

Fort Davis

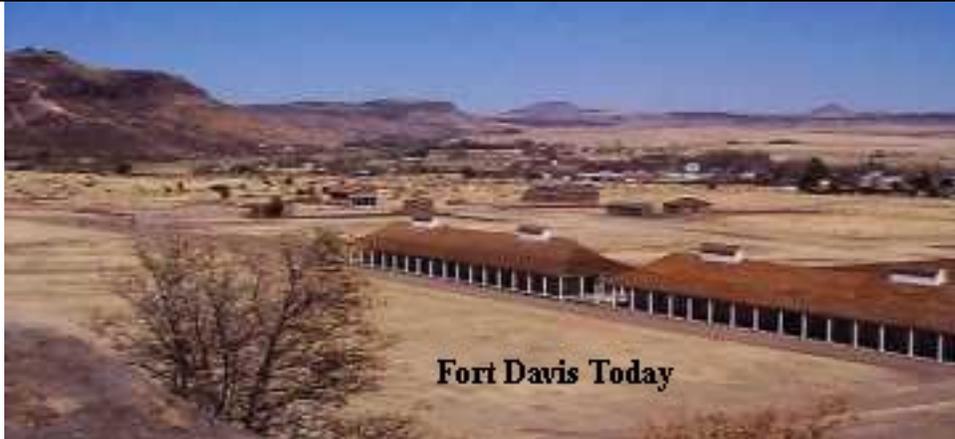
National Historic Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 6-8

Student Activity: Tour of the Fort



Welcome to Fort Davis! Let's take a tour of the buildings. We'll start with Officers' Row because in the military, officers always seem to come first.



Officers' Row

These adobe and stone houses made life on the harsh Texas frontier relatively comfortable for officers and their families. The thick walls were good insulation against summer's heat and helped to maintain a comfortable temperature during the brief winter. Sometimes two officers shared a house.

Commanding Officer's Quarters

The large house in the center of the row was reserved for the post commander. It is refurbished to the period 1882-1885 when Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson and his family occupied it. Grierson had been a music teacher before joining the army. He won fame during the Civil War, and for many years afterward he commanded the 10th U.S. Cavalry, a regiment of African-American soldiers known as Buffalo Soldiers.





A Restored Officer's Kitchen

Kitchens were built separate from the quarters. This kept the main houses cooler in the summer by confining the heat, smoke, and cooking odors to another building. Kitchens also provided housing for servants. An officer's social status dictated that he have a servant to help with the domestic work. Sometimes servants were soldiers, called "strikers," but more often were single women. The kitchen and servant's quarters behind officer's quarters No. 12 has been restored and refurnished. Originally, there was a row of kitchens behind the officers' quarters.

Junior Officers' Quarters

Spacious two-story houses were built during the early 1880s, each to accommodate junior officers, many of whom were bachelors. Designed to be shared quarters, they were sometimes occupied by non-commissioned staff officers when space permitted. Commissary Sergeant Thomas Forsyth, his wife and their many children known as "The Tribe," lived in one of the two-story quarters in the late 1880s and early 1890s.



Chapel

Besides being the church, the Post Chapel was the fort's social center. Here the garrison and local citizens attended church, dances and theatricals. It also served as a courtroom. On weekdays the chaplain, or an assigned enlisted man, taught school for army children here; classes for soldiers were held in the evenings. The chapel housed the post library as well. Here officers and enlisted men could read books or the latest newspapers.

Barracks

Eight barracks were home for the enlisted men; only two remain today. Soldiers spent little time in the barracks in the daytime. Reveille--a bugle call which sounded around 6 am--signaled the men to be out of their bunks for morning roll call. Soldiers stayed busy the rest of the day with work details, drill, target practice, and guard duty. Such a life easily grew monotonous.





Commissary

Food supplies were stored here. The army issued food rations to enlisted men, but soldiers could use their own money to buy items like canned fruit to add to their monotonous army diet. Army officers and civilian employees of the army had to purchase their food.

Quartermaster Corral

This was the industrial center of the post and a beehive of activity. Transportation was vital to Fort Davis. Until the railroad came to west Texas in the early 1880s, supplies came by wagon from San Antonio. At the corral, wagons were housed, maintained, and repaired. Scores of hardy mules and mountains of hay were protected within its walls.



Hospital

This 24-bed post hospital provided up-to-date care for the sick and injured. As the army surgeon was often the only doctor for many miles, he treated civilians as well as military personnel. His staff consisted of a hospital steward, nurses, and a cook--all assigned from the ranks of enlisted men. There was also a matron to do the laundry. Simply being brought to the hospital was no guarantee that one might survive. Surgery was performed right in the wards. Little was known about internal injuries and many patients fell victim to infection.

Magazine

Ammunition for small arms and artillery was stored here, well away from the main fort area in case of accidental explosion.





Fort Davis Visit Activity Exploring Historic Buildings

Buildings identify a place and tell about our history. Their style, design, age, history, materials and relationship to each other are unique. The buildings you see at Fort Davis and in your community tell a story. Begin your adventures in architecture by learning more about a building at Fort Davis when you visit.

Choose a building from the tour above to complete the following activities when you visit the fort.

Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

1. What is the name and purpose of the building? Where on the fort is it located?
2. With what materials is the building constructed? Why were they used instead of other building materials?
3. What does the building feel like to touch? Describe the texture of the building.
4. Are there any patterns or shapes repeated on the building?
5. What adjective would you use to describe this building's "personality" (such as fun, serious, elegant, scary)?
6. Describe the building's interior.
7. Look at the area around the building. Describe the human-made objects and the natural objects. What clues do they give you about what this area was like in the past?
8. What do you think the future holds for this building?
9. On a blank sheet of paper, draw a sketch of your building.
10. How would the loss of this building or the closing of Fort Davis National Historic Site affect you and the community?

Back at School

Design a travel poster to advertise your building or the historic site itself and encourage people to visit it. Your poster should express why you think this area should be preserved for future visitors.