

This line of buildings includes Officers Quarters (OQ #8-12). Several of the houses were built in the 1850s as single-room

structures, but additions were built after the Civil War. The families of the fort's junior officers lived here and frequently shared quarters. OQ #8 is furnished now as quarters shared by two officers.

6 FIELD GRADE OFFICERS QUARTERS

The field grade officers quarters (OQ #2 and OQ #3) were built in 1871. This U-shaped duplex housed the second and third officers in command of the post and their families.



7 COMMANDING OFFICER'S QUARTERS

The post commander's house (OQ #1) was the only two-story building at Fort McKavett. Constructed in 1856, the building was destroyed by fire in 1941.

8 CAPTAINS QUARTERS

Four houses (OQ #4-7) were built after the Civil War as residences for the company commanders of the fort. These senior officers were provided with single-family quarters away from the enlisted men, but close to headquarters. The three remaining homes are furnished as they would have appeared in the 1870s.

9 POST HEADQUARTERS

Originally built as a one-room structure in 1852, the post headquarters building was expanded to its current size after the Civil War. The headquarters building contained the regimental offices, post library, paymaster, and telegraph room. Metal loops to hold the telegraph wires can still be seen under the roof on the front porch.



10 BARRACKS #4

An inscription on one of the walls in Barracks #4 notes that the building housed Company B of the 8th U.S. Infantry Regiment in 1853. It also served as a storehouse for foodstuffs in the late 1850s. Today, the south and central rooms are furnished as they may have appeared in the 1850s and 1870s respectively.

11 OFFICER OF THE DAY QUARTERS

This building was used by the officer of the day, who was the rotating commander of the 24-hour guard detail at the fort.



12 BARRACKS #3

The enlisted men's barracks were originally built as three separate buildings in the 1850s, but they were joined in 1872 to create the longest military building west of the Mississippi River.

13 BARRACKS #1

This barracks was originally built in 1852 and served temporarily as the first post hospital. In later years, it housed the regimental band.

14 BAKERY

The 1874 bakery was the source of the daily ration of bread for up to 560 men.

15 QUARTERMASTERS SHOPS

These building ruins are remains of the post blacksmith, wagon and wheelwright, and saddler shops that were built in 1871.

16 TELEGRAPH LINE

The telegraph line at Fort McKavett was constructed by soldiers in 1875. It connected the post to the outside world. This 1/4 mile section is recreated using the original holes dug by soldiers of the 10th Infantry.



17 GOVERNMENT ROAD NATURE TRAIL

Built by the fort's soldiers, Government Road ran from the fort down to the springs, lime kiln, and rock quarry. Today, the remains of this quarter-mile long road serve as a nature trail for visitors.

18 ROCK QUARRY AND LIME KILN

The soldiers used local stone to build the post. This quarry is one of several quarries that provided limestone for the fort's construction. Soldiers also burned limestone in the kiln to create quicklime, an ingredient in the mortar used during the construction of the post buildings.

19 GOVERNMENT SPRING

This spring was the primary source of drinking, bathing, and washing water at Fort McKavett. It is one of several nearby springs that form the headwaters of the San Saba River.

