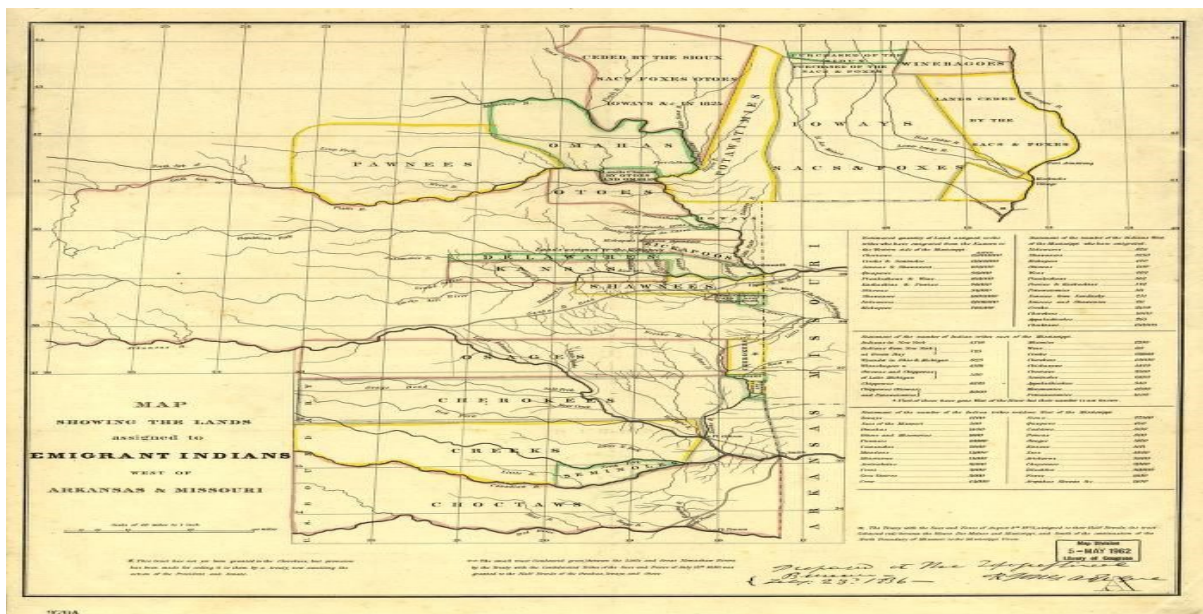


A Short History of the Early Years at Fort Scott Background

In 1830, the US was a growing nation that spread from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. The land was settled quickly as the population grew. Large populations of Native American tribes were living east of the Mississippi and stood in the way of “progress.” Encouraged by white settlers and President Andrew Jackson, the US Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which forced all tribes to relocate west of the Mississippi River. Over the next 10 years, 80,000 Indians were relocated to mostly Oklahoma and Kansas. When the relocated tribes settled on their new lands, they faced the challenges of adapting to a new area. Another challenge the relocated tribes faced were from the Indian tribes that were already living in the region.



In 1834, the US Congress passed the Trade and Intercourse Act. This law set aside all the land west of the Mississippi and designated the land Indian Country. Under the law, the US Army would keep the peace between white settlers and tribes as well as between tribes and other tribes. The law forced the US Army to introduce a new strategy along the frontier. Fort Scott would be a part of this new strategy. In 1836, the US Congress passed the Defense Act which provided funds to construct a military road from present day Minnesota to Louisiana and called for construction of forts that would run along and near the road. This road and forts would protect the “permanent” Indian frontier or Indian country from white encroachment. From 1837 to 1842, the surveying and building of parts of the military road and frontier forts were under way. Fort Scott was officially established on May 30, 1842, and construction of the fort began soon after. Fort Scott filled a gap along the military road between Fort Leavenworth, KS, and Fort Gibson, OK. Besides protecting the permanent Indian frontier, the soldiers at Fort Scott were to protect the travelers on

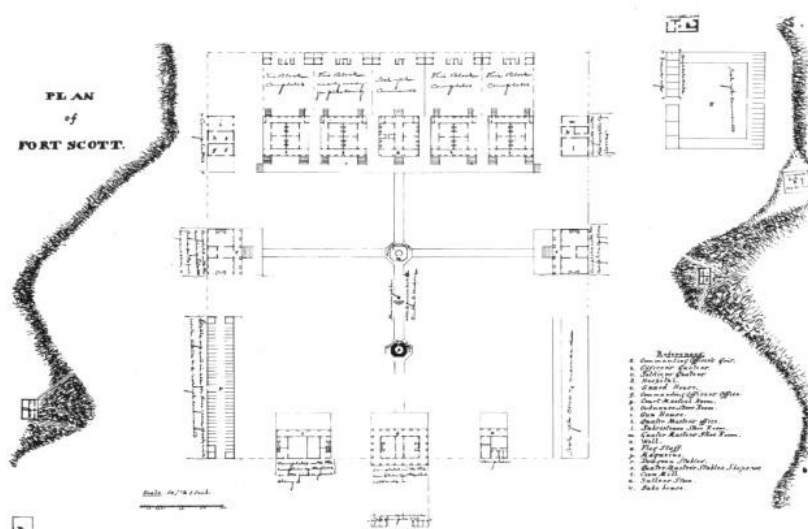
the Santa Fe and Oregon trails, explore the unmapped areas of the West, and stop the unlawful sale of alcohol to Indian tribes.

The fort was located five miles west of the Missouri state line in present-day southeastern Kansas, along a steep ridge which provided protection on three sides of the fort. The fort was near where the Marmaton River and Mill Creek meet which provided plenty of fresh water. Vegetation was a



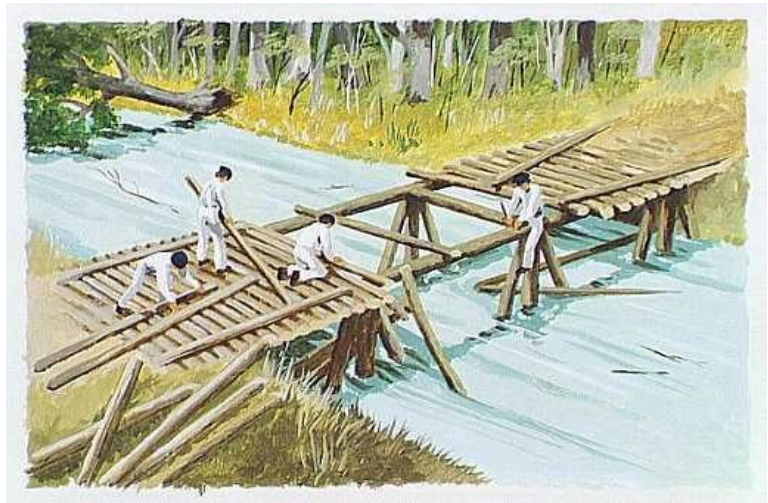
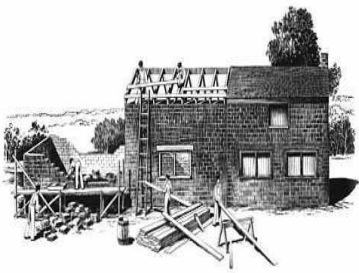
combination of oak hickory forest, which provided wood for the buildings, and a tall grass prairie. Some animals native to the area were deer, buffalo, antelope, coyote, rabbit, wildcat, raccoon, otter, opossum, wolf, fox, turkey, prairie chicken, and quail. These animals provided fresh game that added variety to the soldier's bland diet.

Captain Thomas Swords was the Assistant Quartermaster in charge of constructing and maintaining the fort. Swords had big plans for the fort. He wanted to make it, "the crack post of the frontier, even going ahead of Leavenworth." Swords faced many challenges to the construction of the fort including a lack of skilled workers, lack of funds, and a sawmill that either broke down, lacked water to power the mill or had no skilled millwright to operate the mill. After 8 years and 35,000 dollars, Fort Scott was officially complete on April 25, 1850.



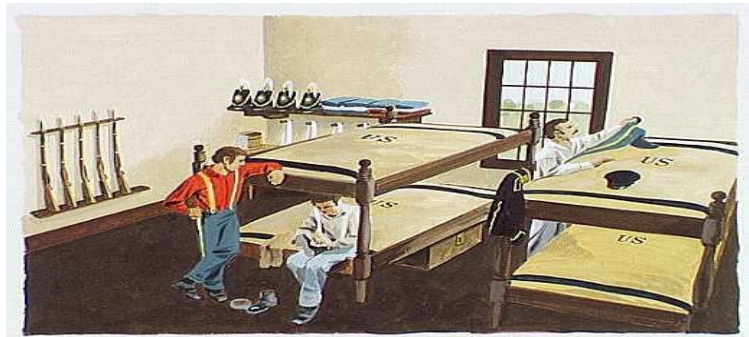
Captain Swords

Fort Scott was home to both infantry and dragoons (early form of cavalry). The soldiers had a strict routine at Fort Scott. A soldier's day began very early in the morning at daybreak. The bugler would play "reveille" which told the soldiers to wake up. After breakfast the soldiers would begin the day's assignments. The typical soldier at Fort Scott worked all day into the early evening. Many soldiers felt more like a common laborer than a soldier. Duties included drilling, fixing roads and bridges, constructing and maintaining buildings, guard duty, cleaning, farming, and caring for the horses. The work was hard and monotonous.



One of the jobs that each soldier took a turn performing was cooking and baking. He would have to make enough food for about 60 men. Bread was a staple in the soldier's life. He would eat bread at every meal. Other parts of his diet would include soup, hash, stew, salt pork, beef, rice, tea, coffee, occasional fruits and vegetables from the fort's gardens, and newly killed game.

Life in a frontier fort was boring and the soldiers felt isolated from the rest of the world. Weather was extreme with hot summers and bitterly cold winters. Living quarters were cramped with up to 60 men sharing a small barracks. The enlisted men would sleep two



to a bed. Officer's quarters were quite a step up, and the officers were able to bring their wives and children with them.

The fort was never under attack during its early years. No soldier stationed at the fort was killed in battle near or at the fort. The soldiers stationed at the fort did participate in battles during the Mexican War and the US Civil War. The biggest threat to the soldier's health was disease. Some common problems were dysentery, malaria, and respiratory issues. Between the years 1842 to 1852, seventeen men died at the fort. Compared to other frontier forts, Fort Scott soldiers had very comfortable and safe living conditions.

The fort's remote location made it hard to find recreational activities offered in large towns or cities. However, soldiers at the fort did find things to do during their free time, including reading, singing, attending dances, playing cards, visiting the sutler's store, hunting, fishing, boxing, and shooting competitions.

Even with the tiring and monotonous work and lack of "action," Fort Scott was considered one of the better posts along the frontier. The fort was officially abandoned in 1853 and sold in auction to civilians in 1855. The fort formed the base of the town of Fort Scott, KS. The existence of some of those buildings today is a living testament to the hard work of Captain Thomas Swords and the 100s of soldiers that called Fort Scott home. Today, many of the original buildings still survive and are a part of Fort Scott Historic Site.

Questions

1. Why do you think the United States wanted to remove all Indians from lands in the east?
2. What law forced all Indian tribes west of the Mississippi River?
3. What were two challenges the relocated tribes faced?
4. What law forced the US Army to change their frontier defense strategy?
5. What did the Defense Act provide for?
6. When was Fort Scott officially founded?
7. What do you think are some reasons the military choose the location that they did for the fort?
8. Who was the person in charge of constructing the fort? What were some obstacles he faced?
9. How many years did it take to build the fort?
10. What were some typical jobs the soldiers stationed at the fort did?
11. What was the biggest threat to a soldier's health?