

Fort Scott NHS Cell Phone Tour-Script

Stop 1-In front of Visitor Center

(Sound of bugle call)

Welcome to Fort Scott National Historic Site. The buildings and grounds in front of you represent Fort Scott in the 1840s, when the fort was built to protect the Permanent Indian Frontier.

Its architect, Captain Thomas Swords, stated that his goal here was to build the Crack Post of the Frontier. To that end, he employed a variety of architectural styles, native building materials, and local water resources used in mixing mortar and plaster.

He supervised the construction of a fort that was intended to be a permanent and safe home for soldiers whose mission was to patrol the Permanent Indian Frontier. They were to keep the frontier at peace by keeping Indians and white settlers separated. As you proceed, you will hear more about how each building or structure played a role in helping the army to fulfill its military mission.

Stop 2-Hospital

Sick and wounded soldiers could be treated at the hospital, which was designed with the health and recovery of the patients in mind. High ceilings on the second floor allowed for better ventilation and porches surrounding the building meant open air, where soldiers could convalesce and perhaps be restored to good health. A surgeon was in charge of the medical team that would provide treatment; however, the surgeon was the only one who received formal medical training. Despite the design of the hospital and the training of the surgeon, treatment here often impeded recovery rather than aiding it, due to the medical practices of the time.

Consider the case of Private Frederick Roderwald, who broke two bones in his left leg while attempting to leap over a garden fence. Since it was a compound fracture, amputation was required to avoid the onset of gangrene. Roderwald was lucky that he recovered, especially since the amputation was performed not by the surgeon (who was away from the post that day), but by the steward (a soldier who maintained the hospital supplies and had no formal medical training).

Stop 3-Infantry Barracks Museum

(Sound of broadax chopping wood)

Before you is one of two reconstructed infantry barracks, home to the infantry soldiers at Fort Scott. Today, this building houses museum exhibits, but originally would have been laid out similar to the dragoon barracks seen later on the tour.

Called the “backbone of the army,” the infantry soldiers, marching into combat on foot, formed the core of the army’s fighting forces. Many were dismayed to learn upon arrival at Fort Scott that they were to be used as a glorified labor force. Using tools such as the adze and broadax, the infantry hand

hewed the beams used to build this and other fort structures. Several complained they had not joined the army to build houses.

This situation was not unique to Fort Scott, however. General Zachary Taylor stated, "The ax, pick, saw, and trowel have become more the implement of the American soldier than the cannon, musket, or sword."

Stop 4-Dragon Stables

(Sounds of horses' whinnies)

This building stabled the horses of the dragoons, soldiers trained to fight on horse and on foot. Designed to shelter 80 horses, the stables included a hayloft and granaries that stored the horses' daily ration of 14 lbs of hay, 6 quarts of oats, and 4 quarts of corn. A window above each stall provided the horses with ventilation, giving the horse relief and comfort during the often-blistering summers. Tack rooms stored the equipment that enabled the horse and soldier to function as one. Here soldiers groomed their horses for the task of patrolling and protecting the frontier.

Infantry jokingly referred to the dragoons as nursemaids, because they spent so much time caring for their horses. A dragoon officer stated that "it requires... attention to see that the horses are in complete condition, that their equipments are so strong, and in such good repair... and are so adjusted upon each animal, so as not to impede his action and power"

Stop 5-Dragon Barracks

Each room of the dragoon barracks in front of you provided the soldier with necessities that enabled him to do his duty. The squad room gave him a place to sleep, the mess hall a place to eat, and the laundress quarters a place to get his clothes clean. Duty rosters generated at the company office kept him busy during the day. In the evening, soldiers could spend free time in the barracks playing cards or checkers, engaging in the sport of boxing, reading books, or writing letters home, although the latter two activities were limited to those soldiers who were literate.

While the barracks often contributed to the soldier's discontent due to crowded conditions, regimentation, and strict discipline, others were content with life in the barracks. A dragoon private stationed at another fort wrote, "Rules of good behavior were strict and well observed. I never had more congenial companionship, and that kept us alive and fairly happy. We made the best of everything, and did no growling..."

Stop 6-Post Headquarters

"A leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don't want to do, and like it." Spoken by President Truman, this quote could be applied to the commanding officer at Fort Scott, who coordinated the operation of the military post from the post headquarters in front of you.

The commander was in charge of the health, safety, cleanliness, and security of the post. He routinely dealt with housing issues, property, supplies, and personnel management. He oversaw post discipline; he could arrest other officers, and he convened courts-martial in this building.

Like a president who has different cabinet secretaries to oversee various government functions, the post commander had officers who were in direct charge of many aspects of the fort's operation." Still, overall responsibility for the post ultimately fell to the commander. In these offices, he and his adjutant prepared reports and kept records that kept his superiors informed of affairs and assured the smooth functioning of the fort.

In addition to the offices and court-martial room, the ordnance storeroom and artillery shed are also attached to this building.

Stop 7-Officers' Quarters

Officers, who had the responsibility of command, received the perks that came with the position. Four three-story duplexes were built along officers' row, with two sets of quarters in each building. Typically, an officer and his family occupied half of one of these buildings. If the officer was a bachelor, he might share his quarters with other bachelors. Each of these quarters had two bedrooms, a dining room, and parlor for entertainment, a morning or sitting room and a kitchen. This officers' quarters is believed to have been the home of Captain Thomas Swords, the post quartermaster, and his wife, Charlotte.

To deal with the hardships of the frontier, the Swords sought to bring the comfort and culture of their homes in the East with them. In these elegant quarters, the Swords entertained guests, had social gatherings, dined on meals prepared by their servants, and furnished their quarters with books, curtains, rugs, a dining room table, and fine china and silver. One observer at another post commented of an officers' quarters that "there is comfort and neatness always . . . and a very successful attempt at luxury. . . . In these houses are to be found elegant and well dressed women. . ."

Stop 8-Officers' Quarters #2

Building a fort on the frontier brought a unique set of challenges, especially considering Captain Swords' goal to make this fort the "Crack Post of the Frontier" While the area provided an ample supply of standing timber and limestone for construction, other items such as window glass, doorknobs, and paint had to be shipped long distances at great expense. Skilled labor was also a challenge, most of the work was done by soldiers using hand tools and a nearby sawmill, which was constantly breaking down. Captain Swords complained that he was entirely on his own for resources and coming up with plans to build the fort. He complained that none of the other officers could "draw a straight line even with the assistance of a ruler.

This building, an original officers' quarters, features many examples of the timber and frame construction that went into the creation of a permanent post. On its exterior, one can see examples of the Greek Revival architectural features that Captain Swords used to build a military post that was intended to impress visitors and instill a sense of pride in those who lived here. A brochure available inside identifies the various building elements.

Stop 9-Quartermaster Storehouse and Quadrangle

“The line of supply may be said to be as vital to the existence of an army as the heart to the life of a human being” This quote from a military commander emphasizes the critical role that the quartermaster and subsistence departments played in the army’s wellbeing and survival.

In this building are housed the barrels and boxes that contained these important supplies. One side is set up as the quartermaster’s office and storeroom. As the name implies, the quartermaster was in charge of providing the army with quarters or buildings in which to live. In the quartermaster storeroom are nails, paint, and other materials used in the construction and maintenance of the buildings, supplies that ultimately provided comfort to the soldiers.

The commissary or subsistence officer ran the other side of the building. He used it to store food rations and other supplies vital to the soldiers’ survival. Dry goods such as flour and bacon were stored in barrels and boxes, while goods that needed a cooler environment, candles and soap, for example, were stored in the downstairs basement.

Strict accountability governed the management of these supplies. Supplies were regularly inventoried. Paperwork accompanied the issuance of these supplies. Even items that were spoiled could not just be thrown out; a board of survey had to declare them unfit for consumption and order their disposal.

Stop 10-Bakehouse

Bread was a staple of army life. General Winfield Scott emphasized its importance, when he explained that bread was one of the “great items of a soldier’s diet” and to make it well an “essential part of his instruction” He furthermore stated that “officers . . . will give strict attention to this vital branch of economy.”

The bake house was part of the quartermaster complex and was closely tied to both the quartermaster and subsistence functions; the quartermaster maintained the building and furnishings while subsistence provided the flour rations and maintained the ovens.

The quality of the bread was of utmost importance to the army, but it was difficult to maintain. As there was no recipe at the time, just general guidelines, the quality of the bread often varied with the cooking ability of the soldier on duty. Needless to say, the bread was sometimes found . . . lacking.

Stop 11-Guardhouse

The guardhouse in front of you served two purposes. It functioned as a jail or prison for soldiers who violated military laws and regulations and as a shelter for guards who played a vital role in the fort’s protection and security. Duties of the guards included patrols of the fort, enforcement of rules and watching prisoners.

Discipline at any post of the 1800s was strict; punishments were harsh and often cruel. Punishments handed out ranged from reduction in rank, stoppage of pay, and confinement in the guardhouse for minor offenses to "bucking and gagging," "spread eagle," standing on a barrel, confinement in a choke box or the solitary cells, mounting the wooden horse, and even wearing iron collars or balls and chains.

One soldier at a different post wrote that the United States Army had "acquired a very odious notoriety for the diabolically inhuman treatment of the enlisted men by their officers" Men were kicked, cuffed, cursed, and even mauled without cause, as suited "the caprice or anger" of the officers. Although laws existed to protect the soldiers, they were loosely enforced.

Stop 12-Parade Ground

All around you lays the parade ground, originally enclosed by twelve buildings. The enclosed area provided some protection to the fort's water supply and blackpowder stores.

The parade ground served as the U.S. Army's showcase. Officers constantly sought to instill a sense of pride in the enlisted soldiers, and on these grounds, that pride had to be demonstrated. Military inspections, assembly, flag ceremonies and guard mounting that took place here were all times when soldiers were required to look top notch and be on their best behavior. Their performance here reflected how they would conduct themselves in battle where pride, discipline, organization, and training all combined to make the U.S. Army an efficient fighting force.